No Good Deed Goes Unrewarded:

The Values/Virtues of Transnational Volunteerism in Neoliberal Capital

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the value of volunteering in producing, sustaining, and legitimising forms of subjectivity and social relations congruent with the ethos of neoliberal capital. Rather than treat it as a spontaneous act of virtue, we insist that volunteerism is a carefully designed technology of government the purpose of which is to align individual conduct with neoliberal capital's double injunction of market rationality and social responsibility. To this end we investigate two complementary case studies of transnational volunteerism, one dealing with Chinese international students volunteering in Vancouver seeking to obtain Canadian citizenship, the other looking at Western university students and graduates volunteering in Ghana to gather relevant professional skills and experience. In both cases we find that transnational volunteerism helps participating individuals assume cultural skills, affective competencies, and citizenship prerogatives they could otherwise not have claimed through nationality or employment.

Keywords: volunteerism; neoliberalism; citizenship; Vancouver; Ghana

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> Along with nihilists, we have to recognize that regardless of how brilliantly and trenchantly we critique it, we are destined to live in this world, not only subject to its powers of domination but also contaminated by its corruptions.[1]

In July of 2010, at the very same time that the British government was announcing severe austerity cuts, Prime Minister David Cameron unveiled his "great passion": a program that would trigger "the biggest, most dramatic redistribution of power from elites in Whitehall to the man and woman on the street".[2] Emphatically called Big Society, the initiative would roll back wasteful and demoralising public services, and empower communities to take charge of their own destinies by promoting volunteering, charitable giving, and social entrepreneurship.

> For a long time the way government has worked - top-down, top-heavy, controlling - has frequently had the effect of sapping responsibility, local innovation and civic action. It has turned many motivated public sector workers into disillusioned, weary puppets of government targets. It has turned able, capable individuals into passive recipients of state help with little hope for a better future. It has turned lively communities into dull, soulless clones of one another. So we need to turn government completely on its head.[3]

In using the lynchpin of individual responsibility to justify further spending cuts and privatisation measures, Cameron was echoing speeches heard 30 years earlier on both sides of the Atlantic: Ronald Reagan's promise to take "government off the backs of the American people" and Margret Thatcher's proclamation that "there is no such thing as society; only

individuals and their families". Using the voluntarist and small-is-beautiful language of the counter-culture and pandering to their critiques of corporate capital and centralised government, neoconservative governments of the 1980s sold neoliberalism as an antidote to bureaucratic rigidities (read: government regulation and labour power) and a harbinger of personal freedom and prosperity.[4] Very soon though it turned out that behind the promise for flexible organisations, gratifying jobs, and universal homeownership lay, in fact, a massive socio-economic overhaul designed to rid people of the kinds of social provisions and collective power that would enable them to resist precarious employment, overwork, and private indebtedness.

Instead of embedding flexible accumulation in some sort of institutional fix, the solution offered at the turn of the millennium by Western social democratic governments, was to dress up neoliberalism in a tolerable and therapeutic language[5] that could manage "the costs and contradictions of earlier waves of neoliberalization" without actually changing anything about its underlying logic.[6] Gradually, the general discourse of neoliberalism shifted "from dogmatic deregulation to market-friendly re-regulation, from structural adjustment to good governance, from budget cuts to regulation-by-audit, from welfare retrenchment to active social policy, from privatization to public-private partnerships, [and] from greed-is-good to markets-with-morals".[7] So-called "Third Way" neoliberalism sees no contradiction between market rationality and moral action. Free market principles, like profitability, performance, accounting, competition, and entrepreneurship, in fact, require social responsibility and public legitimacy for their successful realisation.[8]

Volunteering, not coincidentally celebrated as one of the pillars of the Big Society approach, is an excellent illustration of this highly complex and duplicitous form of government. Situated at the intersection between the de-responsibilised post-Fordist state and the re-responsibilised entrepreneurial self (doubly responsible for its own wellbeing and that

of its community), volunteerism is well-poised to capture the great Foucauldian lesson on neoliberal government:[9] where the task of government is no longer to correct market imbalances through deficit spending, collective bargaining rights or full employment, like in the Fordist period, but to intervene in society to make sure it contains the necessary values, tastes, and attitudes for flexible accumulation to run smoothly. In this view, volunteerism is being revalued as a key technique for disseminating appropriate forms of conduct. Of course, volunteering is not a new development. However, never before has this practice been riddled by so big a contradiction between the selfless aims it claims to pursue and the disciplinary task it in fact accomplishes.

Both a close reading of Marx[10] and a materialist feminist approach[11] will point out that capitalism has never been limited to producing commodities, but that this immediately economic task rests on the existence and reproduction of subjects and social relations congruent with the logic of private profit extraction. Thus, the task of (re)producing workers through language, communication, culture, and other symbolic functions has always been at the core of capitalism. What changed perhaps is the intensity and visibility of this function. In advanced liberal economies, de-industrialisation and labour flexibilisation constitute an abrogation of the Fordist "norm". Capital no longer extracts value solely by producing and circulating commodities. it must also mobilise and valorise culture, social relations, and affective dispositions. In this view, volunteering emerges as a useful subject-forming tool for producing the kinds of skills, emotions and normative orientations expected from neoliberal subjects.

Rather than "make a difference" or "give back" to the community, the main effect of institutionalised volunteering is to produce, sustain, and legitimise subjects and social relations that are congruent with the ethos of neoliberal capital. This is not to say that volunteers are hypocrites looking to boost their résumés or that charity is nothing but an

expression of "liberal guilt". In most cases volunteering is animated by veritable cosmopolitan impulses of care, compassion and even brotherly love. When deployed in a governmental context, however, these emotions, even if genuinely felt by participants, become mobilised for purposes not entirely under the control of those sharing them. In light of the works of Foucault and his followers,[12] we understand transnational volunteerism to be a strategy of government useful in performing the following tasks: governing communities without direct government intervention (and spending); equipping individuals with the social and emotional competencies necessary for producing value in communicative capitalism; and situating certain spaces, communities and identities as favourable junctions in the global flow of capital. Much of the versatility and efficacy of this strategy is owed to the fact that transnational volunteerism appears to be a spontaneous act of virtue independent from the disciplinary power of the state or the ideology of market forces.

In this article, we present two case studies of transnational volunteerism working at the intersection of neoliberal state practices, capital flows, and global ethics. These two case studies are significantly different but they both speak of the various ways in which similar normative dispositions are situated differently depending on how volunteerism is imbricated in specific neoliberal designs. Whereas Montsion's research discusses Chinese international students volunteering in Canada to meet the social and moral requirements associated with the Canadian citizenship design, Vrasti's work focuses on Western students volunteering in Ghana to acquire professional experience and social capital. The seemingly eclectic nature of these two examples – both in terms of the ways in which as authors we are presenting and participating to these case studies, and in terms of the documented emotional experiences of these participating in different volunteering projects - highlights the different ways in which transnational volunteerism operates as a form of subjectivation reaching beyond simple discipline and regulation to inaugurate a flexibilisation and stratification of subjectivity, as

we discuss in the final section. But first we begin with an overview of the most recent uses of volunteerism in neoliberal government practices.

The Virtues/Values of Volunteerism

The virtue of volunteer work is not a new discovery. It has been celebrated in both liberal democracies and socialist countries for its reformative and restorative benefits. As early as Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America,[13] volunteering or, more generally, participation in community associations and charity work, have been recognised as vital for the functioning of republican liberal democracy. If during the Victorian age, philanthropy and volunteering were mostly bourgeois paraphernalia meant to help the middle-class distinguish itself from a morally corrupt aristocracy,[14] in the 20th century the merits of volunteering were recognised more generally. Political scientists and policy-makers alike have hailed service work as essential for disseminating the norms and habits of civil society and a key marker of a vibrant democratic culture.[15] In an age of neoliberal rule, volunteer work gains renewed importance for transmitting social and affective competencies that disseminate the kind of responsibility, both economic and moral, required for free markets to operate and expand. Under Third Way neoliberalism, charity work has been instrumental in filling the void left by the hollowing out of the state, especially in replacing the social bonds and safety provisions of the Fordist era with a more self-reliant, autonomous, and flexible type of social organisation.[16]

The clearest indication of the revalorisation of volunteerism for capitalist purpose is the rise in recent years of so-called "philantrocapitalism", that is, "the use of business thinking by large new donors to transform philanthropy, coupled with the deployment of market mechanisms on a much larger scale to promote development and social change".[17] We see this in NGOs, private initiatives, international development assistance, and especially

in the spectacular charity acts of celebrities and billionaires. Similar to the charity of 19th century industrialists and capitalists, philanthrocapitalism celebrates individual acts of kindness that obscure how this work is "imbricated in and symptomatic of extreme inequality".[18] As Kapoor argues, this type of intervention plays an ideological function. Spectacular acts of generosity are mobilised to attend to the most egregious instances of misery, as if these were mere exceptional instances, while the political relation between poverty and privilege remains untouched. Meanwhile, the consumption and accumulation practices of media and software giants participating in philantrocapitalism is allowed to carry on as usual.[19] What Third Way neoliberalism effectively tells us is "that we can have the global capitalist cake, i.e., thrive as profitable entrepreneurs, and eat it too, i.e., endorse the anti-capitalist causes of social responsibility and ecological concern".[20]

But this is not a practice exclusive to celebrities and wealthy entrepreneurs. Growing emphasis on charity, care and compassion as a core component of civic conduct or citizenship is indicative of a broader transformation in political rationality, which can broadly be termed, following the work of Nikolas Rose, "ethopolitics". Ethopolitics encapsulates the logic of Third Way neoliberalism in that it blends traditional leftist aspirations for dignity and equal opportunity together with conservative values of individual responsibility and entrepreneurship to produce a subject, an ethical individual that is responsible for their own wellbeing and that of their relevant communities. Its purpose, as Rose argues, is to lend the current regime of accumulation (and dispossession) a human face to make it more tolerable, download state power to the community level in the hopes of unburdening the former and disciplining the latter, and transform citizenship from a rights-based entitlement into a merit-based asset.[21]

With the post-Fordist state refusing or failing to assume responsibility for its citizens' lives through planning, calculation, and steering, individuals are encouraged to bind

themselves to their relevant communities and realise their destinies in congruence with these. Coined "government through community", this political rationality proposes that "[p]olitics is to be returned to society itself, but no longer in a social form: in the form of individual morality, organizational responsibility, and ethical community".[22] Government through community, that is, government away from the patronising and disabling structures of central government and back to the choices, energies and commitments of community members, sometimes even the global community, is supposed to cure all social ills which central government has been unable to address (e.g., poverty, crime, teen pregnancy, unemployment, drug abuse, urban decay) by activating personal self-reliance and responsibility.

Despite the welcome emphasis on sociality, autonomy and dignity, transformations in the rationality of government like ethopolitics and government through community render social life at once more inflexible and more uncertain. Suddenly, the relation of responsibility that ties individuals and their communities is no longer based on collective bonds and social obligations given through a national project so much as on capricious ethical and affective principles, like volunteerism. This has implications also for how we conduct and conceive ourselves. We are still dealing with the calculating and responsible subject we have gotten to expect under neoliberalism,[23] except that these dispositions are no longer limited to the economic terrain, they are "placing the affective subject at its centre".[24] While there is still a certain instrumentality to this mode of action, the ethopolitical subject is no longer exclusively informed by rational choice and cost-benefit calculations to the exclusion of all social and moral considerations. Demonstrating compassion, care and responsibility for our fellow human beings or the environment has become key to our understanding of a normative self. The same logic applies also for the transnational level, where images of a global community of care and responsibility are invoked with no attention to transnational relations

of power pertaining to capitalism or imperialism, but phrased purely in moral terms dependent upon individual enlightenment and magnanimity.

This framing of the global volunteer necessarily speaks of the stratification of human life within global capital. Volunteerism contributes, alongside war and humanitarianism, to the "complex ontology of inequality […] that differentiates in a hierarchical manner the values of human life."[25] Using the old Aristotelian distinction between zoe and bios, between biological life and fully qualified political life, we can observe here a growing chasm between the passive populations waiting for help and rescue and the active individuals able to experience growth, accumulate skills, and expand their field of possibility. This is not just the old distinction between haves and have-nots characteristic of global capitalism. It is also a normative difference between individuals able to live up to the demands of responsible self-government and those unable to do so. While the former come to enjoy ever more possibilities for action in terms of political rights and consumer freedoms, the latter are de-subjectified – included only by virtue of their exclusion from social protections and democratic participation.[26] Poor people, especially racialised ones, function as surplus populations, not entirely superfluous to capital, but fully malleable to its needs. They can be made useful either as cheap labor, a trope against which to assert the superiority of the white man,[27] a "place for redemption for those with power",[28] a learning ground for global citizens, or not at all. Either way, their chances to perform credible models of economic and moral conduct are drastically undermined by their position at the bottom of the hierarchy of human life.

We see here how this mode of government "actually seeks to inscribe the norms of self-control more deeply into the soul of each citizen".[32] It inaugurates new strategies of disciplinary rule at the same time that it downloads the classic obligations of the state onto the shoulders of private citizens. Still, this is not to suggest that volunteerism is nothing but

an ideological cover for free labour, social cutbacks, and privatisation. Despite it being unpaid labour, volunteerism rarely remains unrewarded. In its ability to fuse individual responsibility with social accountability and, thus, realise the injunctions of neoliberal government, volunteer work comes to function notably as symbolic capital, training ground, normative orientation.

Two Accounts of Transnational Volunteerism

In what follows we present two distinct instances of transnational volunteerism situated at the intersection between neoliberal capital, citizenship regimes and social responsibility. Although the cases have to be understood as eclectic in nature, we also focus on the unexpected crossovers between Chinese foreign students volunteering in Vancouver and Caucasian young adults volunteering in Ghana to better understand how social and moral responsibility is conceived, transmitted and lived in these encounters. As made clear in Montsion's research, for Chinese foreign students, volunteering is an ideal opportunity to learn more about the cultural and social skills required to become a member of Canadian society. In an immigration system where citizenship rights are extended based on merit, voluntary agencies do not only deliver much-needed social services to disadvantaged populations, they also teach volunteers the virtues of responsible citizenship.[33] Relatedly, Vrasti's research demonstrates that for young adults looking for work in an increasingly flexible and precarious labour market, volunteering abroad counts as valuable professional experience. Living in a foreign country, with no language skills, modern amenities, or support networks lends young professionals the types of immaterial and cognitive skills expected from the flexible workers: initiative, innovation, problem-solving, risk-taking, cultural awareness, and global knowledge. In both cases, being a volunteer is not just about

feeling responsible (read: “giving back”) to the community so much as about becoming a subject responsible for its own skills and assets.

Although both of our research projects draw upon ethnographic evidence, our work is not ethnography per se, in the sense that, we do not purport to capture and reconstruct the world of meaning of an entire people or community. Rather, our ethnographic sensibilities seek to communicate the itinerant nature of our object of inquiry as it moves between places, cultures, and subject positions. It is not only volunteers who travel, research also moves back and forth between field sites and theory, experience and writing, as well as transversally between the two of us. As such, we have chosen ethnography and conversation as strategies for maintaining a degree of honesty and transparency concerning the journey knowledge production inevitably has to make before it can reach the public eye. Especially when the task at hand is connecting a quite specific issue, like transnational volunteering, to macro-level processes, like neoliberal government, transformations of capital, and citizenship practices, we believe it important to keep some space open for movement, contingency, and contestation.

Volunteering to Become Good Citizens

When I (Jean Michel Montsion) started doing field research in Vancouver for my doctoral dissertation on migratory flows at transient locations between China and Western societies in the spring of 2008, I decided to volunteer in local ethnic Chinese community associations not only to expand my contact base, but also to gain a different perspective on the research I was conducting. Most of these organisations are multi-service agencies that offer a variety of services from social assistance for vulnerable populations to support for the elderly, health services, and more traditional immigration services, such as language and professional training. I soon became fascinated with the ways in which volunteering had been institutionalised by these community associations and instrumentalised by state authorities.

More specifically, I noticed that community associations deploy volunteer work to strategically facilitate the integration of Chinese international students and newcomers to Canada into their ranks, where they can communicate values, norms, and representations of what it means to be Chinese in Vancouver. Associations like the United Chinese Community Enrichment Services Society (SUCCESS), created in the 1970s to serve an exclusive but increasingly diversifying Hong Kongese population, are systematically using volunteer work to reinforce their position within local politics, notably by socialising newcomers in the specific affective competencies necessary to become a Canadian of Chinese origin in Vancouver.

As the closest North American metropolis to Asia, Vancouver is quickly becoming a key connection node in the restructuring of global networks of trade, mobility, and communication. The city is particularly active in providing higher education, English as a Second Language (ESL) courses, and other professional training programs to Asia's growing elites, especially international students from Mainland China. Volunteer work has expanded as a complementary branch to this growing demand for post-secondary education. Not coincidentally, Canadian state authorities have incorporated volunteering into the country's immigration policies. Since 1999, Citizenship and Immigration Canada has been advertising volunteer work experience,[31] even if still dissociated from legislations regulating labour, revenue and work, as a way to obtain Canadian permanent residency.[29] This is helpful for international students, as their visas might not allow them to work off campus. They may also not be able to legally find a job, depending on their age, or they may not have the time to take job.[30] For instance, four international Chinese students I met while volunteering at an event organised by a local ethnic Chinese community association shared with me that volunteer work not only allows them to meet people in a new city and gain a sense of self-worth, it was also a strategic component of their long-term plan to remain in Canada or perhaps return in

the future.[34] As such, it reflected a close association between performing volunteer work, obtaining Canadian citizenship, and having the individual freedom to choose opportunities leading to the good life.

If volunteering had a clear function with regards to Canadian society and authorities, within the Vancouver Chinese community volunteering became the terrain of contestation between older, more well-established (usually Hong Kongese) community associations and their newer counterparts from Mainland China. In institutionalising volunteer work, especially by targeting international students coming from the Mainland, well-established Hong Kongese agencies like SUCCESS remain relevant societal actors: they demand public funding and carve out a voice in local politics. Because the newly-developed Volunteer Branch of SUCCESS has consolidated numerous partnership agreements and memoranda of understanding with post-secondary institutions in Vancouver, a large number of volunteers are being directed to SUCCESS by their counselors.[35] This does not only provide SUCCESS with a constantly renewable pool of volunteers, the organisation can also appear to be opening its membership to Mainlanders and adapt to new Chinese migration patterns.[36] Although a few concerned voices from Mainlanders' associations have emerged over the last few years to dispute SUCCESS' claim of representing Vancouver's ethnic Chinese communities (notably as part of the "Big 5" Chinese community associations of Vancouver), the speed and ease with which SUCCESS incorporates newcomers privileges the organisation's social position and relevance against other community actors and their critics. This is especially important in a context where proliferating ethnic Chinese community associations have to compete for limited government funding.[37]

Through the systematic incorporation of volunteer work, community associations communicate specific representations of what a good Canadian citizen of Chinese origin is to their incoming members. Well-established ethnic Chinese community associations, for

instance, cast volunteer work as an essential North American attitude which newcomers must practice if they want to integrate.[38] What is more, volunteer work is said to contain cultural and emotive lessons essential to pursuing the liberal ideals associated with Canadian citizenship, such as a strong career-oriented drive, a respect for personal boundaries, a desire to give back to the most vulnerable in the community, a social network to rely on, and most importantly a will to learn and better oneself, notably by using every opportunity to practice one's English language skills. It also includes a strong ethos of framing the young international student as an active political agent who can help the most vulnerable populations of Canada, as a way to give back to the community he/she wants to join.

Volunteer work helps community associations to position themselves as (exclusive) bridges between the Canadian citizenship design and Chinese newcomers themselves. This is especially true for well-established Hong Kongese community associations opening up their membership to an increasing Canadian immigration from Mainland China. Frank, for instance, a mid-level manager in a well-established Hong Kongese social services agency that uses a lot of volunteers in its daily activities, explained that volunteer work has very different cultural meanings in Canada and in Mainland China: "In China, there is no volunteer work. They do not teach you how and why volunteer work is important […] There is no fundraising because you are looked at by the government".[39] Working with increasing numbers of volunteers from Mainland China for the last 12 years, he sets the motivations of Mainlanders apart to suggest that their upbringing made a difference in how less committed they are to volunteer work, and how volunteer work can do them good in better understanding what it means to be a good Canadian citizen. He claims that culturally, true volunteer work is rather a Canadian than Mainlander practice, hence reproducing the notion that there is an incommensurable divide between two social contexts that volunteer work in his association can help bridge. As such, he recommends that Mainlanders volunteer when

they arrive in Vancouver, as "volunteering is an eye-opener [for them], because of the work ethics".[40]

The interviews I conducted with Mainlanders' community associations in Vancouver dispute these claims. Different from the narrative of Hong Kongese community associations, Mainlanders claim volunteer work is an inherently Chinese practice and encourage Mainland newcomers to join them to continue participate in this Chinese reality. Even if volunteer work exists in North America, they consider their version of the term to be distinct and unique to their cultural practices, most notably a respect for the Motherland and its overseas representatives as well as an everyday use of Mandarin.[41] As such, a participation to their associations as volunteers not only fulfills the requirements to work towards good Canadian citizenship, it also helps the participants to maintain and reproduce their cultural heritage, as Canadian multiculturalism encourages. In this context, subtle differences between competing notions of civic engagement are used by community associations to make strategic claims about identity politics, cultural translation, and Canadian citizenship designs. While Mainlanders' associations are fighting to carve out an autonomous and inherently Chinese political space in Vancouver, more established community associations use an equally essentialised notion of what it means to be Chinese to align their membership with certain Canadian notions of moral responsibility and civic duty.

These ethnic tensions aside, at the level of state practices and immigration policies, volunteerism remains useful in instrumentalising and pursuing Canada's vision of good citizenship. The legitimacy of volunteer work is reproduced through the workings of a well-oiled machine that stretches from post-secondary institutions encouraging international Chinese students to volunteer at agencies like SUCCESS, to Citizenship and Immigration Canada valorising volunteer work as valid work experience, and citizenship judges insisting on the importance for newcomers to "give back" to their community. In each of these cases,

Canada being “a land of immigrants”, civic participation is deemed vital for weaving newcomers into the social fabric. Prominent community associations like SUCCESS understand the pedagogical significance of volunteering and mobilise it to pursue their own ends. By presenting volunteer work as a Canadian practice, rather than a shared or exclusively Chinese value, they can silence the most recent Chinese newcomers from the Mainland and secure precious government funding in the name of minority representation. Further, in using the rhetoric of multiculturalism to integrate newcomers from various cultural backgrounds, community organisations not only impress this foundational discourse upon their volunteers, they also use it to paper over the differences that separate their ethnically diverse membership. Still, none of this diminishes the emotional value of volunteerism. Community associations and international students alike are well aware that in a country where citizenship rights are “conditional on conduct”, the spirit of personal responsibility, community involvement with the local vulnerable populations, and civic initiative that volunteerism represents can go a long way in realising personal dreams of opportunity.[42]

In a context in which volunteer work has been imbricated into neoliberal citizenship designs, local community associations have become key in creating and reproducing what good Canadian citizenship is. Of course, their role is only one of many in the assemblage, which was only used to highlight the specific juncture between volunteer work and neoliberal capital. The next case study will show other ways to approach and comprehend other junctures, in a different context.

The Travails of Volunteer Tourism

Volunteer tourism refers to a rapidly growing phenomenon[43] which allows mostly white middle class students and graduates (18-25 year olds) from Western countries, usually in

exchange for a hefty price, to spend their summers building houses, teaching in schools, providing medical assistance or doing conservation work in the Global South. The phenomenon has blossomed over the past few years into a full-fledged branch of the tourism industry, including for-profit volunteer tourism agencies, all-inclusive packages, and professional standards. On the one hand, the formula has its roots in the itineraries of religious pilgrims, healers and/or medical practitioners, and, most famously, colonial missionaries, educators, and humanitarians. On the other hand, volunteer tourism borrows from consumer trends associated with the rise of post-Fordist "flexible accumulation" from the 1970s onwards. Like ecotourism, sustainable tourism, study abroad programs, and corporate social responsibility, volunteer tourism responds to a larger need for neoliberal capital to develop a "human face" capable of replacing or at least complementing its alienating, individualistic, and competitive tendencies with more satisfying, meaningful, and cooperative alternatives.[44]

The promotional but also scholarly literature on the topic (e.g. the volunteering brochures, websites, discussion forums, blogs, and testimonies) describes volunteer tourism as a transformative practice with normative and therapeutic potentials. By "putting travail back into travel"[45] the formula presumably breaks with the vacuity of mass tourism to foster cultural exchange, social transformation, and personal development.[46] But, as my research revealed, congruent with previous critiques of sustainable tourism, ecotourism, "recreational activism,"[47] volunteer tourism does more to consolidate the spirit of neoliberal capitalism and its attendant gendered and racialised fantasies than realise lasting social change or counter the exploitative dynamics underlying the global tourism industry.

In spring 2009, I (Wanda Vrasti) joined a teaching program in Ghana for $1400/month organised by Projects Abroad, one of the world's largest volunteer tourism providers operating 166 projects in 20 countries.[48] Two reasons motivate volunteers to

embark on this exorbitant experience: “make a difference” in the lives of the local community and add some professional experience to their education. Yet few of the participants were satisfied with the results. The place we lived in, the provincial town of Ho, many reproached, did not resemble the photogenic poverty shots many of us had seen on charity infomercials and fundraiser posters. There were no visible signs of starvation or malady. The locals did not seem to need or appreciate our assistance. Instead, there were constant frustrations relating to “culture shock” and the lack of modern amenities and Western cuisine. As a result, we often felt useless and, somewhat, deceived. As one volunteer aptly put it:

> They made it sound as if you weren’t there, Ghana would fall apart, as if your presence was sought for. They painted a picture that’s not in any way correct. […] I don’t think I’ve helped anyone while I was here. Only I benefited. I changed but I don’t think I initiated any change. After I leave I’d have made a difference to myself but not to anyone else.[49]

It usually took volunteers no longer than two weeks to grow bored with their work responsibilities, which they were either unqualified for (as in the case of medical placements) or overwhelmed with (like with teaching programs), and become full-time travelers instead.[50] Although the program handbook we were given upon arrival discouraged extended travel during the work placement, it was clear from the organisation’s website that exploring the cultural sites, major market towns, and wildlife Ghana has to offer was very much a part of what made this the organisation’s most popular destination (accounting for roughly 40% of its revenues). In fact, the website spent more time detailing the country’s touristic attractions, its golden beaches, colonial fortresses, and bustling market towns, than explaining why Ghana required the urgent help of international volunteers.

Making sure volunteers enjoy their stay was in fact part of Project Abroad's official mission. For instance, the main responsibility of our local coordinator in Ghana was to help volunteers explore "the beaches and nightclubs in a different country without having any problems".[51] Ghana has no shortage of both. For white people, hungry for Western food, entertainment, and service standards, Ghana offers an endless array of entertainment options to choose from with the added bonus of a warm climate, servile people, and lax law enforcement. But this should not suggest that tourism in Ghana is a purely relaxing and entertaining affair. Traveling through Ghana, a country with few modern amenities, a pervasive fascination for whiteness, and plenty of opportunities for hilarious as well as painful moments of "culture shock", is part and parcel of the pedagogical function of volunteer tourism. Learning how to cope with recurrent frustrations and nervous conditions, in particular in the context of racialised encounters, is precisely how volunteer tourism retains its educational value despite its inability to "make a difference" or endow volunteers with practical skills and expertise.

Being white in Ghana means you are constantly on display. People shout "yevu" or "obruni" (white person in local dialects Ewe and Twi, respectively) after you in the streets, and they touch your skin and hair to check for a difference in texture. There are obvious advantages to being white: If you are white, Ghana is one huge resort where almost everyone works as an entertainer. You get the best seat on the bus, the biggest plate of food, the place in front of the line. But the longer you stay in Ghana, the more bothersome this exchange becomes. With time, the proverbial Ghanaian friendliness turns exhausting: your dress is scrutinised and your smoking habits reprimanded; your gestures and opinions awaken either curiosity or laughter; people ask for your name and contact information, they want their picture taken with you; they know you are wealthy and expect you to pay "white prices".

Eventually, all that attention and attending becomes an unbearable form of what volunteers referred to as "reverse racism". As one volunteer explains:

> What is frustrating about traveling through Ghana is the constant haggle over taxi and tro-tro [minivans] prices where you are cheated because you're white. I understand the idea but I can't stand it anymore. I'm getting tired. At the end of our trip [my friend] Judith had to calm me down because I couldn't take it anymore. And it is more or less everywhere like this: in the market, in tros, it's always about the price. At first, everything was new. But step by step I hate the feeling of having to repeat myself. You lose a lot of time and energy. And it's the same with Ghanaian boys. The first time they ask you "can you take me home?" You joke that there is no room in your luggage. But after three months I overreact because I don't want to have this conversation again and again. They want to be your friend but that is not how you make friends. It's too easy to have friends here because I'm white, not because I'm interesting or I'm nice, only because I'm white. Being white can be funny, but I'm bored with it.[52]

The ability to know, speak about and gaze onto others has traditionally been the purview of white people, colonisers, scholars and later on tourists, who have limited their understanding of subaltern populations to essentialised images of innocence, passivity, and exoticism. But this hegemony of the gaze can only be maintained in the world of knowledge production (writing, science, photography), where white people enjoy a tremendous advantage. When it comes to lived encounters, though, the gaze travels both ways, subjecting white bodies to the same act of ruthless objectification they believe is a normal instrument of the touristic repertoire.[53] Using the term "reverse racism" to describe this disturbance of tourist expectations strikes me as a misnomer. The fascination Ghanaians shared for the

epidermal as well as the cultural properties of whiteness is not so much a form of "racism" than the racialisation of whiteness. Historically, whiteness has almost always been the unmarked center of humanity, the nomos of normality and normativity, the standard of reference by which all other positions are assessed. When Ghanaians returned our gaze, even if only to idolise whiteness, we were asked to question their motives, aspirations and subject location and come to terms with the unnerving consequences of occupying the center. For the first time in our lives, we existed for everyone to see, touch, and assess. Being white in Ghana opened all sorts of doors for us, yet it also represented an obstacle. It aligned us with standards of beauty, civilization, and progress, but it also made us uncomfortable with inhabiting these undeserved privileges.[54]

Still, none of these frustrations and nervous conditions could have determined any of us to break our trip short. Not only were volunteers reluctant to disappoint their friends and family members back home, who thought they were brave and selfless for being in "Africa", they were also determined to turn the painful experiences of culture shock and homesickness into pedagogical opportunities. For instance, the racialisation of whiteness in Ghana could have resulted in reconsideration, if not destabilisation, of white privilege. Ideally, experiencing first-hand the discomforts of being the object of the gaze would have encouraged volunteers to reflect upon the power relations involved in this act traditionally belonging to white colonisers and, later on, anthropologists, development experts, and tourists. Instead, however, the anger and frustration of being gazed upon were channeled into a narrative of growth and self-development. Cultivating an attitude of enlightened indifference and emotional resilience in the face of "reverse racism" was what made up a large part of the learning experience volunteers always yearned for but were remiss to find in other aspects of the trip.

Phrases like “expand your horizons”, “fulfill your potential”, or “come back a changed individual” may sound like empty platitudes, but in fact they express the sincere pedagogical ambition of volunteer tourism. Whether it is by allowing volunteers to experiment with various professional identities or gather the necessary linguistic and cultural competencies to confidently navigate a foreign setting, volunteering in the Global South is ripe with affective and aesthetic lessons that can be easily translated into valuable entrepreneurial competencies. Living and traveling independently, making multinational friends, having work responsibilities, confronting cultural differences, narrativising daily adventures in a diary or blog, learning how to survive without modern amenities - all of these human (expertise, experience, capacities), social (emotionality, trust, charity), and cultural forms of capital (mobility, experience, civility) pave the path towards professional advancement and cosmopolitan citizenship.[55]

So it is less that volunteers are self-interested careerist individuals, as they are often portrayed in the media,[56] but that the merits of volunteering abroad, especially in the Global South, are perfectly congruent with the exigencies of cognitive capitalism. Flexible labour markets, shrinking welfare provisions, and an increasingly competitive economic climate demand that individuals, from early age onwards, expand their human capital beyond professional expertise, academic credentials, or classroom experience.[57] Higher education is not exempt from this transformation. As education is moving outside the classroom into study abroad programs, language courses, internships and volunteering programs, its emphasis falls on transferable skills and talents that can endow students with a “borderless neoliberal ethos”.[58] While the formula may not be able to redress the material and ecological ails of the global poor or engender cross-cultural understanding, as it promises, it is also not its opposite, an exercise in liberal guilt or middle-class hypocrisy. Its transformative promises are realised otherwise. By allowing young adults to operate in multicultural settings and

globalized sites, acquire various aesthetic and affective competencies, and experiment with "alternative" modes of being, volunteer tourism enhances the employability and entrepreneurial versatility of those participating. It invests individuals with the same qualities expected from the self-directed workforce of the new economy, the self-reliant subject of financial capital, and the conscious consumer.

Transnational Volunteerism and the Politics of Life

We would like to end our discussion with a brief consideration of how the two case studies we have presented, although quite different, play a mutually reinforcing, even complementary role in reproducing the kinds of social relations and subject positions required by neoliberal capital. At first sight, volunteerism seems like an act of selfless generosity that speaks to a basic desire for purposeful action and meaning. And we certainly do not seek to deny the crucial importance of social bonds of love, care and compassion for producing (and salvaging) what we have in common.[59] Transnational volunteerism, however, plays upon these fantasies of social usefulness, community and self-determination to push the otherwise political question for collective responsibility into a moral terrain of individual responsibility where is becomes a matter of aesthetic self-presentation.

In Vancouver, volunteer work functions as a site of struggle between competing ethnic Chinese community associations shaped by migration patterns that have shifted from Hong Kong to Mainland China. Despite serving a similar function, namely to support the Canadian state in managing an increasingly diverse workforce - commonly known as multiculturalism, both types of community associations instrumentalise volunteer work for their own purposes. On the one hand, established Hong Kongese community associations appeal to feelings of moral responsibility to help their members internalise the values and conduct befitting good Canadian citizens. In doing so, they position their various

volunteering experiences as a competitive advantage over other Chinese associations. On the other hand, Mainlanders' associations use responsibility and its related affective competencies to signal closer ties to a rising China and loyalty to its current political and cultural systems. Whereas SUCCESS uses volunteer work to promote liberal norms of citizenship, Mainlanders' community associations deploy it preserve a distinct and exclusive understanding of being Chinese in Canada. Although in both cases volunteer work communicates specific forms of conduct related to education, discipline, and surveillance volunteerism among the Chinese community in Vancouver has emerged as an everyday international site of conflict over volunteers and how to mold them into good Canadian citizens of Chinese origin.

In Ghana, the pedagogical content of volunteering adopts a different form. By placing volunteers in a foreign cultural setting with little modern amenities, language skills, and networks of institutional or familial support, young adults from Western countries are supposed to develop the social and emotional competencies needed in a regime of accumulation that relies mostly on general intellect and immaterial labour (e.g., socio-ecological awareness, multicultural literacy, and a taste for risk-taking and experimentation). With the double flexibilisation of the labour market and higher education, university students and graduates are required to amass an increasing number of extra-curricular activities to set themselves apart from their peers. In this context, volunteering in the Global South becomes a "world-class" degree. Although it is difficult to quantify the benefits volunteers gain from this experience (in terms of access to graduate programs and professional schools or better jobs), it is safe to say that the emotional and entrepreneurial competencies gathered on these trips allow volunteers to better navigate their social field, assert a credible professional identity, embody desirable cultural values and norms, and live more fully in the global moment. Certainly, the same cannot be said about the objects of their intervention. Ghanaians

remain objects of curiosity to be gazed at, backward life forms to be meddled with, or exotic backdrops to volunteers' journeys of self-discovery.

There is no question about it: transnational volunteerism carries many concrete cultural, professional and personal advantages for its participants, but beyond these, the technique is instrumental to and exemplary of the increasing stratification of human life. One of the distortions of neoliberal globalisation has been an increasingly loose relation between political membership, territorial belonging, and wage labour has made room for various types of "flexible citizenship" that follow the mobile and transient paths of capital (e.g., global cities, cyber-space, refugee camps, regional labor markets, high-tech districts).[60] Following global flows of capital, citizenship has shifted from an entitlement deriving from territorial belonging and wage labour to a flexible prerogative earned on merit. While this is no time to mourn the advantages of national citizenship or Fordist modes of production, both of which were based on social exclusion and conformity, we can also not celebrate the new rights regime. What seems to be a more flexible form of participation and belonging is, in fact, the dawn of an economically and politically uncertain future where citizenship becomes "conditional on conduct",[61] that is, conditional on how well one fulfills the injunctions of neoliberal statecraft and flexible accumulation in competition with others.

Those who possess the right civic attitudes, skill set, and symbolic capital will be rewarded with a growing number of passports, residence permits, and mobility incentives as well as increasing access to job markets, housing options, and cultural goods around the world.[62] Those who fail to conform will become second-order citizens, confined to slums and ghettos, doomed to perform low-wage and tedious jobs, with little possibility of escape. While some individuals can organise their lives (quite enthusiastically) according to the double exigencies of economic proficiency and moral responsibility, others are de-

subjectified, they are excluded only to become included as objects of suspicion, compassion, and humanitarian intervention.

Transnational volunteerism is perfectly suited to fulfill the requirements of citizenship by merit. To begin with, it is free labour affordable only for the privileged. Whether it is university graduates from advanced liberal nations or foreign students living in the West, volunteering always presupposes and requires a deep racialised, gendered and class division between those who provide volunteer their help and those who receive it, whether organised through a religious or secular institutions. After all, one has to enjoy a certain level of material comfort and leisure time to expend their labour power for free. Automatically, the objects of care, the global poor, the unemployed, the elderly, and the diseased, are exempt from civic virtue and must remain the passive recipients of benefaction or, worse, inspection and surveillance. Just like in the Victorian heyday of philanthropy, contemporary volunteerism remains a marker of white middle-class privilege.

This is not to say that only racially white people volunteer. Whiteness, in this context, refers to the social and human capital historically attached to the tastes, values, and attitudes of white bodies and, more contemporarily, extended to all responsible, self-reliant, and self-governing individuals conforming to the (neo)liberal injunctions of good citizenship. These are the flexible subjects who can assume responsibility for themselves and the welfare of their communities without burdening the state or blaming the economy for the free labour they have to perform, the social goods they must distribute, and the ties of sociality and affectivity they need to build in the wake of shrinking social services. They are the active citizens of today's globalising world.

At a more general level, transnational volunteerism harbours the ambition to cultivate a way of acting and feeling in the world that can offset the injustices of neoliberal capital with more humane forms of government and social action. Volunteerism promises to enhance

the sentimental education of individual subjects and weave a more authentic social fabric. Given how callous the forces of transnational production and speculation have become (resource extraction, debt peonage, political repression) it might seem like the only way forward is to inject economic logic with a moral consciousness and to replace bureaucratic control with face-to-face responsibilities. But we should remain skeptical of these populist appeals. For decades, corporate social responsibility, good governance, green consumption, urban regeneration, and a host of other "markets-with-morals" strategies, like volunteerism, have proven to be nothing more than a repackaging of the old formula for accumulation and dispossession. The continuous attempt to download public responsibilities onto private shoulders and transfer central government onto the communal level only proves that, whenever questions of housing, education, health, and security are not treated as collective goods but pre-political (authentic) matters, human dignity loses its universal imperative and is left at the discretion of other people's charity.

Again, we do not discount the transformative potential of charity and community work. Neither do we accuse volunteers of being hypocritical, purely self-interested individuals that participate in charitable work solely for the benefit of their résumés or residency status, nor do we deny the fact that volunteerism can be a genuine manifestation of love, care, and generosity for one's fellow beings. What we do insist on, however, is the need to unpack the moralistic and sentimental pretensions of this practice precisely in order to make room for a politics of love that is not tainted by nationalist, identitarian or imperialist undertones.[63] Even when volunteer work is motivated by the most noble of sentiments, it falls short of realising its progressive ambition without a political consideration of who volunteers, for what purpose and under what circumstances.

Endnotes

[1] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Commonwealth (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p.ix.

[2] David Cameron, "Big Society Speech" (19 July 2010), available <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/speeches-and-transcripts/2010/07/big-society-speech-53572> (accessed 11 January 2011)

[3] Ibid.

[4] This is not to suggest that the neo-conservative Right has single-handedly invented and implemented the neoliberal doctrine. As David Harvey explains, the Reagan and Thatcher regimes, along with their Washington Consensus adepts, more or less "stumbled" towards neoliberalisation rather than followed a predetermined policy path. See David Harvey, A Brief History of Neoliberalism (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 13. We do not want to perpetuate a history-less view of neoliberalism that locates the origins of this model of governance in the turmoil of the 1970s or attribute it solely to the policy decisions of a handful of political leaders and opinion makers. Rather, we acknowledge that neoliberalism is in fact the latest phase of a longue durée of capitalist accumulation that goes back to feudal land enclosures, the inquisition, 18th century industrialisation and urbanisation, 19th century institutions of liberal democracy, and 500 years of colonial and imperial subjugation. All of these things persist, in some form or another, under the banner of neoliberalism. Hence, we use the term neoliberalism less to suggest a rupture with the past than to point out capital's inexhaustible malleability and adaptability to changing historical conditions.

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[6] Jamie Peck, "Zombie Neoliberalism and the Ambidextruous State", Theoretical Criminology, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2010), p. 106.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Stephan Lessernich, Die Neuerfindung des Sozialen: Der Sozialstaat im flexiblen Kapitalusmus (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2008).

[9] Throughout this text we use the term government to refer not necessarily to the sum of state institutions and apparatuses, but rather to Foucault's concept of "governmentality" which describes a proliferation of governing bodies, strategies, and techniques that go above and beyond the bureaucratic carcass of the state. This is not just a conceptual difference, but a historical shift from the centralised, bureaucratically organised Fordist government to the dispersed network of rules, norms, and tactics of post-Fordism. See Andrew Barry, Thomas Osborne, and Nikolas Rose (eds.), Foucault and Political Reason: Liberalism, Neo-Liberalism and Rationalities of Government (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) and Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

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[11] David Graeber, "The Sadness of Postworkerism", in David Graeber, Revolutions in Reverse: Essays on Politics, Violence, Art, and Imagination (Brooklyn, NY: Autonomedia, 2011), pp. 79-106.

[12] See Barry, op. cit.; Burchell, op. cit.; Thomas Lemke, "An Indigestible Meal? Foucault, Governmentality and State Theory" Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory 15, 2007; Aihwa Ong, Neoliberalism as Exception: Mutations in Citizenship and Sovereignty (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

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[15] A. Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba, The Civic Culture. Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963).

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[21] Nikolas Rose, "Community, Citizenship, and the Third Way", American Behavioral Scientist, Vol. 43, No. 9 (2000), pp. 1385-1411.

[22] Ibid., p. 1400.

[23] Lemke, op. cit.

[24] Anne-Marie Fortier, "Proximity by Design? Affective Citizenship and the Management of Unease", Citizenship Studies, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2010), p. 22.

[25] Didier Fassin, "Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life", Public Culture, Vol. 19, No. 3 (2007), pp. 499-520.

[26] Andrew Neal, "Goodbye War on Terror? Foucault and Butler on Discourses of Law, War, and Exceptionalism", in M. Dillon and A.W. Neal (eds) Foucault on Politics, Security and War (London: Palgrave, 2008), p. 51.

[27] Achille Mbembe, On the Postcolony (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[28] Kathryn Mathers, Travel, Humanitarianism and Becoming American in Africa (New York: Palgrave, 2010), p. 4.

[29] Ibid., p. 1409.

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[31] To qualify for permanent residency status under the Canadian Experience Class, international students must accumulate the equivalent of one year full-time work experience in Canada – a requirement which can be fulfilled also through volunteer work. As with any other work experience, this has to be documented and certified by the employer or, in this case, voluntary association. See Citizenship and Immigration Canada, "Canadian Experience Class" (January 2010), available: <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/immigrate/cec/apply-who.asp> (accessed 27 January 2010).

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[34] Collective interview with four international Chinese students, notebook of Montsion, Vancouver, 24 April 2008.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Vince [fictitious name]. Personal interview with a Vancouver City social planner, notebook of Montsion, Vancouver, 12 June 2008.

[37] Carl [fictitious name]. Personal interview with a local Chinese news director in the Greater Vancouver area, notebook of Montsion, Richmond, 3 November 2008.

[38] Collective interview, op. cit.

[39] Frank [fictitious name]. Personal interview with a person involved with SUCCESS everyday operations, notebook of Montsion, Vancouver, 22 May 2008.

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[41] Philip [fictitious name]. Personal interview with a Chinese international graduate student to UBC, notebook of Montsion, Vancouver, 5 May 2008.

[42] Rose, op. cit., p. 1408.

[43] Although not an unprecedented form of travel, never before has volunteer tourism been so popular and so vocal. In the United States over a quarter of the population is interested in signing up. Meanwhile in the UK, there are about 800 organisations offering volunteer services abroad. Tourism is the largest growth industry and volunteer tourism is its fastest growing sector. Over the past couple of years commercial travel agencies, such as Travelocity, Cheaptickets, GAP Adventures, Travel Cuts, and First Choice Holidays have jumped on board, crowding out or joining forces with not-for-profit organisations, such as Habitat for Humanity and United Way. See Aaron Dalton, "Voluntourism Trips for Do-Gooders: When Sipping Margaritas, Sunburning Yourself Poolside Looses its Luster", MSNBC.com (4 February 2008), available: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/19314446/> (accessed 18 May 2008) and Lucy Ward, "You're Better off Backpacking – VSO Warns about Perils of 'Voluntourism'", The Guardian (14 August 2007), available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/aug/14/students.charitablegiving> (accessed 13 March 2008).

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[48] Projects Abroad, "Ghana Handbook" (2008), available: <http://www.projects-abroad.org/destinations/ghana/projects-abroad-in-ghana/> (accessed 13 March 2008), pp. 45-47.

[49] Patricia [fictitious name]. Personal interview with a volunteer tourist in Ho, notebook of Vrasti, Ghana, 6 April 2009.

[50] Certainly, Projects Abroad was partly to blame for these disappointments. From a strictly logistical point of view, PA was not actively involved in managing work placements, communicating with the local staff, or following up with volunteers. Often placements were poorly chosen, according to some cliché fantasies of humanitarian assistance, rather than organised around actual local needs and desires. On the other hand, however, the roots of volunteer apathy lie much deeper. For volunteers to feel "needed" the work must be continuous, it must be satisfying, challenging, and rewarding, it must address local deficiencies, and it must show quick results. This is not an easy task to accomplish for any organisation, especially considering that volunteers stay for a relatively short time, they lack appropriate skills and training, and also expect to have enough free time to travel and relax.

[51] Charles [fictitious name]. Personal interview with a volunteer tourist in Ho, notebook of Vrasti, Ghana, 18 April 2009.

[52] Marion [fictitious name]. Personal interview with a volunteer tourist in Ho, notebook of Vrasti, Ghana, 17 April 2009.

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[61] Hannah Arendt was quite explicit that forms of sociality based on emotion (whether it is pity or pride, collective suffering or communal empowerment) tend to encourage nonpublic, nonpolitical forms of association that function only through the voluntary disposition of like-minded individuals. The importance of strong affective bonds aside, Arendt warns us that these attachments can never translate into universalistic ideals or broad-based political movements, but are bound to remain tied to exclusionary, even disciplinary, face-to-face interactions. See Hannah Arendt, On Revolution (New York: Penguin Classics, 1991).

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[63] Rose, op. cit., p. 1408.