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THE CHANGING FACE OF DEVELOPMENT: BRIDGING THE MACRO AND MICRO PROCESSES OF GLOBALIZATION AND ETHNOGRAPHY

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ABSTRACT

How is development to be viewed in today’s globalized world? With the processes of globalization ever changing the interconnectedness of our planet, actors and institutions now operate on numerous levels which affect the experience of developing countries in complex ways. This thesis attempts to bridge the gap between the global and the local, considering developing countries and their inhabitants through analyses at both the macro and micro levels. It takes up globalization in relation to the spread of neoliberal ideals, and considers the implication for developing countries and development theories. These macro processes (and the individual actors behind them) are considered simultaneously with grounded human experience on the micro level, utilizing a limited ethnography in Uganda and Kenya. In doing so, we seek to begin connecting the complex human actions that operate on various levels so as to better understand today’s world order and where agency lies therein for development purposes and the pursuit of social justice.
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INTRODUCTION

“A handful of pine-seed will cover mountains with the green
majesty of forest. I too will set my face to the wind and throw
my handful of seed on high.”

-William Sharp

How many generations will it take before we can all walk across this planet equally? We have seen great social movements here in the United States over the last century fighting for the rights of women, African-Americans, and gay men and women. But when will it be time for an international social movement to bring equality and social justice across our borders? I became conscious of the need for such a movement when my own worldview was ripped apart when I first traveled to Uganda at the age of eighteen. Seeing such vast disparities between my own life and that which is lived in absolute poverty, I began a journey to try to understand why we have not yet seen such a global social justice movement.

Today, globalization is the dominant trend that shapes our world system and brings all of humanity closer together. How is it possible, then, that global poverty and wealth disparity have increased in an era of great technological advancement and the sharing of knowledge across borders? The answer lies within a new system of neocolonialism which has allowed for the continuation of the historical hegemonic world order in which actors from the powerful, developed nations largely control macro processes for their own political and economic interests. Through international economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, actors have directed the processes of globalization to spread the doctrine of neoliberalism. Arguably,
this has contributed to devastating implications within developing countries and lends itself to the continuation of global poverty and economic inequality.

Ethnographic research, which provides close analyses of cultural experiences, can contribute to the holistic understanding of these global relations today. Since globalization has inextricably linked the local and the global, the importance of micro analysis is more important than ever. Ethnographic work provides a powerful tool for relating human experiences on a local level to the larger global processes. Additionally, considering processes at the micro level can allow us to analyze moments of oppositional agency for individuals and institutions operating from below.

This thesis is organized in four main sections which explore the macro and micro processes, institutions, and actors that operate in the global arena today and their implications for the developing world. The first chapter, *Globalization and Development*, gives a brief overview of globalization, neoliberalism, the implications for developing countries, and the role of nongovernmental organizations. In *Chapter 2: Ethnography*, and *Chapter 3: Reevaluating Individual Activism* the usefulness of ethnography is examined and applied. Through writing, I examine my own past experiences and work in Uganda and Kenya in order to better understand the world, relationships connecting the local and the global, and the agency that lies within the people who inhabit such spaces. Finally, *Chapter 4: Conclusion*, provides a space for discussion of the topics explored, main conclusions, and questions for future research.
CHAPTER 1: GLOBALIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT

The large and encompassing topic of globalization has been greatly contested as of late. Viewed by some academics as inevitable and uncontrollable, others see it as a manipulated path toward the principles of neoliberalism, led by the political and economic elites of the West. Globalization may simply be the continuation of a long, historic journey toward greater modernity and progress, or it may be something completely new. Arguably, the processes of globalization benefit many across our planet by providing greater consumer choices, increased economic efficiency, and cultural diversity. However, it also leads to environmental damage, cultural homogenization, and harm to those living in poverty for the benefit of the rich (Steger, 2009; Kellner, 2002). Whether for better or for worse, globalization has changed the way the global system operates with such magnitude that a reevaluation of how development works today is necessary.

The first section of this chapter gives a brief explanation of globalization, with a look into some of its various dimensions. The second section goes more in depth to analyze specifically how the processes of globalization have pushed the spread of neoliberalism in the global arena. In the third section I explore some of the implications of globalization for developing countries and development models, and finally, in the fourth section I explore the role of nongovernmental organizations in today’s globalized world. The story of globalization that is explored here is that of gains and losses, costs and benefits, the haves and the have-nots, unity and fragmentation, and empowerment and disempowerment, all operating at different levels in different spheres.
Globalization

Globalization can be defined and interpreted in an endless number of ways, but in its most simplistic sense, it is the increased interconnectivity of today’s world. The term globalization became a buzzword in the 1990s when unprecedented advances in communications and information technologies began allowing for faster and more widespread cross-border flows of knowledge, ideas, capital, finance, goods, and people – eventually leading to the highly integrated economies and societies of today (Rath, 2006). Consequently, more than ever, the local is increasingly affected by and mutually affects the global in today’s hyper-globalized world. This expansion and acceleration of cross-national relations, fueled by recent innovations in technologies, has lead to a multitude of economic, political, social, and environmental manifestations.

The Economic Dimension

Today, more than ever before, the world largely operates in an integrated, free-market economy in which goods, services, capital, and finance flow freely across national borders (Rath, 2006). Technological advances over the last thirty years have allowed for goods and services to be produced better and faster, and to travel further than ever before. Improved technologies, coupled with an emphasis on free trade and more integrated markets, have changed the way in which goods and services are produced, as well as the way we exchange these products over ever-expanding markets (Steger, 2009).

The origins of today’s integrated, global economy can be traced back to the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, where, at the end of the Second World War, the
world’s economic leaders gathered to rewrite their economic policies. One of the important outcomes of this conference was the outlining of several international economic institutions, known today as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank\(^1\), and the World Trade Organization (WTO).\(^2\) Although the original plan for monitored capitalism that was drafted at Bretton Woods eventually collapsed, the establishment of these institutions set the stage for international economic integration. (Steger, 2009)

With neoliberalism (to be defined and explored in the following section) as the dominant doctrine today – replacing the original ideas that emerged from the Bretton Woods Conference – globalizing forces push an agenda for free markets, liberalization, and international integration. Today, goods, services, and even finances can easily flow across borders in growing international and regional trading conglomerates. This has also allowed for the enormous increase in both the numbers and strength (both economic and political) of transnational corporations (TNCs). In 2006 there were 78,000 TNCs operating across the globe, compared to 7,000 in 1970 (Steger, 2009). Continually augmenting their strength, in 2005, TNCs made up 42 of the 100 largest economies worldwide (countries made up the other 58) (Steger, 2009). Liberalized markets have allowed TNCs to find cheap labor, inexpensive resources, and favorable political environments for manufacturing cheap products and thus to profit enormously, in what some critics have called the “race to the bottom” (Steger, 2009). Additionally, we continue to see the rise of trade agreements and associations and the increased influence

\(^1\)Originally the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, whose purpose was to provide loans for reconstruction in Europe post WWII

\(^2\)Originally the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)
over such actions by the IMF, World Bank, and WTO – the international economic institutions which make and enforce the rules for the global economy.

Although globalization is typically defined by its economic dimension, this is just one part of a larger, more complex whole. By exploring the political, cultural, and ecological dimensions, the complexities and relationships of the larger forces of globalization become clear. Indeed, all of these dimensions are mutually reinforcing and dependent upon one another. A return to the economic dimension in the next section of this chapter will provide a more in depth analysis of this predominant dimension of globalization, specifically as it acts as the spread of neoliberal ideals and the implications for development.

**The Political Dimension**

“Political globalization refers to the intensification and expansion of political interrelations across the globe” (Steger, 2009, p. 58). This increase in international political relations raises questions of today’s concept of state sovereignty and the place for regional and global governance. The political dimension of globalization is inextricably linked to the cultural and economic dimensions as well; political decisions are influenced by economic factors, and changes pertaining to state sovereignty question national and cultural identity.

Today, the nation-state³ may no longer be “the political container of modern social life” (Steger, 2009, p. 59). As nations have become more interdependent for

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³ The concept of nation-states arose from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 at the end of several religious wars in Europe. It gave national sovereignty to all recognized states. A nation-state is a geographic territory comprising of a culture and/or ethnicity (nation) along with a political system (state).
trade and various other common interests, there has been an increase in the number of intergovernmental organizations and associations. Regional blocs that often begin with the purpose of integrating their markets have developed loose governing bodies as well (the best example being the European Union). The 20th century saw the creation of several such quasi-governing bodies that both created and governed international trade and other interactions, such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the World Trade Organization. (Steger, 2009)

Some argue that these political changes have resulted in the subordination of the decision-making power of political actors to the forces of economics (Uttam, 2005; Rath, 2006; Steger, 2009). Certain decision-making duties, primarily within the economy, have been acquiesced to larger international forces. Trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and international institutions such as the World Bank regulate and determine many economic decisions that previously would have been made by an incumbent (Uttam, 2005; Rath, 2006). This has had more prominent effects in the global South where nations have far less power and authority in the international organizations and agreements that have taken over these decision-making powers (Steger, 2009).

International political associations have been established on sub-national levels as well. Major "global cities” such as London, Tokyo, and New York City have utilized globalizing forces to establish cross-border cooperation with one another, as these cities often have more in common with one another than they do with cities in their own countries. Additionally, global advocacy groups and nongovernmental organizations
Globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.

Roland Robertson, Professor of Sociology, University of Aberdeen, Scotland (Steger, 2009)

The political changes due to globalization call into question not only the power and place of nation-states and their leaders, but also the self-identification of individuals. People across the planet have historically based their personal identity upon national (albeit artificial) boundaries which define a shared nationality, heritage, and culture. Today, globalization affects not only the political and economic sovereignty of a nation-state, but also its culture.

The Cultural Dimension

Due to the changing interface of the international arena, culture has been called into question, as tensions arise between the global and the local. As new technologies, goods, media, and people increasingly flow across borders, so too do values, ideas, and customs. Such “cultural products” are usually Western, by virtue of the fact that it is the West (particularly the United States) that owns and/or controls many of the institutions controlling such outputs (i.e. TNCs and media networks). Tensions arise when ideas, principles, and lifestyles from outside cultures clash with local cultures, calling into question the integrity and purity of the local culture.

Such tensions are explored in Benjamin Barber’s *Jihad Versus McWorld* (1996) and Thomas Friedman’s *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999). In the former, Barber describes the struggles and backlash of “Jihad” in trying to protect local, traditional beliefs from Western homogenizing forces and corporate political control of “McWorld”
(Kellner, 2002). In the latter, however, Friedman, explains the duality that can and does exist in our new, globalized world between modernity and high consumption (represented by the Lexus) and traditional roots and beliefs (represented by the olive tree) (Friedman, 1999). These two opposing theories, trying to explain whether or not cultures can withstand the integrating forces of globalization, are crucial to understanding the future of international relations. As we become increasingly more interconnected in today’s global society, will we see cultures clashing against one another in resistance and dispute, as Samuel Huntington (1993) predicts? Or will we see more peaceful global coexistence as cultures learn about one another, create mutual understanding and respect, and even borrow and mix ideas with one another?

There is contestation about such questions, with a number of academics defending each of the possible outcomes. The “homogenizers” (i.e. Latouche who views this as a negative force and Fukuyama who views it as a positive force) believe that the West is leading a campaign of cultural imperialism and that the world is undergoing “Westernization” or “McDonaldization” which is creating one uniform, homogenized global culture. However, the “heterogenizers” (i.e. Huntington and Barber) believe that in response to the influx of foreign cultures, local cultures actually strengthen their own belief systems, values, and traditions, which can result in cultural polarization. This process reinforces the heterogeneous mixture of cultures across our planet, and the flows of globalization allow cultures to express themselves in the global sphere. And then there are the middle-of-the-road “hybridizers” (i.e. Kraidy and Friedman) who believe in “glocalization” – a process in which the local integrates some cultural aspects from the global, resulting in mixed, hybrid cultures (Steger, 2009; Friedman, 1999; Kumar, 2006).
Arjun Appadurai, however, argues that cultural flows can only be understood as acting in much more complex ways, with an infinite number of cultural combinations (as opposed to the three general categories mentioned here). Culture flows through five different “scapes” according to Appadurai: ethnoscapes (the movement of people), technoscapes (the movement of technology), financescapes (the movement of capital), mediascapes (the movement of media), and ideoscapes (the movement of ideologies). Global culture, flowing through different ethnoscapes with various intensities, thus combines with historically and contextually manifested “imagined worlds” at the local level in a plethora of ways. The ways in which globalization impacts local cultures is thus unpredictable and complex (Appadurai, 1990).

The general, although simplistic, concepts of cultural homogenization, heterogenization, and hybridization are still useful in representing the general models used to view cultural globalization, but we must not forget the complexity of such processes. As Douglas Kellner writes, “it is important to present globalization as a strange amalgam of both homogenizing forces of sameness and uniformity and heterogeneity, difference, and hybridity” (2002, p. 292).

**The Ecological Dimension**

Although it is still contestable as to how intertwined our cultures, political affairs, and economies have truly become in this era of globalization, few can argue against the fact that we are all connected through the air we breathe, the water we depend upon, and the climate in which we live. Although globalization may lead to greater economic efficiency, higher consumer choices, and lower prices, the ramifications can be seen in the environmental problems plaguing our world today.
Consumerism, upon which the entire international economy is built, views the earth as a resource to be used and material possessions as something to accrue. However, this ideology of high mass consumption leads to production processes that pollute, damage, and destroy our environment in pursuit of low costs and high output. Our heightened rates of international production, competition, and trade have lead to great ecological consequences.

The West and particularly the United States is greatly implicated in this dimension of globalization. By setting trends (via cultural outlets mentioned in the previous sub-section) of a high-consumption lifestyle, we set the scene for a largely unsustainable global culture. Although the US is home to just 6% of the world population, we consume 30-40% of the world’s natural resources (Steger, 2009). Furthermore, it has been the rich, industrial countries of the West that have profited immensely in the process of degrading the environment. Developing countries not only have missed out on such profits, but they also have insufficient funds and infrastructure to adapt to ecological changes such as climate change (Steger, 2009).

Today, global warming and climate change stand as some of the most threatening global issues. Air and water pollution and the loss of biodiversity know no territorial boundaries, no state lines. These, among other ecological threats, have become global problems that will require a global solution. (Rath 2006; Steger 2009)

The various dimensions and processes of globalization can in no way be isolated from one another, as they all interact in a complex, mutually reinforcing web of cause and effect. Although its processes, paths, manifestations, and ramifications are vast, today it is most often defined in terms of economics. A more in depth look at this economic
dimension reveals how the processes of globalization act as the spread of neoliberal principles and implications for global development today.

**Neoliberalism**

Today, the economic aspect of globalization is, in essence, the spread of a neoliberal agenda. Neoliberalism is a philosophical, political, and economic ideology that became the dominant doctrine in the US, UK, and Western Europe during the early 1980s, and has been spreading across and throughout nations across the globe via international economic institutions and the individuals that create policy within them. As an ideology, neoliberalism claims to seek individual freedom and dignity and defend the personal pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness by deregulating the economy and reducing the role of the state to give every individual the utmost opportunity to compete in the economy (Harvey, 2005). However, as neoliberalism seeks to provide personal freedom and choice, the means through which it tries to achieve these ends create a disconnect, and we instead end up with increased social inequality, structural poverty, the creation of a class-based system, and the loss of the welfare state (Harvey, 2005).

Throughout the 1970s, the largely Keynesian\(^4\) world was entrapped in such high rates of stagflation\(^5\) that the West began paving the way to a new economic model. Led by Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) in the United States and Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990) in Britain, the West began a revival of old models of liberal economic policy. The new form of neoliberalism had long been advocated by Friedrich August von Hayek (1899-

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\(^4\) The macroeconomic theory of John Maynard Keynes in which monetary policy and fiscal policy are utilized by the central bank and government, respectfully, to intervene in order to stabilize the normal cycle of economic expansion and recession  
\(^5\) An economic condition marked by both high inflation and high stagnation
1992) and other academics within the Mont Pelerin Society, but had always been repressed in favor of popular Keynesian economics. With neoliberalism finally in vogue, there was a return to the famous liberal ideology of Adam Smith (1723-1790) that claimed the economy, and society, should be left to self-regulation at the guidance of the “invisible hand” of the market. (Harvey, 2005; Yergin, 2002)

If the goal of neoliberal reform was to maximize market freedom and minimize state intervention, then the visions were privatization, deregulation, and liberalization. State-owned industries were sold to private investors as competition and entrepreneurial activity were encouraged. The state was largely removed from the market, which was left to self-regulation. With such deregulation came reductions in public expenditure; the welfare state declined and social services such as health care and education were no longer guaranteed by the state. The market was freed from intervention and regulations, and barriers to international trade and investment were abolished as were domestic restrictions such as price controls (Martinez, 1996). Consequently, the reforms of neoliberalism shifted the responsibility for well-being and economic security from society and the state to the individual. In the famous words of Margaret Thatcher, there is “no such thing as society, only individual men and women” (Harvey, 2005, p. 23).

By the mid 1990s the model of neoliberalism endorsed in the US, UK, and Western Europe was claimed to be the answer to global problems in what came to be known as the Washington Consensus. The international economic institutions (IMF, World Bank, and the WTO) had been purged of Keynesian policies in favor of neoliberal

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6 The organization of economists, business executives, philosophers, and other prominent thinkers who advocated for the doctrine of neoliberalism and the ideals for which it stood
7 A set of neoliberal principles prescribed to indebted developing countries by the economic institutions based in Washington, D.C. (IMF, World Bank, and the US Treasury)
ones, and the major universities of the US and UK (where many foreign economists were trained) became dominated by neoliberal thinkers (such as Milton Friedman and his colleagues from the Chicago School) (Harvey, 2005; Klein, 2007). Outlets such as these, coupled with the West’s media, major corporations, financial institutions, and state treasuries, dispersed neoliberal principles to the rest of the world. Neoliberalism had become, and arguably remains, the hegemonic discourse of economics as it intersects social life across the globe (Harvey, 2005).

Whether directly or indirectly, many developing countries around the world have been pressured to adopt neoliberal policies. As previously mentioned, the West provides strong discourse to the rest of the world simply due to its pervasive, hegemonic strength. Additionally, in today’s global economy, to gain entrance to large consumer markets (like that of the US), to have competitive success, to attract foreign investment, to sign bilateral trade agreements, and to have a chance at economic growth, there is little alternative to joining the neoliberal agenda. Being able to compete with the major global players in the international economy means creating a good business climate with approval from the IMF, World Bank, and WTO – approval that comes from playing by the neoliberal rules. (Stiglitz, 2003; Harvey, 2005)

The international economic institutions, predominately run by individuals from the West, may also influence the economic scheme of developing countries more directly, even forcefully, via structural adjustment programs (SAPs). Such programs, which require governments of developing countries to implement neoliberal reforms, have been widely administered to countries caught in the “debt trap” – a cycle of debt which coincided with the rise of neoliberalism. In 1973 OPEC’s increase in oil prices resulted in
large amounts of petrodollars accumulating in oil-producing countries (i.e. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) which were deposited in New York investment banks. These funds were largely lent out to developing countries which were in need of such funds, at interest rates profitable to the New York banks. Eventually, due to a hike in interest rates (administered by the chairman of the Federal Reserve, Paul Volcker), developing countries began defaulting on their debts. It was at this time that the IMF stepped in and offered debt rescheduling in exchange for neoliberal reforms. Such reforms, intended to accrue profits in order to pay off debt, required developing countries to implement structural changes including reduced government spending, privatization, reduction of trade barriers, and export-led growth. As developing countries continue fighting to pay off their debts, the rich, developed countries of the West have profited two-fold: they have accrued great profits from the interest rates on their loans and have successfully converted many countries to neoliberal reforms. (Harvey, 2005)

As previously mentioned, there exists a large disconnect between the theory of neoliberalism and the reality. Neoliberalism claims to promote personal liberty and freedom, but the manners in which it does so lead to the restoration and/or the creation of class power, inequality, and poverty – both within and across countries. Principles of free markets benefit the private interests of businesses, TNCs, and financial institutions, but not always the individual – especially in the developing world where the benefits of technological innovations and consumer choices are not implicitly manifested. At the same time, neoliberalism places responsibility on the individual for their well-being, diminishing the welfare state and thus removing the state from the responsibility for poverty and social inequality. If an individual has failed economically, it is because she
or he did not take advantage of investment opportunities or did not utilize entrepreneurial skills (Harvey, 2005). The doctrine views poverty not as accidental, but rather, as a structural, inevitable part of society, regulated by free-market competition (Markantonatou, 2006). As David Harvey eloquently states, “Under the assumption that ‘a rising tide lifts all boats’, or of ‘trickle down’, neoliberal theory holds that the elimination of poverty (both domestically and worldwide) can best be secured through free markets and free trade” (2005, pp. 64-65). Yet, the evidence of growing poverty and inequality demonstrate that this is not what actually occurs.

In 1960, the income ratio between the top fifth of the world’s population living in the richest nations and the bottom fifth in the poorest was 30 to 1. In 1990 that ratio had grown to 60 to 1, and by 1997 it was 74 to 1 (Harvey, 2005). According to Harvey, “the evidence strongly suggests that the neoliberal turn is in some way and to some degree associated with the restoration or reconstruction of the power of economic elites” (2005, p. 19). Additionally, over 45 percent of people in our world live on less than two dollars a day; 1.2 billion live on less than one dollar a day (Stiglitz, 2003). Although globalization has brought much good to the world, wealth has accumulated unequally both within and across countries. In the last decade of the twentieth century, although the total world income increased, so did the number of people living in absolute poverty (Stiglitz, 2003). Such outcomes of neoliberalism force one to critique and reconsider the institutions, individuals, and policies that are being disseminated and their implications for developing countries.
Implications for Developing Countries and Development Theories

These dominant trends of neoliberalism have been disseminated from the epicenters of the US, UK, and Western Europe to much of the rest of the world over the past thirty years. However, this discourse and the policy it advocates have led to increases in both the number of people living in poverty as well as the gap between the rich and the poor – both within and across countries (Stiglitz, 2003). Why then, has neoliberalism become the dominant doctrine around the world? Behind the façade of the international economic institutions enforcing such a doctrine are individuals making self-serving policy decisions, representing their own commercial, financial, and political interests. However, these policy decisions are made on behalf of other nations and thus other individuals, having profound effects on the developing world and the individuals living there. This section will further explore how globalization, specifically neoliberalism, affects developing countries, as well as the implications for the major development theories.8

Although the formal system of colonialism had collapsed by the beginning of neoliberalism, today’s world has taken on a form of neocolonialism, with the IMF, and to a lesser degree the World Bank, as the new imperialist leaders mandating the economic activity and governance structures in countries around the world. Economically and politically strong nations, like the US and Japan, can resist and have resisted advice and recommendations for change from the IMF, choosing instead to strategically protect and

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8 There exists much tension around the term “development” – itself a manifestation of Western discourse. I use it here, in this thesis, as a broad term to imply an elevation in the quality of life. Such improvements may begin with economic growth, but the term may also incorporate improvements within social, political, and ecological realms as well. I do not have adequate space in this thesis to properly analyze the depth and breadth of the term “development,” so I use it generally in this sense. The same broad definition applies to the usage of “developing countries” and “developed countries.”
build up their domestic industries before slowly opening up their markets to foreign competition. Developing countries are simply not strong enough to refuse IMF policies. Refusal would mean losing much needed loan programs from the IMF and World Bank as well as additional aid from Western countries. In return for such monies, developing countries, given no other alternative by the individuals running these institutions, acquiesce to structural adjustment programs. (Stiglitz, 2003)

In her book *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (2007) Naomi Klein goes so far as to argue that neoliberalism has been covertly implemented within countries during times of disaster, strategically timed by neoliberal elites to successfully get their reforms instated. These reforms recommended by the IMF force developing nations to prematurely liberalize by removing trade barriers, opening up capital markets, and deregulating their economy. Such a sudden shock of liberalization in these politically fragile countries is devastating to the economy and society. Industries and workers are simply not able to compete with their foreign counterparts, which are typically more efficient, provide cheaper goods, and may be subsidized by their governments. And thus, thousands of jobs are often lost. When coupled with the fact that developing countries have never had the chance to develop social safety nets to deal with problems such as job loss, the changes resulting from sudden market liberalization have resulted in hunger, poverty, and riots in countries around the world. Such reforms have also forced many vulnerable countries to open their capital markets prematurely to the rest of the world, often creating disastrous effects to the local economic institutions. Given that European countries forbad the free flow of their own capital markets up until the 1970s, it is unfair to expect newly emerging countries to immediately open their own markets.
Additionally, in many trade agreements that have been signed, Western nations have acted hypocritically by creating terms in which less powerful countries are required to reduce trade barriers, tariffs, and quotas on imports, while they themselves maintain large protectionist strategies. This allows the more powerful nations to prevent an influx of imports while still subsidizing their own special-interest industries. Even when wealth is created from the IMF’s neoliberal reforms, it often goes only to the already well-off. Having to integrate a neoliberal agenda, developing countries are forced to liberalize trade and financial markets too quickly and prematurely. (Stiglitz, 2003)

Ideally, globalization would benefit all nations and people that entered the international free market if global competition led to comparative advantage and specialization, thus lowering prices and improving the quality of products for all. Such a process requires “creative destruction” in which inefficient industries are destroyed by foreign competition while new, emerging industries with a comparative advantage are created (Friedman, 1999). Developing nations are at a disadvantage for such “creative destruction.” As aforementioned, developed countries such as the US and Britain maintained largely protectionist policies up until the 1970s, allowing their domestic industries to develop before opening up their markets to the international system. However, during the 1970s many developing countries, especially in Africa, had just come out of colonialism. Such countries certainly have not had the same length of time to develop their domestic industries, and thus when market barriers come down, developed, competitive Western companies (e.g. Wal-Mart and Coca-Cola) often out-compete young industries. In addition to TNCs, foreign banks also flood the newly liberalized capital markets of developing nations, taking business away from local banks. Western banks
may be able to provide greater security to their clients, but they rarely lend to small- and
medium-sized businesses, greatly reducing the chance for start-up businesses or farmers
to take out loans for seed and fertilizer. Furthermore, the IMF’s structural adjustment
programs also call for tightened monetary policies, making it more difficult to start up
new industries in the hypothetical idea of “creative destruction” (Stiglitz, 2003).

These real-life implications of neoliberal policies on developing countries
challenge the thinking of both modernization theory and W. W. Rostow’s infamous
stages of development. Broadly speaking, these two theories describe a predictable
sequence of stages or processes through which nations pass on their developmental path.
Modernization theory looks at the internal changes and processes that inhibit or lead to
development, with the belief that “traditional” countries can progress and develop in the
same sequence that “modern” countries once did (Valenzuela, 1978). W. W. Rostow’s
theory of the stages of economic growth describes a similar sequential process in which
traditional societies progress toward high mass consumption societies, through
predictable stages of technological and social change (1960). Yet, today’s world is
largely defined by external factors that impact a country via globalization, and we have
seen that the processes of globalization have caused economic and political changes to
developing countries at much earlier and more premature stages compared to developed
countries. Through the choices made by influential political and economic individuals in
the West, the path to development appears to be different for developing countries today.

Furthermore, as these countries are in the midst of trying to establish political
institutions and good governance, they are at the same time losing much of their
sovereignty in the name of free markets and the international regimes that control them.
(as discussed on pages 6-8). States no longer make decisions concerning their economy, and to a lesser degree their policies and society, to the same extent as states did just four or five decades ago (Uttam, 2005). Ironically, the Western nations that have historically pressed for democracy around the world, have proven to be quite un-democratic through their roles in the international regimes, including the IMF, World Bank, WTO, and various trade agreements and regional alliances.

Furthermore, these free markets have not proven to be so “free.” The hegemonic order of nation-states is reflected within the power structure of the global economic system. The rich, developed countries of the West predominately control the terms of trade, the trade agreements, and the international economic institutions. Thus, the individuals who dictate so much of the global policy are highly unrepresentative of the vast array of people within developing countries for whom their policies influence (Stiglitz, 2003). Inherently, the IMF, World Bank, and WTO are not democratic, participatory institutions.

It seems apparent that although explicit colonialism has ended, a new system of neocolonialism still perpetuates a global system in which a powerful, imperialist core of countries exploits a weak, subservient periphery (as described by Immanuel Wallerstein in his Modern World-System theory, first in 1974). This concept is also central to the ideas of dependency theory, a school of thought that emerged largely from Latin America around 1960. Also questioning modernization theory, dependency theorists saw the contradiction in believing that developing countries could be on the same path of development as those that came before them. The developed countries of today did not have a “core” of nations manipulating the global system through unfair terms of trade.
The theory of dependency thus views the profits and market successes of the core, or global North, as directly correlated to the impoverishment of the periphery, or global South by virtue of the world system (Valenzuela, 1978). Many developing countries that embraced dependency theory sought to break such ties from the exploitative world system by endorsing import substitution industrialization (ISI). However, the countries that shut themselves off to the global economy the most ended up with the worst economic growth (Valenzuela, 1978). Although the global system appeared to be exploitative and disadvantageous to developing countries, ISI proved that highly isolating oneself from the global economy was not the answer.

Nelson Mandela once asked, “Is globalization only for the powerful? Does it offer nothing to the men, women, and children who are ravaged by the violence of poverty?” (Cited in Kellner, 2002, p. 295). Globalization has proven to challenge many issues of development as well as some of the theories used to analyze this process. Countries are no longer isolated from one another as they journey along this path toward greater modernity and development. Globalization has interconnected once distant locales, providing the opportunity for the sharing of technology, knowledge, and people. However, the countries already deemed “developed” and the powerful elites within them have gained great influence – largely manipulating how globalization will be directed, often times to their own advantage. Neoliberalism has not only changed economic policies, but has also had an effect on social policies as well. Through deregulation and a reduction in government spending, neoliberal reforms have vastly removed the role of the

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9 An economic policy embraced to reduce foreign dependency by replacing imported goods with domestically produced ones. ISI proved to be largely unsuccessful by raising prices and reducing the quality of goods, as well as replacing dependency upon foreign imports with dependency upon foreign capital and know-how.
government to provide social welfare programs. Thus, in the changing dynamics of the world more responsibility is placed upon the individual to provide for oneself, raising the question of who will provide a safety net for those living in poverty.

The Role of Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs)

As neoliberalism has greatly reduced the role of the state in the provision of social services, a civil society has emerged to fill this void – a civil society largely composed of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Since the 1980s NGOs have surged in numbers and services provided, coinciding with the rise of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2005). The role of NGOs is important to analyze as they act as a different and fairly new type of institution and actor working within the global arena, in both congress and at times opposition, to various government and international policies.

While NGOs have been operating within the realm of social justice and global development for over a century, they weren’t officially termed “nongovernmental organizations” until the initial charter of the UN in 1945. Arising to combat a particular interest, provide a specific service, or promote a certain cause, NGOs act with independence from governmental actors and bodies. Examples include Greenpeace, Amnesty International, and the Red Cross. Some NGOs still rely heavily upon funding from government sources (i.e. Oxfam and Medecins Sans Frontieres) while others do not, but all of these organizations do depend upon fundraising, donations, and grants to carry out their initiatives. The term “NGO” is often used interchangeably with “nonprofit”; however, nonprofits may include such organizations as museums, hospitals, and universities and are not necessarily autonomous from the government (Nursey-Bray, 2007).
NGOs act at both the local as well as the international level. There are an estimated 37,000 international NGOs (INGOs) today; up from less than 400 a century ago (Nursey-Bray, 2007). INGOs, including the Red Cross and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), often operate within a multitude of different countries with variously located programs and affiliates. However, most NGOs operate domestically, often times within a specific community. The United Nations reported that as of 1995, roughly 2 million NGOs operated within the US, and countries such as Kenya were seeing around 240 new NGOs being established each year (Nursey-Bray, 2007).

The methods utilized by NGOs to spread awareness of issues, provide services, and create change are vast and unique to each organization. Protesting and demonstrating are utilized in addition to research and lobbying. NGOs do have strong clout within various debates, acting within meetings and committees to inform and pressure domestic and international policy. The 1997 Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change is an example of successful action on behalf of NGOs to pressure governments to take action for a particular cause. NGOs also provide tangible aid and support – including human rights support, food aid, and health services – to vulnerable populations, including the poor, women, children, the disabled, and various ethnic groups (Nursey-Bray, 2007).

No matter how well-intentioned NGOs may be, they are not free from pitfalls of their own. Not being intrinsically democratic, NGOs are at times critiqued as to their representativeness and accountability. NGOs often define their own cause, organizing around what they presume to be an issue, and they speak on behalf of others. Additionally, funded by outside donors and/or governments, NGOs may be biased to representing the interests of these funders. Governments in the developing world
sometimes view outside NGOs as acting as “Trojan Horses,” a front to foreign policy interests and neocolonial prerogatives (Nursey-Bray, 2007; Harvey, 2005). INGOs may also be viewed as intrusive when they implement programs and initiatives in developing countries rather than funding local NGOs to do the same work, thus employing and empowering local individuals. Due to such critiques, countries like Zimbabwe, Eritrea, and the Sudan have created laws which work to limit foreign-funded NGOs within their countries (Nursey-Bray, 2007).

Additionally, as NGOs write and promote their own agenda on behalf of those in need, they often do so by conceptualizing a universal set of human rights that they feel are worthy of pursuing. Although well-intentioned, it can be problematic to ignore the complexities that exist within each particular context in lieu of universalisms. Development is a complex nexus of relations, and by working on one specific crisis without analyzing its specific relationship to others may simply fix one problem while creating another, rather than fixing the underlying issue. For example, in certain political and cultural contexts, the elimination of child labor may increase child prostitution if there are no other means to generate family income at the loss of children’s work. By not analyzing the complexity of each context and considering the sequencing of social, political, and economic change may simply create a different problem for a different advocacy group to then fight against (Harvey, 2005).

NGOs, although acting in imperfect and ambiguous ways, fill an important niche in today’s globalized world by providing a greater humanitarian agenda to the provision of social services. These organizations have stepped in to fill a vacuum created as neoliberalism removed the state from the responsibility of providing social services and
welfare. The rise in NGOs that coincided with the hegemonic spread of neoliberalism has created a “civil society,” that gives agency to oppositional politics and social change.
CHAPTER 2: ETHNOGRAPHY

A Case Study: The Republic of Kenya

The macro forces of globalization interact with the micro in an indefinable number of ways, as each locale varies historically, politically, and contextually. By analyzing one case study, we can begin to understand how these complex macro and micro processes operate within the world system as they apply to a specific country and group of people. Ethnography is a powerful tool for doing so, as it allows for the study of local contexts and the discovery of relationships as they pertain to larger processes and understandings. Kenya is the primary locale for such fieldwork in this thesis, and due to the country’s relative openness and connection to the globalized world it serves as a good case study. The practice of ethnography will be further explored in the following sections, but first, a review of the historical and political contexts of Kenya will contextually position the country within the global arena.

Described as the “cradle of humanity,” Kenya has had a long history, marked by dynamic changes in trade, production, and interactions with foreign cultures. In the 10th century, Arab merchants set up trading posts on the east coast of Kenya, along the Indian Ocean. Along with goods from the Middle East came the influence of the Arabic language (mixing with the Bantu language to form Swahili) and the religion of Islam. Portuguese colonizers arrived at the beginning of the 16th century, with a larger influx of Europeans arriving in the 19th century – all bringing their own interests, beliefs, and religions as well. Kenya eventually became a British colony in the partition of Africa, beginning nearly a century of exploitation and oppression. The British settlers forced the
Africans off of their land, forced them to work on large tea and coffee plantations, and even made it illegal for the Africans to grow their own food. (Stanford, 2001)

Around 1920 Kenyans, especially the Kikuyu tribe, began forming rebellious groups against their British colonizers. Jomo Kenyatta, himself a Kikuyu, became a leader in the fight for self-rule, becoming president of the Kenya African Union (KAU) in 1946. In the 1950s radical Kikuyus joined together in what came to be known as the Mau Mau rebellion. All of the Kenyans’ efforts, however, were violently suppressed by the British, and it wasn’t until 1963 when Kenya was finally granted independence from Britain. The charismatic Jomo Kenyatta, who had been imprisoned by the British from 1952 until 1961, became prime minister and was elected president in 1964. (Stanford, 2001)

For the next fifteen years, Kenyatta governed an economically and politically stable country. Although a Kikuyu, Kenyatta appointed individuals from various tribes to serve in his government, in attempts to overcome ethnic rifts. Upon his death, however, the autocratic Daniel Toroitich arap Moi, from the Kalenjin tribe, stepped in. Over the next twenty-four years Kenya fell witness to a series of repressive policies, assassinations, and oppression. The economy plummeted as inflation soared, unemployment increased, and the value of currency fell (Stanford, 2001). Moi finally stepped down in 2002 when he lost to presidential candidate Mwai Kibaki (a Kikuyu), who won re-election in the December 2007 elections which resulted in two months of ethnic and political violence (“Country Profile”, 2010).

Today, Kenya plays a predominant role in East Africa, acting as a central hub for both trade and finance (“Kenya”, 2010). Additionally, it has become much more
integrated into the global economy over the past three decades. Although pursuing import substitution industrialization (see page 22) for the first twenty years of independence, by the 1980s Kenya had highly embraced free markets and had one of the highest reductions in tariffs (proportionally) in the world (Jenkins, 2005). In a study by Rhys Jenkins comparing the effect of globalization on poverty in Bangladesh, Kenya, South Africa, and Vietnam, Kenya’s markets were the most open of the four during the 1980s (2005). However, while the other three countries of comparison became significantly more open throughout the 1990s, Kenya remained essentially the same between 1990 and 2002 (Jenkins, 2005).

During the 1990s, Kenya was the IMF’s picture-perfect country: “all administrative controls hampering international trade had been abolished, tariffs had been significantly reduced, export incentives put in place, exchange rate controls removed and the current account liberalized” (Jenkins, 2005, p. 4). However, despite such reforms to open up trade policy, trade flows and foreign direct investment did not increase, largely due to Kenya’s poor exports. As a result, between 1990 and 2002 Kenya had a GDP growth rate of just 1.9% (down from 4% experienced during the 1980s), and furthermore, real GDP per capita during the same time period was -0.9% (Jenkins, 2005). “Kenya can therefore best be described as an unsuccessful ‘globalizer’ rather than a ‘non-globalizer’” (Jenkins, 2005, p. 5).

Today, over half of Kenya’s population lives on less than a dollar a day (“Country Profile”, 2010; Jenkins, 2005). Three-fourths of the labor force works in agriculture, mostly as subsistence-farmers (“Kenya”, 2010; Stanford, 2001). Economic growth and social security (in terms of sufficient food, water, and energy) often fluctuates and
depends upon rainfall (“Kenya”, 2010). Kenya’s main exports include horticulture, tea, and coffee – products for which global market prices are highly volatile and thus greatly impact local economic stability (Stanford, 2001). The country continuously struggles with high unemployment, widespread government corruption, sporadic political and ethnic violence, poverty, income inequality, droughts, and the devastating effects of AIDS (“Country Profile”, 2010).

The IMF has repeatedly suspended loans and structural adjustment programs in Kenya between the years 1997 and 2007 due to its failure to adhere to reforms and largely (and repetitively) due to government corruption.

The Practice of Ethnography

In Chapter 1 I sought to explore the processes of globalization and how these are implicated in development today. However, such a discussion limits itself to analyses at the macro level, only engaging the actions of international institutions and organizations and the people behind them. To understand the real implications of these large, global actors and processes, we must explore the effect which is manifested within local communities and their individuals. Globalization and free trade advocates at the macro level may claim to know the way to development through free markets and economic reform, but this does not take into account the ramifications for individual people, especially the poor. On the ground, when basic needs are barely met, the concept of “development” may take on a whole new meaning. In this chapter, I switch gears and look at the communities, peoples, and operations at the micro level, using ethnography as the principal method in doing so. Ethnography is a powerful tool to analyze real-world meanings and experiences of individuals at the micro level. This chapter describes my
endeavor to explore how ethnography can be utilized to give a voice to the individuals who remain largely disempowered, through both an exploration of what ethnography is and how I have applied it to my own work in Uganda and Kenya.

Ethnography, sometimes referred to as fieldwork, is a branch of anthropology and sociology that aims to study and understand human networks and societies by extended immersion in a culture. Utilizing an array of techniques in the field including observations, interviews, and surveys, ethnography attempts to reveal, through the art of writing, the relationships and practices of a group of individuals in their natural setting. Ethnography places a researcher into the field as not only a practitioner, but also as a cultural participant. The method of ethnography thus qualitatively combines accurate research with a strong cultural, human component. Its qualitative nature also allows this practice to be quite flexible and its writing to be artistic. In turn, ethnography increases knowledge of the various cultures, views, beliefs, and practices across our planet.\(^\text{10}\) (Wolcott, 2005; Robinson-Caskie, 2006)

Although ethnography may take place on the micro level, it “can provide a focused illumination of a part of a complex whole” (Molyneux, 2001, p. 276) and is thus inextricably linked to and through the macro level. Ethnographic work allows us to analyze large, complex objects by bridging the dichotomy of the “global” and the “local,” finding the threads that link the two. By embarking on ethnographic work and writing within and across locales, we bring specific groups of people into a larger framework of discussion in which we can separate out the relationships that operate at various levels in

\(^{10}\) Ethnography has a multitude of definitions and variations. What is discussed here is just one way of defining it.
a larger system. This allows us to theorize how the abstract, top-level actions distantly and subtly affect the lives on the bottom-level (Marcus, 1995).

In the remainder of this chapter and in the following chapter, I attempt to explore the complex relationships that exist within and between individuals living and working in developing communities, by rethinking my own experiences in Sub-Saharan Africa. I first visited this region when I was eighteen, traveling to Uganda just after graduating from high school. The following summer, after my freshman year of college, I went to the neighboring country of Kenya for a longer stay.

Both of these experiences are explored in the following two sections. Through my writing, I explore my own experiences within these two cultures (autoethnography\textsuperscript{11}), focusing on how the alteration of my own beliefs and attitudes are implicated in understanding relations between Western culture and these East African cultures. Chapter 3, however, contains my explicit attempt at ethnographic work, when I returned to Kenya this year to specifically carry out ethnographic interviews and observations, in an attempt to discover the impact (if any) of an individual activist working at the micro level.

\textbf{Uganda, 2006: Opening my Eyes}

To be bluntly honest, it is somewhat surprising that I let myself get bogged down into the complexities and hardships of the larger world order – the implications of globalization, neoliberalism, and development – because, quite simply, I grew up in a bubble. My upbringing was in a very small, un-diverse suburb of Northwestern Pennsylvania where opinions, challenges, and issues of the outside world didn’t seem to penetrate. And unfortunately (or fortunately) growing up in a comfortable lifestyle allows

\textsuperscript{11} Although controversial, autoethnography is a form of autobiographical writing through which a researcher explores a culture through the writing of one’s own lived experience.
you and reinforces you to think about little more than parties, dating, and friends. My parents provided me with the most loving and comfortable upbringing, but with that comes comfortable blinders of ignorance. Yet, I was fortunate enough to have been exposed to international travel at a young age, having visited places like England, Scotland, South Korea, Japan, and Australia before the age of eighteen. I grew up with an appreciation for other cultures and I had formulated a belief from my own experience that people all over the world, despite culture or color, were intrinsically the same, just placed in vastly different environments. By my senior year in high school, I had grown sick of my own environment – one largely defined by the closed-mindedness of my home town and my peers. I was suffocating in the preoccupations that filled the lifestyle around me, and knew I would be limited in my understanding of the world and my pursuit of greater knowledge if I didn’t get out. I developed a yearning to discover what was real in the world; somehow I knew there was more out there that defied what I had grown to know as “truth.”

This yearning is what drew me to Sub-Saharan Africa: one of the most impoverished areas of our planet. When I was eighteen years old I was the youngest of a 19-member Habitat for Humanity Global Village team to travel to Uganda. Global Village, a branch of the well-known Christian, non-profit organization Habitat for Humanity, brings volunteers around the world on short trips to build affordable

![Figure 2.1 A typical Habitat house in Mukono, Uganda](image-url)
housing (Figure 2.1) to those in need (“Habitat for Humanity,” 2010). My trip took me to a village outside of Mukono, Uganda for three weeks during the summer of 2006. A fresh graduate from a secluded high school, it is almost impossible now to imagine how eye-opening that trip was for me.

Before boarding the plane in London Heathrow Airport that would take me to Entebbe, Uganda, I hid away in a bathroom stall, taking a few moments to gather my thoughts. I was overwhelmed with both excitement and fear; I had no idea what I was getting myself into. Safe in my hideaway, it never crossed my mind that I would return to that airport a short three weeks later completely changed and redefined.

Over the next nineteen days, I learned about the Baganda people living in the eastern area of Uganda through my stay in a guest house, building two houses side-by-side with the community, and visiting various churches, schools, and clinics. My experience in Uganda was constantly defined and redefined by the contrasting emotions of happiness and sadness, as both seem to exist side-by-side in a culture marked by amazingly resilient people living in absolute poverty. I was taken aback by the smiles, laughter, and friendliness, and at the same time by the ripped clothing, dirty faces, and the protruding bellies of the malnourished children (Figures 2.2 and 2.3). My mind was blown open by a culture and lifestyle so vastly different than my own.

Figures 2.2, 2.3 Children posing for the camera
In my journal I noted how I found the city of Kampala to be filthier than anything I had ever seen, even quoting a sign that read “Dumping and Urinating Here.” And I found the village life to be completely backward, stuck in the B.C. era (Figures 2.4 and 2.5). Our village was not even structured in a manner that could accommodate development initiatives even if they were present. The sparse roads that did exist were unplanned, homes were spread out in a random array, and the concept of a time schedule was non-existent. At the same time as I was realizing how much need existed in such a community, I was also realizing how difficult it would be to meet those needs: much structural change would be required first. Even before the much needed health and dental services could be provided, before orphanages could accommodate all of the children abandoned by reckless parents or AIDS, and before proper lending and market facilities could be established, better roads, transportation, and communications would need to be instated.

Yet, alongside this filth and backwardness, I also grew to find the lifestyle in our village quite happy and peaceful. I came to understand true laughter and happiness – that which exists in the absence of materialistic belongings or possessions, and from human warmth and relations. The people I worked and lived with laughed, danced, and smiled.
more strongly than any American I knew. And, everyone showed a strong sense of pride in what they did have and what they did do. Individuals often wanted to show us their small plot of land they farmed, the stone quarry they worked in, the homes they had built (Figure 2.6). Every emotion seemed to be amplified in this culture with so “little” in terms of capitalistic wealth.

It was on this first trip to Sub-Saharan Africa that I began to wonder, with my capitalist-raised mind, how one could find happiness in a life with so little “stimulation” (as I had known stimulation to be, in a Western sense, filled with television, restaurants, cars, malls, video games, etc). But I saw it happening all around me. This is not to say that I did not see the underlying struggles and strife that were ever present, but I had been prepared for that. I had not been prepared to find so much warmth, generosity, and happiness. With such thoughts and findings, the power of money seemed to melt away with the equatorial sun. Economic belongings all became relative. This is where my mind began pushing back and questioning the entire system of capitalism. What can money really buy? And how can we, in the West, spend so much money superfluously

Figures 2.7, 2.8 Cramped living conditions at a local orphanage (left); Kitchen at the same orphanage (right)
when that money could do so much good where there is so little (see Figures 2.7 and 2.8)? This economic disparity seemed to radiate from our mere presence and defined how we were understood by the local people. Often times while in Uganda, and later in Kenya, I felt as though I had a big dollar bill sign hovering over me, following me around. Everyone thought that just because I was white I was rich. And after my trip to Uganda, I realized that we are. We are all rich.

In our global society, being rich means having power. My time in Uganda was also when I learned about the power of “whiteness” 12 (Figure 2.9) that exists throughout the world. Stemming from the assumptions that all whites have money, knowledge, and success (coupled with a curiosity of an unknown group of people) we were treated like celebrities throughout our stay. Everyone wanted to spend time with us and meet us. One day, while visiting an elementary school that coupled as an orphanage, three girls from my team and I stumbled upon the “sick room” on the grounds. The small room was as austere as the name implies. Without any adult supervision, about four young children lay sprawled out across a random assortment of blankets and mats. Too sick to stand, too sick to even show the typical excitement of a Ugandan child at the sight of a “muzungu,” 13 their little hands found their way into ours, and they asked us to pray for them. I was told that our white skin implies that we are closer to God because

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12 I use the terms “white” and “whiteness” because I am white and all of my co-travelers in Uganda and Kenya have also been white. I do in fact infer the meaning “Westerner” which of course would encompass all races, but I have not had experience traveling with people of color in Sub-Saharan Africa.

13 A term used to refer to a white person or foreigner.
our color signifies wealth and successful lifestyles. If we are more blessed by God with this bounty, then praying on behalf of these African children is held in high esteem. Holding those tiny hands I learned the power I was born to carry on this planet, and yet at that moment I felt completely powerless.

Toward the end of my stay in Uganda, we went on several safaris in and around Queen Elizabeth National Park. I was all of a sudden immersed back into Western culture and Western people. Although we were still in Uganda, we were no longer in the real Uganda but rather the tourist Uganda. This feeling of disaffiliation was my first indication that something had changed within me; I no longer felt as though I could relate to these Americans and other Westerners. The lens through which I saw the world had been refocused, and that world that I saw had been turned upside-down.

On my way home, my layover in Heathrow was marked by vastly different emotions. Hidden away in a bathroom stall in my ankle-length Ugandan skirt, I was now escaping the overwhelming hustle and bustle of what felt like rude and inconsiderate people and the pathetically expensive shops of Lacoste, Chanel, and Burberry – the icons of this consumerist society where I had “belonged” just three weeks previous.

My time in Uganda, although short, opened my eyes to global inequality and true poverty, complicated by the wonderful people I met trapped in this cycle (Figure 2.10).

Figure 2.10 Children walking in Mukono
Shortly after leaving my village that I called home for a short two weeks, I wrote the following in my journal:

That’s the hard thing about leaving here; you come here and build bonds and friendships with these people. You learn their culture. I built homes with them and gave them as much as I could, but you also learn that it’s not nearly enough. It’s not just that I know how badly Africans still need help; I know how badly my friends need help.

I may have returned home, but I could not return to the ignorance and bliss I had known before my travels. I had established personal associations with the suffering of poverty. Uganda redefined who I was, what I knew (or did not know), my priorities, my outlook, and my place as a global citizen rather than just an American citizen. I no longer viewed our society or the world in the same way, and I felt that no one else around me could understand this new perspective. I grew upset when my loved ones would ask how the safari was; to me that was a superficial question after everything else I had witnessed that deserved priority. I viewed money differently and once cried for an hour after being talked into buying a seventy dollar purse. But I had also established a new sense of perspective and happiness, remembering the spirit of the people I had met along the way.

That summer, through participating in a small, community service project, I was intimately introduced to the social injustice that exists across our planet, and I realized that I could not and would not go back to living contently so long as injustice persists.

Kenya, 2007: Returning to East Africa

Not being able to stay away from East Africa, the following summer, at the age of nineteen, I partook in an eight-week teaching internship in Kenya through the NGO Global Routes. Structured as somewhat of a “pre-Peace Corps” program, Global Routes places college interns in rural communities and partners them with a school district;
interns teach classes and carry out community service projects of their own creation (“Global Routes,” 2009). My trip to Kenya in the summer of 2007 was not only longer than my trip to Uganda, but it was also more immersive, independent, and applied.

On the night I arrived in Kenya I wrote about immediately feeling “exactly where I [was] supposed to be.” In just one year’s time I had gone from a naïve, nervous, sheltered American hiding in an airport bathroom to a confident, comfortable, cultured, individual, returning to East Africa to see, learn, and do more. Already having experienced much of the “culture shock” that accompanies such travel while I was in Uganda, this trip allowed me to directly immerse myself into the culture and further explore small-scale community service projects with much more independence.

That summer I lived with a host family in the village of Eshiakula in Western Province, Kenya; two other interns lived in surrounding villages and we all worked at St. Maurice Mwira Secondary School (a high school). Our primary purpose was to teach at the school, but we were also encouraged to carry out community service projects of our own design. Whether it was in the classroom or working on various projects, every day in Kenya I learned an enormous amount from the work I was doing. In the classroom, I learned about the quality of the educational system, where value and pride were quite high, but future potential was doubtful and teachers’ commitment was flailing. I taught two ninth grade biology classes and one tenth grade English class (in Kenya, all courses in secondary school are taught in English). My time in the classroom was marked by emotions that alternated between utter frustration and sheer hilarity. Frustration accompanied most types of performance evaluation: exams, homework assignments, classroom activities. In an area where the education system is modeled after the old-
fashioned British style of lecture, repetition, and discipline, creativity and imagination were nonexistent. Concepts such as creative writing, interactive group work, or sitting in a circle to hold a discussion were foreign to these students. At the beginning of the summer, my students could not think up one fun fact about themselves; they would simply repeat what the person in front of them had said. But, believe me, Kenyans are neither boring nor quiet people. Laughter filled every other moment of my summer as a “mwalimu” (teacher), as my “odd” culture and mannerisms mingled with theirs (Figure 2.11).

Outside of the classroom, my two co-interns and I designed and implemented several projects with monies raised prior to the internship. With just two months to do such projects, they had to be small in size and planned and carried out with speed. Typically, the three of us would brainstorm ideas for various projects, seek permission from the proper authority, and then carry out the implementation. Gaining approval to do just about anything was extremely easy; there was very little formal red tape. However, the process of getting work done in this particular context – where time is not the greatest priority and language is often a barrier – proved to, once again, be both frustrating and humorous.
The first project we implemented was the painting of a large mural on the side of one of the school buildings. Following a Peace Corps manual, we painted a 6 foot by 7 foot mural of the world map (Figure 2.12) to beautify the school, provide a creative outdoor educational tool, and teach our students about the world outside of their community. The need for such a map was solidified one day when a teacher pointed to the large white continent on the bottom of the globe and asked “What’s that?” Our second major project was the establishment of a small library on the school grounds, for which we were given a small room. Along with two contractors, we designed, furnished, and stocked this small “reading room.” This was by far our most multifaceted project, as we hired two workers, purchased books and supplies from various locations, as well as did much of the labor ourselves. Additionally, we hosted a cross-cultural day where students could learn and explore the differences between our two cultures (Figure 2.13). We also conducted an HIV/AIDS educational workshop with each class (about eight in total), through which we were utterly shocked by the sheer ignorance about a disease that ravages the community (Figure 2.14). In a Christian school where inter-sex relations are completely not tolerated, these workshops allowed the students to open up and ask real
questions that the full-time faculty would not otherwise have answered. We were later reprimanded for our workshops not being abstinence-only, but I was pleased that we dispelled many falsities (i.e. drinking a liter of alcohol a day will not cure HIV and running to the river after intercourse will not prevent infection). Finally, I also stocked a small boarding school of special needs students in a neighboring village with mosquito nets to help reduce the incidence of malaria.

My experience in Kenya was not simply defined by my positions as teacher, painter, worker, and educator; I was also a daughter and a sister. At the end of each work day, I got to go home to my “shamba” (farm) and to my wonderful host family. In the summer of 2007, I gained a new father (baba), Martin, a new mother (mama), Rose, brothers, Derick (10 years) and Shadrack (7 years), and sister, Sandra (3 years) (Figures 2.15 and 2.16). Whether it was talking over tea with my baba, cooking with my mama, or playing with the kids, my family taught me about themselves, their community, and their lifestyle, and they welcomed me with open arms. This immersion into a family in which I was treated as a member was something I had not experienced in Uganda, and it was here that I learned the most about the everyday experiences in a
developing community, as I got to live through them myself. The area where I was living was not quite as impoverished as where I stayed in Uganda, but it was still a “traditional” community, based upon subsistence-farming and lacking in electricity and running water. Over the summer I took my baths out of a bucket, used a latrine, went to bed by the light of a kerosene lamp, and awoke each morning to a rooster’s crow.

My summer came to a sad and abrupt end when it was finally time to go home. Although I was excited to return to my real family, I felt that I was leaving behind my new family that I had become a part of. I was definitely leaving new relationships, understandings, and love with my baba, mama, and siblings, but I was conflicted as to what I was leaving the community. I had spent a summer learning how much my community needed, and was faced with the realization that what I had done came nowhere close to filling that need. Just as I had felt leaving Uganda, I went home feeling like I hadn’t done enough. I may have left some paint on a wall and some new books in a modest library, but what had I really done, if anything? Our projects that summer were small, they never really got the community involved, and they weren’t really “sustainable.” What, if any, change had I really created?
CHAPTER 3: REEVALUATING INDIVIDUAL ACTIVISM

My short excursions to both Uganda and Kenya, discussed in Chapter 2, provided me with hands-on volunteer experiences in impoverished villages in East Africa. Both trips were extremely eye-opening and life-changing – redefining me as an individual and making me question my place in and relationship to the world. I began to question how my actions – as a white, Western, consumerist – impact those living in poverty. How in an era of globalization, a process which connects us all, is there still so much disconnection? As I looked back on my well-intentioned work in Sub-Saharan Africa, as I engaged in coursework and conversations about such thoughts, I began wondering how one person can make a real change in such a large, complex world. In pursuit of answers to such challenging questions, I returned to my home in Eshiakula, Kenya over the 2010 New Year’s holiday.

This chapter presents my findings from my second trip to Kenya when I returned with the mission to discover what, if anything, I had done there. This represents a very important longitudinal component of my thesis research, as I was able to return to the same community two and a half years later. I visited Kenya over the course of two weeks at the end of December 2009 and the beginning of January 2010. There, through observations and interviews, I was able to reevaluate the community projects I had implemented, re-visit past relationships with individuals, and try to understand the connections between the local and the global.

Although often critical of any true impact my time in Kenya may have left (on others besides myself), my follow-up several years later was surprisingly inspirational, demonstrating my community’s dedication to continuing the projects begun by their three
“muzungu” interns. What follows are my thoughts that came to me as I revisited the work in which I had invested myself two and a half years ago. As I have attempted to flesh out what I may have accomplished, I have begun to think about individual activism in new ways. In the first section, I will take a further look into each of the service projects I had been a part of implementing in the village in the summer of 2007. Next I will share a series of interviews I held within my host community to better understand the relationships between the local and the global. And finally, I will conclude this chapter with some remarks on how individual activism does in fact have a role in today’s globalized world.

**Past Service Projects**

*The World Map Mural*

Rounding the bend in the dirt road leading up to the school grounds, the painted world map that the three of us had tirelessly worked on for weeks came into view. Drawing closer to the mural, signs of two and a half years of rain and sun became obvious. The colors were faded to new shades of pinks and blues, paint was peeling off in long cracks, and labels had been worn away and traced over again in pencil (Figure 3.1). Its poor condition was just what I had expected. Perhaps painting a mural wasn’t the best community service project in which to invest our time, effort, and money. It was, after all, taken from a Peace Corps manual, but if we had actually asked the community if they even wanted us to throw some paint on a wall for them, perhaps they would have

![Figure 3.1 A portion of the world map mural, two and a half years later](image)
said no. Or, even better, as they probably would have said yes, being Kenyans, maybe we
could have worked on the painting together. Everyone could have taken a turn painting a
portion. Thus, everyone who contributed
would have had a stake in its completion, and
in its upkeep (had we thought to leave them
paint and supplies to do so).

However, to much surprise, across the
lawn and over the fence in the primary school
two new murals had been painted. Having
been inspired on some level by our first
painting, the school had hired an artist to paint
two new, outdoor educational murals. On the side of one building were two maps of
Kenya – one topographical and the other political (Figure 3.2). Another building was
decorated with the inner workings of the body’s excretory and circulatory systems
(Figure 3.3). Thus, although the original mural may no longer be the sharpest, it has lead
to the creation of others – both beautifying the campus and adding new, innovative, and
creative educational tools for the students to use.

The Nikala Reading Room

When we left the Nikala Reading Room
(affectionately named by the school staff in honor
of Nina, Katherine, and Lauren, their three interns)
in August of 2007, only a quarter of the book
shelves had been filled. Our plan had been to
gather donated books back at home and ship them over to the library, but shipping costs and customs difficulties had prevented us from sending the books we had gathered – creating a feeling of incompleteness. Once again, however, the school itself had taken the reins and grown with our project. Above the room was a new sign, “Library,” and a schedule was posted on the door, designating the class time in which each class could use the library (Figure 3.4). Inside, the shelves were filled to the brim. Textbooks had been organized and placed in all of the shelves (Figure 3.5), and a newspaper archive had been started (Figure 3.6). Additionally, a young woman was there to show us around, and much to my astonishment, she was introduced to us as the librarian. This woman had been a senior at St. Maurice during my internship, and upon graduating she was hired on as the full-time librarian.

When working on the library in 2007, I had not realized the full extent or possibilities of such a project. My most powerful realization two and a half years later is quite simple: we founded the first library in Mwira (and quite possibly the first library within a large surrounding area). We
had done this particular project for two reasons. The first, once again is rather obvious, there was no library. And second, the library was meant to expand and challenge the minds of our students. Thus, we had envisioned a library filled with Harry Potters and Chronicles of Narnia – things that would open up their minds and encourage their imaginations.

Although filling the library with such books never came to fruition, it has still become something innovative for St. Maurice Mwira Secondary School. In the American school system, where funds allow, often times students are slowly introduced to the library system: how to check out books, use references, etc. Teachers are able to integrate lessons and learning in the library, preparing students for higher-level education and research. Now, Mwira is doing the same.

My host father, Martin, compared our small library to a seed being planted within the community. Sooner or later, the school will realize that the space is too small and insufficient for a library. But not until this realization is made will efforts begin toward establishing a new library, with bigger and better space and facilities. We founded the very first library in Mwira that summer. And although it was small, dark, and limited in many facets, it was a start. Classes are now incorporating time in the library into their schedules, and thus, students are learning about borrowing books, looking up reference material, and using newspapers. A new job was created for a graduating senior, and the seed was planted to grow into a larger and better facility in the future. The entire library system consisting of borrowing books and utilizing the space for studies has been established. In a world where information is power, this home-grown library has empowered a local community to commit to the power of learning.
Teaching and Workshops

Walking the grounds of the rural school where I had worked and taught for two months, I noticed every new plant, every tree, and definitely the new cafeteria and kitchen in the process of being built. But sticking my head through the glass-less windows, peering into the grim, barren classrooms, I thought of what wasn’t there at that moment: all my wonderful students I had worked with everyday. I had no way of evaluating the possible ramifications of my efforts and time teaching there, but I reflected upon the cross-cultural interactions that had occurred in those rustic classrooms.

As I had struggled all of those days to get my students to play games, do group work, and challenge their minds, they had struggled to understand their crazy “mzungu mwalimu” and her crazy teaching style. While I was asking them to be creative and dedicate themselves, they were asking me why I was so old yet not married, why I carried around a water bottle, and what this candy was that I had brought them. We were both forced to think about ourselves, our cultures, and the world. I was only two or three years older than most of my students, but I could feel the distance of insights that lay between us.

The cross-cultural workshops we held were one way my two fellow interns and I facilitated further cross-cultural conversations amongst our global peers. We talked about our different holidays, customs, expectations, etc., and in the process of such conversations, we were all forced to rethink and re-conceptualize “truths” and “the way things are.” Our HIV/AIDS workshops confronted similar cultural differences as three liberal Westerners, feeling that sex had to be talked about in a community with shockingly high rates of HIV and shockingly little knowledge about its prevention, clashed with a conservative school that hid behind the hopes of an abstinence-only
student body. Although I will probably never know what was to become of most of my students from that summer, I hope that we instilled in them a curiosity about another culture, dispelled myths about the West, and challenged them to think about the world outside of their villages.

**Mosquito Nets**

During my return to the village, I also had the opportunity to revisit the special needs school for which I had purchased mosquito nets. Although this was a rather small and simplistic project, it is still interesting to note. While being shown around the Matungu School, the head teacher of the special needs program, Ali, informed me that no children have fallen ill of malaria since my purchasing of their mosquito nets (A. A. Mbwana, personal communication, January 3, 2010). Now, this may very well be an exaggeration stemming from the brimming optimism of Mr. Ali, but there is no doubt that a mosquito net on every bed at least reduced the incidence of malaria as opposed to no nets. And, after walking through the dormitories where the boys sleep in one room and girls in the other, several of the same very large, oversized green mosquito nets purchased two and a half years previously still hung draped from the ceiling. Most of the nets, we were told, were being stored in trunks during the holiday break. But from the sight of the two or three that were still out, one could conclude that the nets had received their fair share of wear and tear, evident from the abundant holes in the netting. However, the fact that 33 nets, although a bit beat up, could last two and a half years truly illustrates the thrift and upkeep possible in this village and the value held for personal belongings (compared to the over-consuming culture of the West). Having not purchased new nets in
over two years, and considering the damage done over the course of that period, illustrates the real need the school had for an outside party to purchase these necessities.

**Building Cross-Cultural Relationships**

Perhaps the greatest “impact” that resulted from my time spent in Kenya was the creation of powerful cross-cultural relationships, established with my host family. In our increasingly interconnected world, the global and the local are becoming ever more integrated, and participating in cross-cultural relationships aids in bringing down misperceptions and stereotypes of other peoples, contributing to a greater understanding of today’s larger, global community. During the summer of 2007, I no doubt learned a great deal about a different culture, having lived there. And my family and community learned a bit about my culture as well, through my representation and discussion of it. Yet, beyond just learning about another culture is the act of appreciating and respecting it. Perhaps this concept is best said in the eloquent words of my baba Martin:

This side of the world is one big challenge of life, we have no electricity, no running water, nights are dark and mosquitoes buzz around, main mode of travel are bicycles, no computers, no leisure things, practically no nothing; we duly live on a [cohesive] social bonding, kept warm by each other’s closeness and acceptance. In Lauren we all did find this warmth so edifying and would you believe that for that little while we forgot our problems? It’s because she was able to appreciate this kind of life and reveal to us that sometimes that glamour of the world we may inwardly search after if in the course of time it comes, it may lack that which is really essential, human warmth, the dignity of life and the oneness of humanity no matter which point of globe we occupy. (M. Nafukho, personal communication, August 3, 2007)

Although mosquito nets will rip and paint will fade, building intimate, personal relationships fosters higher understanding both within and across people. One of the most impactful things I may have done that summer was just going. Truly immersing myself
and living with my family and community demonstrated an appreciation for their culture and lifestyle.

**Relationships Between the Global and the Local**

In order to better understand how the individuals in my community view their relationship, as Kenyans, to the rest of the world, I interviewed my host father Martin. Over the course of the last two and a half years, I have grown to greatly value Martin’s insights and knowledge and think he has much to contribute to my research and to my understanding of the global processes discussed in this paper. Over the course of many hours, Martin and I talked about his understandings of the processes of globalization and development – insightful in and of themselves, these discussions also help us to understand how an individual, an actor on the micro level, understands the global and their own connection to it.

In both of the villages that I visited in Uganda and Kenya I became aware of a pure sense of satisfaction and happiness in spite of deprivation of many basic needs as well as most material possessions. Through my discussions with Martin, I tried to discern how individuals living in relative poverty understand the world and the processes that operate within it. Martin proved to be extremely knowledgeable about the interactions between Kenya and the world – carrying on discussions about loan repayment, financial ministers, Kenyan leadership, etc. However, throughout it all, I noticed a steadfast optimism in Martin’s thoughts, ideas, and interpretations about Kenya’s role in the international system. Noting the culture, heritage, wildlife, and large population of young people with good education, Martin suggested that Kenya has a great role to play in the global system. He believes his country has a unique set of skills, especially the ability to
re-engineer used products, turning “waste” into something useful. Such expertise has arisen from Kenya having to repair the cell phones and automobiles that they receive second-hand, after the West has deemed them to be waste. Martin believes that the resilience that Kenyans have developed from living in the midst of hardship, coupled with a vibrant informal sector and strong vocational skills will prepare them for the global economy. “Kenya can contribute positively to the global village just like any other country elsewhere.” (M. Nafukho, personal communication, January 2, 2010)

No matter how much truth lies in these statements, I could not help but be doubtful as to the degree to which the dominant global players will allow Kenya to compete in the same game. Martin appears to be a satisfied and happy man, living a good life, but I know the quality of life that is possible and the international institutions and individuals that continue to instate policy and recommendations that prevent individuals like Martin from achieving this quality of life. Whether or not the consumerist lifestyle in the West or the simple lifestyle in these East African cultures can provide “true happiness,” the real problem is that there is no choice. Individuals in power, making self-interested choices, create policy that prohibits how far these communities can develop, at least economically.

Often chatting over a cup of chai tea in the afternoon breeze, the discussion of cell phones repetitively arose in the midst of rooster crows, cows’ cries, and the playing of neighborhood children. A popular technology, cell phones have taken-off in Kenya, connecting individuals across towns, across the country, and across the world through this new communication device. Although it remains unclear to me where rural Kenyans charge their phones, placing calls, texting, and utilizing banking services through these
services have become quite popular. Such services have the potential to be particularly useful in a country where most of the population lives in distantly spaced rural areas (M. Nafukho, personal communication, January 2, 2010). Yet, this plethora of cell phones seems to clash with the lack of toilets, electricity, and running water (Figure 3.7). There appears to be a disconnect between priorities, as certain basic needs are not yet met, but certain technological products are abundant. Nearly every adult has a cell phone, especially men, and many families have battery-operated televisions. This strange ownership of “wants” over “needs” makes me think back to modernization theory and Rostow’s stages of economic growth (see page 20); how would proponents of these theories account for traditional societies obtaining cell phones before toilets? More research is needed on this topic in order to understand the reasons behind and possible ramifications of these choices.

Additionally, upon my return visit to Kenya, the visible encroachment of power lines upon the rural villages served as an appropriate metaphor to the advancing development and modernization of the region. Yet, I could only imagine, once my host village acquires electricity, who will supply them with computers, iPods, and all other electronic-dependent products? Certainly a country that has had very little access to

Figure 3.7 An ad in Nairobi for the cell phone provider Zain, featuring two Masai tribesmen. The motto in the bottom right corner says “A Wonderful World”.

electricity will not have the industries in place to supply the new demand that will emerge. If industries do exist, or are quickly formed, they surely will not be as efficient or high-quality, and thus not as competitive as outside suppliers.

Martin certainly recognizes, in the midst of his optimism, the need for a level playing field in today’s globalized world, as well as the reality that Kenya is not yet situated on such a level ground. Development doesn’t happen overnight, he told me. Kenya has only been an independent nation since 1963, while other economies have been in the process of development for over a thousand years. Martin, as he often does, gave an analogy: if a child is two years old, one cannot expect it to act 50. One day, it shall be 50 years old, once it has grown. The same can be applied to the global economy in which the Western countries are the 50 year olds and Kenya is still just an infant. (M. Nafukho, personal communication, January 2, 2010)

Throughout my interviews, I kept coming back to one of my fundamental research questions: will globalization affect the way developing countries progress (as compared to the path taken by today’s developed countries)? When presenting such inquiries to Martin, he predicted that economic growth and development today will occur exponentially, as opposed to linearly. Developing countries will be able to skip stages of development thanks to the processes and resources of globalization. In the past, as Martin described, countries such as the US and Britain developed in fairly isolated spheres, with technologies and developments largely remaining within their own realms of production and society. However, today, technologies and development can spread across borders, and once they spread to developing countries, growth and development can be experienced at a more rapid pace. However, Martin also acknowledges the hegemonic
order that continues to play a role in progress. The rich and modern countries of today were able to pave their own way in development, making their own decisions as to the processes they would utilize and the technologies they would create. However, today, these developed countries now often dictate to their less well-off counterparts what decisions they should utilize, what technologies they should create (i.e. prohibiting nuclear programs). (M. Nafukho, personal communication, January 2, 2010)

Partaking in such discussions with Martin allowed me to begin to analyze how one individual sees and understands the global system and his place within it. The eloquent and detailed conversations we had were greatly optimistic about the potential of Kenya to compete and flourish in the international arena – politically, economically, and culturally. However, Kenya’s growth rates have decreased since the 1980s (see page 29) and the principle exports include coffee, tea, and horticulture (all primary exports).

Although far from being an ignorant consumer of global knowledge, Martin may remain fairly aloof from the realities of the limitations of developing countries in today’s global system. Although history may have set Kenya back on the development trajectory, Martin has confidence that with independence the country can begin catching up, utilizing the resources that globalization can provide to do so.

During my visit I was also able to interview two individuals working within the sphere of NGOs, giving me a glimpse into the operations and interpretations of this grassroots form of development in Kenya. While in the capital city of Nairobi, I was able to speak briefly with a woman who works for Oxfam International. Over a quick cup of coffee, she told me that in Kenya, individuals who work for NGOs are held in very high regard; those who work for an NGO, especially an international one, are treated very well
at the workplace. Additionally, she explained that working through an NGO is much more productive than doing so through the public or private sector. (Personal communication, January 4, 2010)

My second, and significantly longer, interview was with Justin Mutobera, one of the cofounders of the community-based NGO Support Against AIDS, Poverty Eradication, and Health (SAIPEH). Highly effective in holistically combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Western Kenya, Justin said that NGOs have the ability to actually implement the policy their government creates (i.e. reduce the rates of HIV). However, unlike the experience of the Oxfam worker, Justin explained the difficulties of operating within a country where government funding is slow and thus dependence upon international funding is high (although the same most likely applies to Oxfam, the difficulties of obtaining funding for a community-based NGO is much more profound). The targeted communities of SAIPEH are extremely poor, and thus cannot substantially contribute (at least financially) to the operations of the NGO. Additionally, international donors do not usually give funds to support administrative costs, making it difficult to pay and keep employees. Yet Justin still believes that NGOs bring much good to the rural areas of Kenya, and without them, poverty rates would be much higher. To Justin Mutobera, NGOs advocate for the people and create governmental change on their behalf. (J. Mutobera, personal communication, January 3, 2010)

These two NGO workers operate within very different contexts – one in a metropolitan city within a well-funded and world renowned NGO, the other in a rural area within a very small community-based NGO. Despite their different experiences, both workers seemed to emphasize the ability of NGOs to bring tangible change and
services to Kenyans in need of assistance, acting as a bridge between the government and the people.

**Reevaluating the Impact of Individual Activism**

Through my ethnographic journey of returning to Kenya to reevaluate my impact in the community, I also reconsidered the net effects of my time spent in Uganda. Looking back at my trip with Habitat for Humanity, I realized that although we did in fact build two houses that are bound to last for many years to come, perhaps the passion and education that were instilled in 19 volunteers will far outlast those homes. I did not keep in contact with all 18 of my fellow volunteers, but I do know that at least one went on to become a Peace Corps volunteer in Malawi and another has been inspired to lead Global Village trips of his own, already having led trips to Fiji and Zambia and planning a third to Kenya. I myself have also continued to explore the outlets of global citizenship. When I came to college I began to incorporate my experiences and lessons learned in Africa into my coursework, pursuing a personalized major around the issues of global development and social justice. Having been exposed to global injustice for the first time in Uganda, I continued to search for understanding about the causes, meanings, and implications of absolute poverty. Additionally, unprompted on my own accord, I also began acting as an impromptu consultant for volunteer trips to Africa. As many friends and acquaintances began calling, emailing, or Facebooking me, I got to encourage and help others to participate in similar cross-cultural volunteer trips. I also began speaking in classes about my experiences and pursuing research projects such as this one, to spread my understandings of the world and to further my own knowledge.

Similar to what I found in Kenya, reflecting back on the aftermath of my trip to Uganda I realized that much of the valuable work done was in fostering a desire to learn
and understand more about our cross-cultural relations. Those living in poverty without a
doubt need material provisions, such as affordable housing, educational materials, and
protective mosquito nets, however, by enriching our education and seeking to understand
the larger system that created deprivation in the first place, we have a greater potential to
affect large-scale change. The small community service projects I was a part of no doubt
brought good to the beneficiaries and planted small seeds that will hopefully grow into
larger endeavors for their communities. However, the cross-cultural understanding that
was established, and the empathy that came from such grounded experience will continue
reverberating and making ripple effects.
CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

Globalization is the defining and predominant force of today’s world, influencing economic, political, cultural, and ecological processes in highly complex and ambiguous ways. Without a doubt, there are both pros and cons to this pervasive phenomenon, but so long as the cons still exist then our research and work is not done. Globalization, specifically the spread of neoliberal ideals, has reinstated a new class-based system and has made poverty a structural side-effect of the market system. Profits have been made from the doctrine of free trade, but they have been accumulated among a very small group of elites while nearly half (according to Stiglitz) of the world’s population still lives in poverty (less than $2 a day). The contradictions of globalization are stark: in a vastly integrated world where so much technology and knowledge exist there is still widespread poverty.

Developing countries today seem to be both dependent upon and exploited by the processes of globalization. Although the current global system appears to largely prohibit such countries from greatly profiting, joining the global economy may be the best and only way toward development and economic growth in today’s globalized world. Now that our world has become more interconnected and a wealth of knowledge and technology exists, developing nations do not have a vested interest in shutting their borders to develop in an isolated manner (especially since the failure of ISI proved this is not a beneficial option; see page 22). Furthermore, today’s developing countries appear to have the potential to leapfrog through “stages” of development. No longer are nation-states or empires alone when wandering the path toward modernity, the knowledge and tools already exist to aid a developing country. Yet, our world remains polarized between
core and peripheral countries, largely due to the decisions made by the powerful actors of the West acting in their own best interest.

Much of the discourse of globalization, specifically of neoliberalism, removes the human factor from the frame of consciousness. Neoliberalism promotes a doctrine in which we reduce the concept of a society, and instead reinforce principles of individuality. We create a system in which every individual is responsible for competing in a market-based economy and thus a market-based society to provide for oneself and to secure oneself socially. Neoliberalism removes the safety net of a socially just philosophy and has created a dog-eat-dog world. Such a doctrine has effectively restructured the priorities and prerogatives of human existence; today the goal is to advance oneself, without regard to the rest of society.

Such a doctrine and its emphases on market competition, profit motives, and capital flow have removed the human condition from the forefront of policy consideration. The human has effectively become a “unit” in the economy, production, competition, and statistics. However, cultural ties and relationships effectively reincorporate people into the more complex system of economics and politics. Looking at individuals living in their cultural contexts restructures how we understand the goal of policy, and thus illuminates the symbolic and actual violence of the neoliberal vision. By engaging communities and individuals within their own lived experiences we reinstate the human factor into these doctrines; we re-weave humanity back into the fabric of our ideology.

Although globalization has largely acted as a force to spread neoliberalism and thus dismantle the emphasis on social justice and economic equality, the processes of
globalization simultaneously present the opportunity to embrace and understand cross-cultural relationships today more than ever before. Such opportunities need to be embraced and utilized by the elites creating policy in order to truly understand the array of individuals affected in complex ways by the decisions they make. Although the global economic and political elites may not directly take money from the hands of the poor, they are not innocent from shaping the global context in which those living in poverty remain so.

Empathy is a powerful tool for crossing our cultural and economic barriers. Some people live in complete indifference to the lives of other individuals, while others may believe they understand what poverty means and may even feel great compassion for the poor. However, until one is immersed in lived, real-world experiences they cannot fully grasp the experience of an unknown culture. Globalization has opened up avenues for well-intentioned individuals to pursue travel and volunteer opportunities abroad to do just that. Globalization has allowed for easier and more frequent overseas travel, and communication technologies have brought social activism to our computer screens and to our fingertips. Whether through internet social networks or cross-cultural programs, globalization has shrunk our world and made it easier to interact with various cultures, including interaction in the form of volunteerism in impoverished communities around the world. Such globalizing processes have allowed the women and men of my generation to be more active global citizens than our predecessors.

By looking back and reflecting upon my experiences within such international volunteerism, I have come to an understanding that our actions as humans can and do

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14 In this thesis I have generally focused on the economic disparity that exists between the West and “the rest,” but this is not to deter from the need to address poverty within Western nations as well.
influence one another, in perhaps subtle but complex and meaningful ways. At the same time, these actions appear to be channeled through relationships of power that still exist in a world which remains largely defined by a system of neocolonialism. While every individual in this highly complex, globalized system has the power to act and make choices, the respective influence behind our power is unevenly distributed. As described throughout Chapter 1, the global political and economic elites, predominantly from the West, are able to greatly impact others through the policies they implement. However, these individuals operating at very high-level decision making positions do not see or understand how their policies affect lived experiences of poverty. The people that I have met living in such poverty do not have nearly the same degree of power or influence. Isolated by the lack of transportation, educational opportunities, and economic resources, these individuals do not have as much ability to have their voices heard. Yet, with nearly half of the world living on less than two dollars a day (Stiglitz, 2003), it seems imperative to bridge the gap between the few elites with power and the many poor with very little power.

My ethnographic endeavors have also revealed the power that I carry as a white Westerner, and the subtle impacts my actions as an activist can have within a community. Through my travels, I have acted as an intermediate between my Western culture and that of my host communities in East Africa. My relative economic power has allowed for my visits, and the reputation I carry from my global context has given me respect for my opinion and community service initiatives. It is the global context that stipulates my relative power, nothing intrinsic. However, my experiences have allowed me to create cross-cultural relationships, build understanding, and share the culmination of such
actions with my peers. Perhaps through such actions I have also amplified the voice and experiences of my family and friends in Kenya and Uganda. Small actions and small voices lead to greater outcomes when pooled together.

Through conducting research, partaking in interviews, and writing to an audience, I have participated in oppositional action to the larger forces that act within the global system. NGOs have largely contributed to such oppositional politics as well, providing advocacy and services where the state no longer does. David Kellner argues that globalization operates both from above and from below; at the same time as it is imposed from the top it can also be challenged and transformed from the bottom (2002). Thus, my voice and writing through this thesis contribute to this oppositional movement shaping global relations from below.

This exploratory thesis does not end with universal conclusions or new theories, but rather, it acts as a voice of power to contribute to the body of work on understanding poverty within the current global context. I have tried to reinsert humanity into the consideration at the forefront of development discourse, and in doing so, have attempted to ask the larger questions of each of us. How are our actions implicated in affecting others through the complexity of the globalized system? And, how can the “rules of the game” be re-written to more equitably distribute the benefits of free trade? Can we get the political and economic elites of the West to agree to such reforms? Additionally, we must continue to consider what model of development can account for the impact of globalization as well as allow for fluidity so as to be applied to various contexts. Globalization has the potential to bring about good, so how can this potential be harnessed in order to reduce poverty?
Today, deprivation continues to persist alongside overabundance. Although globalization may bring us closer together, a system of neocolonialism keeps us largely apart. By bridging the gap between the macro and micro processes, we can begin to break down the vast disparities that continue in today’s world, and through understanding such relationships we can better understand the global system and our place within it.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Education:

09/2006 – 05/2010    Penn State University    University Park, PA
B PH Bachelor of Philosophy Program and B S International Studies
Minors: Civic and Community Engagement and Spanish
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Thesis Title: The Changing Face of Development: Bridging the Macro
and Micro Processes of Globalization and Ethnography
Thesis Supervisor: C. Michael Elavsky

Work Experience:

09/2009 – 02/2010    Penn State Dance Marathon    University Park, PA
Donor Relations Database Captain
• Maintained a database of over 7,000 donors for a multi-million dollar
  student-run pediatric cancer philanthropy
• Established and maintained professional contacts at small businesses
  for solicitation and benefitting purposes
• Served as a fundraising liaison to various student organizations

06/2008 – 08/2008    The Community Knowledge Project      Irvine, CA
Research Intern at the University of California, Irvine
• Researched community capacity and empowerment and their relation
  to community development
• Worked alongside a Spanish-speaking community in their efforts to
  create sustainable community change
• Produced a promotional and educational video:
  http://www.communityknowledgeproject.org/page2/page2.html

10/2007 – 05/2008    Centre Volunteers in Medicine    State College, PA
Volunteer
• Medical and dental record filing
• Special events development
• Computer work with mail merging and database entry
• Gained knowledge of medical assistance programs, social work, and
  operations of a non-profit business

Teaching Intern
• Taught 9th grade biology and 10th grade English
• Designed and implemented community service projects:
- Painted a mural of the world map as an educational tool
- Designed, furnished, and stocked a library to encourage reading
- Worked with special needs children at a primary school
- Designed and conducted an HIV awareness workshop for students
- Equipped a boarding school with mosquito nets to reduce the incidence of Malaria

**06/2004 – 06/2008  Saint Vincent Health System  Erie, PA**

**Administrative Assistant**
- Designed a webpage for the Erie Regional Medical Reserve Corps
- Worked with human resources on fundraising events
- Aided in the organization and preparation of emergency preparedness courses

**Grants Received:**
- IES Abroad Leadership and Community Involvement Scholarship
- Schreyer Ambassador Travel Grant, Spring 2009
- Schreyer Summer Internship / Research Grant, Summer 2008

**Awards:**
- Dean’s List each semester
- The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi
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**Activities:**
- Students and Physicians Across Nations
- Global AIDS Initiative
- Atlas THON
- THON Morale committee member
- Habitat for Humanity, Global Village in Uganda
- Delegate at the 2010 Naval Academy Leadership Conference – *Leadership Under Stress: Transforming Crises into Opportunities*

**International Education:**
- Madrid, Spain – Spring 2009

**Foreign Language:**
- Basic Spanish