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Peace Corps Volunteers and the Boundaries of Bottom-up Development:

Mongolia, a Case Study

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

in Education

by

Hugh Erik Schuckman

2012

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Peace Corps Volunteers and the Boundaries of Bottom-up Development:

Mongolia, a Case Study

by

Hugh Erik Schuckman

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2012

Professor Sol Cohen, Chair

From President Kennedy's first announcement of a non-military US volunteer corps in 1961, the Peace Corps has been one of the preeminent government grassroots volunteer development agency. This study explores the history of the ambiguities inherent in this contention, pressure primarily stemming from the organization's role as both a governmental diplomatic and a popular grassroots development agency. The genealogy of conflict stems from three ill-defined and considered elements: the grassroots volunteer, development, and the discourses of grassroots programming. In bracketing these terms, this study illustrates the ways organizational epistemology is fractured among political actors, staff, and volunteers. Though the Peace Corps organizational rhetoric has shifted these categories over the years, the organization's political face has remained dominant in organizational attitudes and expressions. This dissertation underscores the disproportionate weight of this side of the discourse, which is simultaneously most at odds with the idea of the horizontal, grassroots rhetoric of the organization. In demonstrating the paradox of the Peace Corps' simultaneous rhetorical role as a

grassroots development organization and US political theater, I combed archival resources such as pamphlets, reports, internal memos, and posters produced by the organization to better understand the particular messages contained in these documents. While the images and narratives concerning the grassroots volunteer, development, and programming are varied, the overwhelming message is one of unexamined US benevolence. For comparison with volunteers with actual experience with these concepts, I conducted ethnographic interviews of volunteers and staff in one Peace Corps country, Outer Mongolia. In order to contextualize the Peace Corps' struggle with other similar governmental agencies, I also interviewed volunteers of the Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers working in similar projects in Mongolia. Through an ethnographic semi-structured interview model of volunteers working in education, health, community economic development, and youth development sectors, I assessed volunteers' 1.) motivations and awareness of development, 2.) understandings of "empowerment" and "participation" among current development constituents, 3.) perceptions of host-country partners culture and history and 4.) visions for re-constituting the Peace Corps.

Findings suggest that while some of the volunteers reiterated the Peace Corps' rhetorical perspectives of volunteer roles, development, and programming, many had either not considered these important aspects of their development experience or expressed views starkly opposite to that of the organization. The resulting investigation reveals not a splintered, failed program, but one internally odds with stated participatory, democratic ideals. Far from condemning this notable organization, this dissertation argues for greater organizational imagination through self-reflection among volunteers and staff about the horizon of possibilities of grassroots cooperation untethered from political rhetoric.

The dissertation of Hugh Erik Schuckman is approved.

John Hawkins

Nancy Levine

Carlos Torres

Sol Cohen, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2012

This dissertation is dedicated to

Gale Schuckman

Born on autumn nights,
the dewdrops remain dewdrops,
but the wide meadows
on the mountainside all shine,
washed by tears of passing geese.

--*Mibu no Tadamine*

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Preface

“Truth is mighty and will prevail. There is nothing the matter with this, except that it ain't so.”

Mark Twain, *Notebook*, 1898

History is a slippery eel. The history of the US Peace Corps, the US governments' first non-military volunteer development organization, is exceptionally elusive. With over 190,000 volunteers in 139 countries since the organizations creation in 1961, no other US governmental body comes close to sending Americans to the far reaches of the globe, each partaking in indelible, individual experiences. Unlike hierarchical, project-based governmental development, the Peace Corps takes pride in placing volunteers in both urban and rural areas for two-year volunteer posts as educators and facilitators in fields such as English education, nursing, environmental protection, and youth development. Among the US government's forays into development, the Peace Corps represents the US government's preeminent “grassroots development” agency, a term loosely indicating an egalitarian, cooperative development effort between volunteers and host community members. Though the organization has employed this rhetoric from the beginning, these terms implications have not necessarily translated into a self-reflective manifestation of these ideals. This dissertation disentangles the history of Peace Corps organization development narratives, which often ring of politically expedient rhetoric, from realities lived by volunteers on the ground. Interviews from one Peace Corps country, Outer Mongolia, elucidate the complexity of the relationships of grassroots development and the Peace Corps organization's rhetoric of these concepts.

Much of this dissertation relies on the collective recollections of volunteers' experiences. But like the organization's history, comprising a myriad of perspectives, memory itself is a thorny issue, as I quickly found. When I began interviewing returned Peace Corps volunteers in the United States, many volunteers could remember only fragments of their experiences. At a 2011 Peace Corps Fiftieth Anniversary celebration held at the University of California, Los Angeles, for instance, few former volunteers could recall issues important to this study such as language training methods and specific work schedules with their counterparts. While generally exuberant to recount scintillating stories of their cultural experiences, volunteers reacted to my questions about their thoughts of "grassroots development" with perplexed faces. Fewer still could remember specific details of their Peace Corps job training at the time of their service.

In truth, my own recollection of serving as a volunteer lies somewhere between memory and a later re-interpretation. As a Peace Corps Volunteer Teacher Trainer, I worked in a Mongolian Government Education center for two years in the southwestern province of Gobi-Altai. As an education volunteer, I was expected to participate in a scheme of "grassroots development" by building the capacity of my Mongolian counterparts. Upon my return from Outer Mongolia, however, I instantly began to narrate my excitement for service, the thrill of living in another culture for two years, and falling in love with Mongolia and her people. On the trail between the towns of "Blue Horse" and "Gelding," I would say, I crossed inexorably from a fascination to visceral respect of Mongolians. On this particular office trip, I accompanied my Mongolian colleagues to provide educational support to smaller villages in the province. "Blue Horse," much as the romantic name suggests, had miniature sand dunes quite literally drifting through the central of town, a collection of brightly painted concrete buildings. After an

exhilarating day of meeting with teachers and teaching demo lessons, we departed for the town of “Gelding” that evening, weaving through the itinerant dunes.

Soon our sturdy Russian jeep climbed in elevation, entering a more mountainous terrain and a building snowstorm. My Mongolian colleagues joked and told stories as puffs of snowflakes billowed around us in great plumes in the night air. Abruptly, the mood changed. Rounding a sharp curve in the path, the jeep suddenly careened off the side of an embankment. I remember panicked hands struggling to hold on to the seats as we slid down a steep rock strewn hillside. After the initial commotion, a deep silence enveloped the jeep. We patiently waited through the night until the storm passed.

The morning sun revealed the nearby snow dusted trail with a patina of golden splendor. As we cut across a field and out of the mountains, I distinctly recall my colleagues striking up a deep, gorgeous Mongolian folk song. Like a something out of a dream, a group of wild horses galloped alongside our vehicle as we entered the horizon of the endless Gobi steppe. From innumerable iterations of this indelible experience, I have explained the courage, the tenacity, and the resourcefulness that I have come to know in the Mongolian people to my friends, family, and students.

My story is far from unique. Among those former volunteers I interviewed in the United States, all seemed to have a catalogue of anecdotes explaining their two years of immersion in another place and time. Some of these accounts point towards the challenges of living in diverse cultural contexts, most often much less comfortable than those in the affluent neighborhoods of the United States. Others highlight the unlikely comradery experienced between themselves and their fellow volunteers. Few of these interviewees, however, could articulate a clear expression

of the logic behind the Peace Corps' specific approaches to international development beyond the abstract confines of organizational-speak: "grassroots," "participation," and "cultural sharing."

Granted, memory is not a passive experience. Though I believe the stories of returned volunteers, I recognized a familiar element of flourish alongside the act of remembering. Like my own recollections, returned Peace Corps volunteers I interviewed certainly blurred recollection and the need to narrate a scintillating story. While I certainly have no qualms about harmless autobiographical embellishment, the prevalence of highly practiced narratives in my interviews of returned volunteers led me to re-think my strategy for gathering volunteer perspectives on the Peace Corps. I found myself yearning for a more direct evaluation of the Peace Corps volunteer development program, one less adulterated by the golden hues of distance, romanticism, and anecdote. Consequently, I made plans to return to Mongolia and interview volunteers during their service.

While revamping my strategy for interviews, I became a connoisseur of the wide corpus of extant Peace Corps literature. The organization's own literature paints a glowing self-image of world friendship and successful "Third World" development. The more I investigated the non-organizational literature, however, the more I found among the plethora of celebratory histories a trail of protests and accusations of the Peace Corps spanning its 50 year history. These criticisms were surprisingly homogenous. The most pointed set of critiques center on the Peace Corps as an arm of US neo-colonial interests in the developing world. The second group charges that Peace Corps volunteers are for the most part unqualified or culturally ignorant to perform their assigned work requested by the hosting country. The third group portrays the Peace Corps as a lumbering liberal showcase organization, administratively insensitive to volunteer needs and current international development theories.

Though I recognized strains of these critiques from the occasional frustrations in my own experience, these positions told only part of the story. Just as celebratory literature of the Peace Corps rarely admits to failure, the critical perspectives rarely admitted to the successes of the Corps. Many Peace Corps critiques conflated their feelings about the broader American interests in the developing world with their understandings of the ways the Peace Corps organization practices development and diplomacy in the “global south.” Further, few of these celebratory and critical histories placed the Peace Corps within a global grassroots development context. The US is certainly not the only country with a national grassroots development organization. In truth, the Peace Corps is itself one version of a collection of similar agencies including the Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV), the Volunteer Service Organization (VSO), and the United Nations Volunteers (UNV) among many others. Given these alternative visions of grassroots development, I realized that a fair, constructive investigation of the Peace Corps’ understanding of grassroots development must include a comparative approach, both across organizations and across geographic regions. Finally, none of the critiques I could find interviewed large groups of volunteers during their actual service, let alone systematically. Most relied on peppering negative anecdotes of returned volunteers within a broader critique of US development policy. To address these drawbacks, I embarked on a six- field semi-structured qualitative research study of Peace Corps in Outer Mongolia with the central goal of gathering volunteer perspectives on the meaning of “grassroots volunteerism” and “grassroots development.” My desire to include the *context* of the volunteer development experience led me outside of the capital city Ulaanbaatar. I traveled to the four corners of Mongolia in order to interview and observe over 40 of the 166 Peace Corps volunteers and their Mongolian counterparts.

Along with Peace Corps volunteers, staff members, and Mongolians associated with the organization, I included interviews and observations of Japanese volunteers. Even before meeting Peace Corps volunteers and staff in Mongolia, I had appreciated the ways US history and culture affects the ways people think and speak about international aid. In order to understand alternate governmental paradigms and perspectives of grassroots development, I also interviewed fourteen Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers in Japanese. As Japan is currently Mongolia's largest bilateral foreign aid source for loans and grant assistance, I chose to interview Japanese volunteers about their experiences. My ability to conduct interviews in Japanese and read Japanese scholarly articles certainly contributed to this decision. As Japanese volunteers often expressed their experiences and perspectives about service in unique ways, this part of my research provided a revealing comparison for the positive aspects of the Peace Corps approach and some potential aspects for improvement.

Though any journey to a place like Mongolia inevitably elicits a certain amount of romanticism, I have striven to be as fair as possible to my interviewees and the subject of the Peace Corps. I hope that any criticisms I raise throughout this dissertation will elicit conversation about future possibilities for the Peace Corps, a remarkable experiment in international development.

Acknowledgments

I must first thank the US and Japanese volunteers and their counterparts for their willingness to participate, and their candor, and warm hospitality during these interview sessions. Though I found cultural and personal uniqueness at each stop along the way, one striking similarity was everyone's willingness to go to great lengths to help with my project. More than once, I found myself chatting over a bowl of homemade soup, sipping a mug of hot Mongolian milk tea, or sharing a plate of steaming dumplings with volunteers. Listening to the volunteers discuss their lives, their work, and their aspirations was fascinating and inspiring, a fact for which I am grateful.

As much as possible, I have tried to include perspectives of Mongolians I met and spoke with during my trips into the Mongolian countryside. Requiring numerous jeep trips through craggy mountains and windy deserts, this part of my investigation was not often easy, but always enlightening if not exhilarating. During these long rides, a few lasting more than 30 hours, I chatted with Mongolians about their perspectives on politics, hopes for the future, and international relations. Many of these conversations led to surprising insights in better ways to frame questions to Japanese and American volunteers, particularly in terms of contemporary Mongolian history. I hope insights from this book will serve to repay the kindness of these fellow travelers.

Though much of this research stems from fieldwork in Outer Mongolia, historical archives also played a key role in my research. In addition to making use of the plethora of documents held by the UC Library System, I additionally travelled to College Park, Maryland to access the Peace Corps records in the National Archives. Here, I found photographs, news clippings, and a wealth of internal documents relevant to my study. I would like to extend my

warm thanks to these librarians, who generously went above and beyond the call of duty to help me locate relevant articles, interviews, and news clippings.

In addition to the direct support during from volunteers and archivists, this project would not be possible without the generous financial support. I would here like to thank the UCLA Asia Institute for supporting my work with the Foreign Language Area Studies (FLAS) fellowship for Japanese language study and the UCLA Asia Institute's Wagatsuma Fellowship for comparative field research in Outer Mongolia. In addition, the American Center for Mongolian Studies (ACMS) summer intensive language program was indispensable in rekindling my Mongolian language studies. Without this considerable support, this dissertation would be a shadow of the current creation.

My path towards writing this dissertation includes many friends and mentors whom I have relied on for counsel. My trajectory began from an initial focus on world religions and Buddhism. My college advisor at the College of the Holy Cross, Todd Lewis, encouraged me to study abroad in Sri Lanka, an experience that led to a greater consciousness of living conditions beyond the borders of the US, and eventually to a decision to become a Peace Corps volunteer. Along the way to becoming a doctoral student in Comparative and International Education, I spent a total of four additional years studying Buddhism under Robert Thurman at Columbia University and Janet Gyatso at Harvard Divinity School. These years studying Buddhist cultures and philosophical schools expanded my understanding of the array of Buddhist pedagogical innovations, propelling me towards a career in education.

In the next stage of my journey, I was fortunate to meet many other friends and mentors as I pursued international and comparative education at the University of Los Angeles, California. I would here like to express my deep thanks to my UCLA doctoral dissertation committee, Sol

Cohen, John Hawkins, Nancy Levine, and Carlos Torres for their tireless work in reading my manuscripts and making insightful comments and suggestions. In particular, the constant support and insights from my committee chair, Sol Cohen lit the path of my journey, becoming not simply an academic mentor, but a friend through all of the trials academic life brings. For this generosity, I am grateful beyond words.

Finally, the love of my family has made this dissertation worth pursuing and completing. My parents Gale and Hugh have encouraged me throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies with their love, support, and belief in me. In the final days of writing this dissertation, my sister Heather and brother-in-law Dave picked me up off the ground, gave me much needed shelter, and pushed me across the finish line. To witness the love and affection of my family made this dissertation worth pursuing. I can only hope the results in part repay the kindness, generosity, and love so many friends, colleagues, mentors, and family have shown me throughout this undertaking.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Education

UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies PhD Candidate in International and Comparative Education	Los Angeles, CA 2008-2012
Harvard Divinity School Master of Theological Studies	Cambridge, MA 2005-2007
Columbia University Graduate School of Arts and Science Master of Arts in Religious Studies	New York, NY 2001-2003
College of the Holy Cross Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies	Worcester, MA 1995-1999
Peradeniya University ISLE Study Abroad Program	Kandy, Sri Lanka 1997

Academic Fellowships, Awards & Honors

UCLA Wagatsuma Fellowship	April 2011
American Center for Mongolian Studies Summer Fellowship	March 2011
Foreign Language Area Studies Fellowship (Japanese Language)	August 2010
Honors Distinction on UCLA Written Doctoral Qualifying Exam	June 2010
UCLA GSE&IS Faculty Fellowship Award	January 2009

University Teaching Appointments

• Visiting Professor, Korea Development Institute School	Seoul, Korea 2012
• Teaching Assistant, University of California, Los Angeles: -Classics, Education, and Nursing Departments	Los Angeles, CA 2009-2010
• English Professor, California State University, Long Beach	Long Beach, CA 2008

Language Study

Japanese (9 Quarters), Mongolian (2 Years Immersion), Sanskrit (4 Semesters), Classical Tibetan (2 Semesters), Spoken Tibetan (2006 Summer Intensive), Latin (5 Semesters), Chinese (1 Semester), Sinhala (1 Semester), Korean (1 Semester)

Professional Associations and Memberships

American Educational Research Association
Comparative and International Educational Society
World Council of Comparative Education Societies



President John F. Kennedy discusses the possibility of a Peace Corps with students at the University of Michigan, October 14th, 1960¹

¹ Photo courtesy of the National Archives, College Park Maryland

CHAPTER 1

Blinded by the Light

“What we...realize, after ten years of the Peace Corps, is the enormity of the problem of poverty in the world. Knowing this, and knowing what we can do to help ease the conditions it causes, we must keep working.”

--John Glenn, *Peace Corps Tenth Annual Report*, 1970
Chairman, Peace Corps National Advisory Committee

“We have come to the unavoidable conclusion that the Peace Corps should be abolished.”

--Committee of Returned Volunteers, September 1969

Though well after midnight, more than ten thousand students braved the chilly autumn evening to hear the future president speak on the night of October 14th, 1960. The mood was exuberant, students cheering and chanting his name as he mounted the stairs to the student building.² John F. Kennedy spoke extemporaneously, captivating the students with the idea of a new agency, the “moral equivalent to war,” a vehicle to spread American prosperity and democracy to the Third World.³ Two weeks later, Kennedy announced his vision for a new governmental agency called the “Peace Corps” on the campaign trail in San Francisco’s Cow Palace pavilion.

Think of the wonders skilled American personnel could work, building goodwill, building the peace. There is not enough money in all America to relieve the misery of the undeveloped world in a giant and endless soup kitchen. But there is enough know-how and enough knowledgeable people to help those nations help themselves. I therefore propose that our inadequate efforts in this area be supplemented by a Peace Corps of talented young men willing and able to serve their country in this fashion...well qualified

² Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman and Gift in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps (Library of Congress), *All you need is love : the Peace Corps and the spirit of the 1960s* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 11.

³ US Peace Corps, *First Annual Peace Corps Report* (Washington, DC: US Peace Corps, 1962), 4.

through rigorous standards; well trained in the language, skills, and customs they will need to know...⁴

Though Kennedy's oration undoubtedly aimed to excite the imagination of voting Americans, his early sketches of the agency simultaneously left an indelible presence on the organization. Even in these initial iterations, he imagined the success of his grassroots campaign transplanted into the developing world. Just as Kennedy recruited hundreds of volunteers to galvanize local support for his campaign, the Peace Corps would similarly recruit volunteers in order to animate development and progress among Third World nations.⁵ Sensitive to the imagery, Kennedy carefully framed the organization in opposition to the image of a never ending "soup kitchen."⁶ In contrast, Peace Corps Volunteers would be a progressive, highly select, yet culturally sensitive group of Americans who would ultimately impart American goodwill by teaching a model of American progress from the bottom up.

Kennedy's Peace Corps was superb political theater, a glittering campaign idea that narrated US engagement in world progress in mythic terms.⁷ The myth was one of transmission; the American dream could be shared with the world in an unfolding of political and personal benevolence. Even before the first volunteers flew to their sites, the Kennedy's rhetoric emphasized the transfer of middle-class American ideals to the world. Painting a portrait of

⁴ John F. Kennedy: "Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, Cow Palace, San Francisco, CA - (Advance Release Text)," November 2, 1960. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25927>.

⁵ Edmund F. Kallina, *Kennedy v. Nixon : the presidential election of 1960* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010), 54.

⁶ Kennedy employed the image of the "soup kitchen" in several of his 1960 political speeches to draw voters attention to Roosevelt's progressive legislation ending this phenomenon as a widespread way of life in the US. In an election speech at the Biltmore Hotel in Ohio, for example, he states that "At that time the banks were closing and the soup kitchens were opening; the breadlines were forming and the dirt was being blown off the farms. Franklin Roosevelt put forward one of the programs that ended hard times - the program for a Securities Exchange Commission." In his vision of the Peace Corps development, therefore, Kennedy articulates his vision in terms opposing this evocative image of regressive,

⁷ The Peace Corps as a social and cultural phenomenon is mythic, in semiologist Roland Barthes sense of the term, in that the organization relies on a myriad of constructed, targeted second-order signs, signifiers which denote bourgeois capitalist, democratic ideals. See Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (New York, NY: Hill and Wang, 1972).

ethical and cultural solidarity between the US and peoples of the Third World, the president expressed soaring hopes for US engagement, declaring, “To those peoples in huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required—not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right.”⁸ President Kennedy’s stamp on the Peace Corps’ development ideals stressed a righteousness that hardly transcended old colonial paradigms. This vision relied on a narrative of altruistic American volunteers entering an imagined world of “huts and villages,” even though many volunteers would actually find themselves in urban settings or even working the elite classes. Despite contradictory realities on the ground, realities that this study will bring the surface, the organization’s rhetoric latched onto this iconic idea, encapsulated within the organizational term “grassroots.”⁹ The way these sources expressed the term itself, however, was protean; grassroots was regularly interchanged with synonymous words such as “cooperation,” “community action,” and later “participatory development” or “participatory action.”¹⁰ Though the method of expression was malleable, the idea has great significance for the Peace Corps, acting as a shibboleth for organizational actors to enter into the Peace Corps narrative.¹¹ The terminology signaling cooperation and participation from below are semantic entry devices in that they vaguely gesture towards a network of

⁸ Quoted in Richard Peet and Elaine R. Hartwick, *Theories of development : contentions, arguments, alternatives*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2009)., 235.

⁹ The term “grass roots” was apparently coined in a *political* campaign in which a newspaper article from 1903 that quotes a Kansas political organizer who states that “Roosevelt and Torrance clubs will be organized in every locality. We will begin at the grass roots.” See “Movement to Make Minneapolis Man Roosevelt’s Running Mate,” *The Salt Lake Herald*, September 25 1903., 6.

¹⁰ These terms find their purest expression in recent training materials aimed at teaching volunteers to engage in participatory development models. In 2005, the PACA (Participatory Analysis for Community Action) training packet devised methods for including traditionally marginal groups (particularly women) in their development projects. See Peace Corps, “Participatory Analysis for Community Action (PACA) Training Manual,” (Washington, DC: Peace Corps, 2005).

¹¹ I use Derrida’s interpretation of Paul Celan’s semiologically multivalent use of the term here. See Jacques Derrida, Thomas Dutoit, and Outi Pasanen, *Sovereignities in question : the poetics of Paul Celan*, Perspectives in continental philosophy, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005).

inchoate organizational practices, yet ultimately serving to support the grand narratives of benevolent US engagement in the developing world. From Kennedy's mythological vision of the agency, one that glided over the internal contradictions of the first non-military US international service corps, arose a distinctly complex dominant discourse, supporting the image of a cooperative, altruistic, egalitarian development agency.

While the image of American benevolence was and is radiant, the organization's founding principles betray amorphous quality inherent in these grand narratives. Both then and now, the Peace Corp's three guiding codes gesture towards Kennedy's high ideals, asserting that the organization should: "1. Help the people of these countries meet their needs for trained manpower; 2. Help promote a better understanding of the American people on the part of peoples served; and 3. To promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of the American people."¹² However high minded, these principles flatten the diverse realities behind them. By placing mostly college-educated liberal arts majors in the developing world, whose image of Americans would the Peace Corps promote? Similarly, would the complexities of other countries' cultures, politics, and history necessarily connect with the organization's own imagination of "huts and villages" at the grassroots? Finally, would the diverse ideas and perspectives of peoples from varied contexts jive with the agency's ideas of providing manpower for grassroots development? The thread connecting all of these questions is the aspect the organization largely ignores, the *locus of power*. Built upon a vague theater of ideas, the Peace Corps organizational leaders alone retained the power to unify and define denoted meanings, and therefore mythologize the image of the organization. For those interested in the future potential for this unique governmental program, the conundrum then becomes understanding the ways

¹² US Peace Corps, *First Annual Peace Corps Report*, 5.

these mythologies conceal vital questions inherent in the organization's operational reality, thereby freeing organizational actors (staff and volunteers) to strive for effective horizons beyond the confines of political theatrics.

This study ultimately aims to energize the organizational actors, both volunteers and staff, to re-imagine the architectural possibilities of the Peace Corps through an act of de-mythologizing narratives born of political expedience. That is, I will step back from and highlight the foundational *a priori* concepts stemming from the organization's dominant rhetoric as an international articulation of US soft power and benevolence abroad. Chipping away at these prescriptive models could create a passageway for those internal actors interested in re-shaping the possibilities of the organization as a democratic organization responsive to the interests and initiatives of people living in the developing world.

As political theater, the Peace Corps image and organization expressions rely on a gestalt of three narratives: the volunteer, international development, and programming. The value imbued into these organizational narratives, however, depend on the intersection with the term "grassroots." The Peace Corps organizational literature largely employs a shallow usage of the word, thereby obscuring the myriad of potentialities. In a leveling sweep, the Peace Corps literature homogenizes all peoples of the developing world as on the level of the grass roots. The 1966 *Peace Corps Fifth Annual Report to Congress*, for instance, first employs the term grassroots to distinguish the program's extraordinary approach from existing top down development aid programs. The introduction explains that "Because other foreign assistance programs usually dealt only with the surface symptoms- economic instability, lack of technological progress, shortage of top level manpower-the Peace Corps had what amounted to

carte blanche at the *grass roots*.”¹³ Here, the Peace Corps receives free reign from a faceless collective, the grassroots. From whom did the Peace Corps receive this invitation? The invitation is predicated on the existence of poor, disempowered people. A later statement further reveals the organization’s unique grassroots approach, noting that “...much of the work that needs to be done in the villages of developing nations does not require the services of skilled technicians; ‘experts’ often feel frustrated or wasted at the *grass roots* level.”¹⁴ By imagining this level at a smooth, unadulterated collection of huts and villages populated by unskilled laborers, the term grassroots denotes the idea homogeneity in the settings of world poverty as opposed to the bourgeois existence, the lives of wealthy land-owning Americans. The overarching narrative assumed in grassroots implies that the principle actors are so unskilled that higher-skilled assistance would be wasted in this context. In actuality, the grassroots is treated as a lower-level in the hinterlands, something as not as vital, complex, compelling instead of a term denoting equality and cooperation.

Constructed alongside this hierarchical narrative of grassroots, the Peace Corps imagined the ideal volunteer. In their vision, the Peace Corps volunteer would work on this lower plane, the grassroots level, with a goal of working side by side with citizens of the developing world. In truth, the organization’s initial understandings of the principles of grassroots development were as selective as the membership of men, and they were almost all *men*, called to mold them into an organization.¹⁵ With Kennedy’s full support, the Peace Corps’ first director Sargent Shriver assembled an all-star team from various governmental offices, top law firms, high

¹³ Peace Corps, "Peace Corps 5th Annual Report to Congress," (Washington DC: Peace Corps, 1966)., 1. Italics added.

¹⁴ Peace Corps, 1966, 19. Italics added.

¹⁵ The 1962 annual report lists female employee in the Washington, DC staff, ALICE GILBERT, Director of International Programs. See Peace Corps, "1st Annual Peace Corps Report," (Washington, DC: Peace Corps, 1962)., 81.

ranking military positions, and American universities. By choosing the most elite members of American social and intellectual society, Shriver's team was the epitome of First World, mostly white male upper class privilege. This group formed a bureaucratic structure that stressed an occupational understanding of development; Peace Corps volunteers would undergo a rigorous selection and testing process designed by Educational Testing Services (ETS) and eventually fill positions in sectors such as education, health, agriculture, and business. These sectors would be governed by a hierarchy of bureaucrats residing in Peace Corps host countries, controlled in turn by a department in Washington, DC. Admittedly, the Peace Corps did not function as a completely centralized bureaucracy; then as is true now, Peace Corps staff leadership working in various regions and countries have some autonomy. Nonetheless, the Peace Corps is a government bureaucracy and in many respects acts like one. Various decisions in Washington, D.C. concerning volunteer training, budgets, and perhaps most importantly the organizational vision stemming from Washington rhetoric undoubtedly affected the way volunteers approach their volunteer experiences and working relationships let alone volunteer selection criteria. Even if volunteers came from underprivileged backgrounds in the US, they still work within a framework designed by an elite echelon of the US political class. And yet with all of this top-down hierarchy, the Peace Corps self-image is of the volunteers enacting grassroots development from the bottom up. The internal contradiction between rhetoric and reality are quite stark. The idea of the Peace Corps volunteer rests on the untenable assumptions that they are representative of America. Further, the idea requires a belief that a selective, top-down US governmental hierarchical bureaucracy could best create a cadre of volunteers compatible with a bottom up, community-based program serving the developing world.

The second wobbly leg of the Peace Corps organizational rationale rests on the strategy of grassroots development. Whereas Kennedy's populist grass roots political strategy operated under the rationale that people at the local level would work to elect a representative at the top, countries of the developing world have little real input into the operations of the Peace Corps. Though the Peace Corps staffs country offices with members from a given host country, the Peace Corps does not ultimately work for any country aside from the US. Early Peace Corps organizational documents express an alternate view, a seamless unity of purpose and perspective between the US Government and host country nationals at the grass roots level. In portraying the Peace Corps activities in India, for example, the same 1966 report notes that

...where shortage of food to feed a population of 500 million has reached desperate proportions, the Peace Corps rose to the occasion by creating a specially designed, hard-headed program at the *grass roots* to help alleviate the problem. More than 1,000 Volunteers (the largest contingent anywhere) will be sent to work in closely related projects such as poultry production, nutrition, vegetable gardening, family planning.¹⁶

The term "grass roots" here signifies a cooperative, collective approach to development; the US would send Peace Corps volunteers to provide much needed assistance at a level not requiring the expertise of macro level understandings of the issues food security. Though the idea is certainly compelling and not without a laudable goal, several power dynamics remain open to reasonable questions. If the Peace Corps is a grassroots development organization, why did the organization *create* the solution; what type of agency did local people have in this decision? Were the categories suggested by the Indian government or, even better, a community in India? Though the Peace Corps organizational rhetoric attaches the terms "grassroots," "community," and "cooperative" to development, the actual implementation of these ideals even within the same texts appears nominal at best. The Peace Corps organizational idea of development,

¹⁶ Corps, "Peace Corps 5th Annual Report to Congress.", 10. Italics added.

initially at least, had little or no consciousness that citizens at the grassroots had their own agency, their own ideas and knowledge about choosing and determining their futures.

Beside the internal contradictions of volunteers and development, grassroots programming obfuscates power relations inherent in Peace Corps programming activities abroad. In the 2009 *Peace Corps Performance and Accountability Report*, the term grassroots skates over agency and power disparities in the largely educational activities. The report notes that “Many Volunteers serve as mentors for young people and as counterparts in youth service organizations. Volunteers are uniquely positioned to provide learning opportunities to girls and boys at the *grassroots* level.”¹⁷ For the organization, the idea of volunteers’ very presence implies an unquestioned solidarity and equitable power relations. Granted, in many cases this could be true; the idea that two people of vastly different national, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds could see eye to eye on any number of issues is completely valid. But the discussion is largely one-sided, so the reader is left to guess or assume benevolent power relations. In this non-discursive grassroots narrative, American volunteers make friends with, *train* or *teach*, their host-country counterparts while living among host communities. But as underscored in questions and internal contradictions in earlier organizational literature, the power and agency unities assumed in the garb of grassroots educational programming may be less certain in reality. The Peace Corps education offered by volunteers and supported by staff is far from value free. As the Peace Corps organizational actors are selected from a relatively narrow socio-economic pool, the lessons and materials produced by volunteers and staff carry a hidden-curriculum, a social lesson imparting values, ideologies, and assumptions about the world.¹⁸ The

¹⁷ Peace Corps, "Performance and Accountability Report," (Washington, DC: Peace Corps, 2009).,8

¹⁸ For a wider discussion on the idea of the hidden curriculum, see Landon E. Beyer and Michael W. Apple, *The curriculum : problems, politics, and possibilities*, 2nd ed., SUNY series, frontiers in education (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

programming is not necessarily designed through a partnership of grassroots actors, but through dialectic between people of relatively similar socio-economic and cultural backgrounds: Peace Corps trainers and volunteers.

This investigation challenges the gestalt of narratives assumed by the Peace Corps organizational rhetoric. Cutting through the one-dimensional, obfuscating rhetoric of volunteers, development, and programming, I hope to bring balance to the organization's politically imagined vision. Through historiographical and ethnographic methods, I highlight the contradictions and intersections between organizational literature and imagery, interviews with Peace Corps volunteers working at their host sites, and progressive voices challenging hegemonic formulations of the development process.

In this dissertation, three broad questions guide the investigation towards a more nuanced narrative of the grassroots volunteer, development, and programming. To begin with, how do volunteers understand themselves and their work in relation to the Peace Corps' depictions? Second, how do the current Peace Corps grassroots development models recognize and reconcile issues of power and agency lacking in organizational literature? Third, does the current Peace Corps programming, educational and otherwise, recognize and include input from host country actors? By asking these questions, my goal is not to discredit the organization. Though the Peace Corps organizational narrative glosses over the complexity of truly participatory development, this omission certainly does not wholly discount the work performed by volunteers. However, a higher level of institutional self-reflection amongst volunteers and staff alike on these three foundational assumptions would certainly clarify the organization's potential for realizing a self-conscious, inclusive grassroots development program.

II.

Histories of the Peace Corps are beset on all sides by romance and tragedy. The exoticism of Americans volunteering abroad, exploring new cultures, and interacting with peoples in the far reaches of the globe has spawned the romantic historical type in great number (Meisler 2011; Barlow 2011; Schwartz 1991; Searles 1997 *inter alia*). Most romantic histories focus on the Peace Corps' story of self-betterment, slaying the dragons of scandals, setbacks, political interference and pessimism in their quest for international development and global friendship. At the same time, an equal number of historians have narrated the history of the Peace Corps as a tragedy, excoriating or at the very least concentrating on the organization's shortcomings in delivering much needed change to peoples in the developing context (Fischer, 1998; Hoffman 1998, Weiss 2004; Watkins 2012 *inter alia*). These tragic narratives vary between underscoring the naiveté of the organization's overall mission to the fall of the organization from a once high standard to the present state of disgrace, disorganization, and folly. While romantic and tragic Peace Corps histories interpret their subjects in opposite lights, some salient commonalities comprise the substance of both narrative plot types. Both the romantic and the tragic narratives converge on the organization's own narrative, Peace Corps' tri-partite mission of providing manpower to countries in need, facilitating US citizens learning about other cultures, and sharing US culture in the developing world. These three aspects have become the cornerstones in historical judgment, whether inexorably critical or sanguine, particularly in the first ten years of the Peace Corps.

Among histories with romantic narratives, the Peace Corps organization and volunteers are valorized in a variety of ways.¹⁹ The Peace Corps published collection of volunteer memoirs *At Home in the World*, for instance, emphasizes the successes of Americans overcoming adversity in the developing world while learning about other cultures.²⁰ In these narratives, volunteer recollections center on the adventures of living with mosquitos, trying new foods, and overcoming cultural barriers in the backdrop of specific historical contexts or Peace Corps initiatives. These types of Peace Corps publications elide the sense of wider US political and economic interests in the settings of rural Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Further, the voices of host-country nationals are non-existent. Particularly absent in these versions of intercultural connection are the numerous times when citizens of other countries protest this expression of US foreign policy. For example, the first serious critique of the Peace Corps' core mission as a development organization for "promoting a better understanding of American people" came from Nigerian university students during the opening year of the program. After her initial Peace Corps training at Harvard University, Smith College graduate Margery Michelmores wrote a fateful postcard during the second half of her Peace Corps Nigeria training at University College at Ibadan. Found near Marjorie's dormitory Queen Elizabeth Hall, the iconic postcard was reprinted in Nigerian newspapers as indications of American imperial intentions.

...With all the training we had, we really were not prepared for the squalor and absolutely primitive living conditions rampant both in the city and in the bush. We had no idea what "underdeveloped" meant. It really is a revelation and after we got over the initial

¹⁹ Hayden White insightfully notes that all historians pre-determine their narrative tone before embarking upon historical research, calling this practice historical "pre-employment." For White, the only four historical plots are romance, tragedy, comedy, and satire. Though his theoretical framework extends somewhat precariously from this point, his incipient theory is useful in debunking the notion of "objective" as well as identifying and labeling the tone of historians writing about the Peace Corps. See Hayden V. White, *Tropics of discourse : essays in cultural criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

²⁰ Peace Corps, *At Home in the World: The Peace Corps Story*. Edited by P. Getchell, J. Coyne, R. Keeney, & R. Green (Washington, DC: US Peace Corps, 1996).

horrified shock, a very rewarding experience. Everyone except us lives in the streets, cooks in the streets, sells in the streets, and even goes to the bathroom in the streets...”²¹

Though the *First Annual Peace Corps Report* notes that the international press exaggerated the numbers of the subsequent student rally, even by the Peace Corps numbers, 150-200 university students took to the streets to protest the volunteers as “agents of imperialism.”²² As Nigeria had only recently escaped British colonial rule, these students were no strangers to imperial mentalities, and the line between American cultural misunderstandings and neo-colonialism was paper thin. The Peace Corps staff summarily dismissed the “indiscreet comments,” noting that the Nigerian government asked for an increased number of volunteers. Interpreting the incident, the report notes that “other Peace Corps Volunteers throughout the world were also alerted to their vulnerability in a way much more effective than a lecture of written warning...”²³ Here, the meaning of “vulnerability” does not equate to an inner lack of understanding of the developing world, but an outside scrutiny of host-country peoples. In their narrow vision of American presence in the developing world, the early Peace Corps leadership overlooked the Janus-faced reality of cultural exchange: that placing American volunteers in developing contexts to share American cultural values could showcase not simply American progressive benevolence, but potentially backwards prejudices and immaturity about the developing world.

In addition to those produced by the Peace Corps, a fair number of journalists and former Peace Corps Volunteers and Staff have published romantic memoirs and histories of the organization. Though raising minor quibbles with the organization, they largely extoll the overall scope and mission. In former Peace Corps staff and current *Los Angeles Times* writer

²¹ Peace Corps Writers. *Peace Corps Letter Incident*.
<http://www.peacecorpswriters.org/pages/2000/0001/001pchist.html> (accessed August 4, 2010).

²²Peace Corps, "1st Annual Peace Corps Report.", 56.

²³ Ibid., 56-57.

Stanley Meisler's *When the World Calls* valorizes the volunteers, at one point noting that "all in all, based on the evidence in these memoirs, the more recent Volunteers struck an old evaluator like myself as a heroic band."²⁴ As an evaluator, Meisler is rooting for the volunteers first and the organization in most instances. In discussing the arguments of a 2008 volunteer critic Robert L. Strauss, he dismisses the Peace Corps' alleged inadequacies altogether, stating that "...his views were old-hat and impractical, and his assessment of the young Volunteers unfairly dismissive of their great energy and enthusiasm..."²⁵ But Meisler's contribution to understanding the often contentious relationship between volunteers and staff cannot be overstated. In his chapter entitled "US Troops Invade the Dominican Republic," for example, he illustrates the ways that volunteers serving in the Dominican Republic protested the 1965 US invasion, which was prompted by a popular uprising against the dictatorial incumbent government. Through the perspective of the then Peace Corps Latin American operations director Frank Mankiewicz, Meisler contrasts the Johnson administration's apprehension of the situation to that of the volunteers. Recounting Mankiewicz's impressions, he writes "[Mankiewicz] was struck by how little embassy officials, unlike the Volunteers, understood the masses of poor Dominicans who supported the rebels. He attended some of the U.S. military briefings for the press and was shocked by their dishonesty."²⁶ In Meisler's admittedly complex narrative, the one constant is the valor of the volunteer, followed by the nebulous, liminal space of Peace Corps staff situated between the interests of the volunteers and those of Washington, DC.

While Meisler's romantic historical narrative is quite compelling and useful for thinking about organizational leadership, particularly in the way he frames the Peace Corps as against the

²⁴ Stanley Meisler and Gift in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps (Library of Congress), *When the world calls : the inside story of the Peace Corps and its first fifty years* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 98.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁶ Stanley Meisler, 81.

US government international political agendas, his volunteer valorization quickly glides over the fact that many volunteers, however independent from Washington and the Peace Corps administration, feel that the Peace Corps is in fact an agent of US soft power imperialism. In his retelling of the Peace Corps during the Vietnam War, Meisler and other romantic Peace Corps historians barely mention the Committee of Returned Volunteers.²⁷ This group breaks the mold of outside criticism in that these volunteers themselves indicted the Peace Corps as an arm of American imperialism, an indictment challenging the idea that the organization promoted “a better understanding of other peoples on the part of the American people.” This organized early internal protest came as self-absorbed Peace Corps director Joseph Blatchford took the mantle of leadership in 1969. Unknowingly, Blatchford strolled into an ideological battlefield over the very survival of the organization.

As an unlikely choice for the conservative Nixon administration, he fit the Peace Corps mold of his two high-achieving predecessors, R. Sargent Shriver, Jr. (1961-1966) and Jack H. Vaughn (1966-1969). With his wide-ranging skills as an exhibition tennis player, jazz musician, hip fashion sense, and motorcycle parking space in the lobby of the Peace Corps headquarters, his profile embodied the image of the Corps in the 1960s. But even with sharp understanding of the power of image, Blatchford grossly misunderstood the extent to which the organizational rhetoric sustained the logical integrity of the Peace Corps. In his budget request to Congress in May of 1969, for instance, he innocently notes that “Agencies of Government customarily use their annual presentations to the Congress as an occasion to justify the discharge of their duties. I have *chosen simply to set out with minimum rhetoric in the pages which follow the facts and*

²⁷ If Meisler’s index is correct, he writes about a total of two paragraphs in two places on this significant internal protest of the Peace Corps.

figures of the Peace Corps...”²⁸ By the end of the summer, however, Blatchford would need all his rhetorical charisma to “justify” the organization not simply in the face of the Nixon administration’s patent disinterest and hostility, but to the politically engaged volunteers who staffed the program. With Nixon’s expansion of the American war in Vietnam, Peace Corps Volunteers began to question their roles as “development workers” in greater numbers. In August, the Committee for Returned Volunteers (CRV), an initially small group of 75 volunteers (out of 33,000) whose goal was convincing current volunteers to “subvert the Peace Corps and all other institutions of US imperialism,” would publish a scathing critique of the Peace Corps mission with the endorsement of 659 other former volunteers.²⁹ Though Meisler and romantic historians fail to follow through with the logic of their volunteer valorization, the CRV’s letter highlighted the fact volunteers themselves questioned and continue to question the organization’s role as in promoting and expanding US interests and influence in the developing world.

In counterbalance to romantic histories of the Peace Corps, scathing critiques of the organization’s scope, mission, and/or practice have surfaced on a regular basis every few years. In their significant 1977 assessment, former volunteers Payne Lucas and Kevin Lowther weave their historical narrative as a classic tragedy by detailing the organization’s decline from the original mission and scope, as indicated from the title *Keeping Kennedy’s Promise: Unmet Hope of the New Frontier*. This take on the early years of the Peace Corps describes the ways leadership, bureaucracy, and general volunteer mediocrity have adulterated the original noble ideals of the organization. In a chapter bemoaning the “Numbers Game,” the Peace Corps seemingly constant imperative to increase volunteer induction and placement, Lucas and

²⁸ US Peace Corps. *Congressional Presentation Full Year 1970*. (Washington DC: US Peace Corps, 1970), 3. [Italics added].

²⁹ From “Position Paper on the Peace Corps,” September 15, 1969, Ashabranner Papers, box 2, “The Struggle to Keep the PC out of Politics,” cited in Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman, 219.

Lowther present a tragic narrative of the Peace Corps involvement in the 1965 invasion of the Dominican Republic. Unlike Meisler's sympathetic version, Peace Corps Latin America director Mankiewicz here plays a central role in coordinating with D.C. to significantly increase volunteer presence in the Dominican Republic to "satisfy the president's need to soften the impact of the U.S. military presence in Santa Domingo, and...identify the Peace Corps with the present Dominican regime."³⁰ Although Mankiewicz tries to meet the 1,500 new Dominican Republic volunteers envisioned by Peace Corps Washington staff, even his initial 350 projected new volunteer posts falls short to 65.³¹ Though Lowther and Lucas weight their history of this event within their own tragic agenda, their criticism raises the common theme among other sources that volunteers do not necessarily know their jobs. Along with doubts about promoting better understanding between Americans and peoples in the developing world, the early administrations of the Peace Corps faced a host of detractors in relation to the actual development initiatives undertaken by the Peace Corps volunteers. Among these, none were as disparaging as the volunteers themselves. After being subjected to a grueling selection process and training routine, volunteers often found nothing to "develop" when they arrived at their sites. The running joke for one 1960s Peace Corps India volunteer group at the completion of their project was "their only purpose was entertainment, a sort of government-sponsored exhibit of rich Americans for the local populace to gawk at..."³² Far from helping with "trained manpower," some Peace Corps volunteers toil their entire two years with rudimentary language skills and scavenging for actual work in their host-country community. For Lowther and Luther,

Kevin Lowther, C. Payne Lucas, and Gift in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps (Library of Congress), *Keeping Kennedy's promise : the Peace Corps, unmet hope of the New Frontier* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1978), 31.

³¹Ibid., 32-33.

³² "The Volunteer Image," *the Peace Corps Magazine*, February 1963, 4 cited in Fritz Fischer, *Making Them Like Us: Peace Corps Volunteers in the 1960s*. (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 131.

this 1965 “numbers game” played out in the Dominican Republic is yet one more indicator of the decline of the organization, a once politically independent, high-quality, thoughtful institution into a dependent political pawn, thoughtlessly peppering the developing world with unwanted, low-quality volunteers.

As these two accounts of the 1965 Invasion of the Dominican Republic illustrate, both the romantic and tragic histories relate important aspects of the Peace Corps’ historical narrative. Meisler’s romantic view of Peace Corps volunteers surfaces their at least partial independence and reaction to military occupation. While Lowther and Luther’s take on the Dominican Republic elide an important tension between the Peace Corps staff’s allegiance to the volunteers and the Washington office, their criticism elucidates the political pressure Peace Corps faced in catering to the political whims in spite of the development needs of any particular country. Yet both seemingly opposing histories share many of the same elements this dissertation challenges. Both representative romantic and tragic histories imply, through weighting organizational leaders, the importance of Peace Corps staff lay in the direction of the organization, whether better or worse.

While the Washington elite certainly pull strings, this history of the Peace Corps focuses on the most vital organizational actors within the organization, the volunteers themselves. The ideas of a grassroots Peace Corps “volunteer” employed by both of these histories, however, are far from self-evident. Bracketing the meaning of this term, I provide a standpoint from which to see the way the ideas exist within multiple fields of knowledge.³³ Histories of the Peace Corps largely assume the grassroots Peace Corps volunteer as a “development” worker and “educator”

³³ Readers will recognize a nearly identical strategy of bracketing assumed terms employed in Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality*, i.a. See the introduction in Michel Foucault, *The history of sexuality*, 1st Vintage Books ed. (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

or “health specialist” without considering the epistemic fallacies assumed definitions face when thrust into a “grassroots” relationship. The organizational rhetoric defining these terms, both in text and image, are much less tenable when set aside the ideas stemming from volunteers themselves. Therefore, the following history will create a genealogy of these terms, tracing the ways that the power of the Peace Corps organization mutes the often contradictory notions of truth behind these terms. These incongruities will not gesture towards a tragic narrative of the fall from some golden past. Nor will the narrative suggest yet another stop on the romantic quest for the perfection of the organization. Instead, the genealogical approach, focusing on the epistemology of organizational definitions disentangles the political theater from actual practice, allowing volunteers and staff to understand the hegemonic processes at work in shaping these discourses. Though this process, these actors may choose to re-appropriate and redefine central elements of Peace Corps development initiatives.

III.

Mindful of extent celebratory and critical histories of the Peace Corps, this analysis delves into the ambiguities of the organization’s grassroots self-image and the power dynamics this understanding obscures. In exploring this topic, I conducted archival research in various locations. After exhausting Peace Corps online institutional records, I explored the Peace Corps textual and photo archives in the College Park, Maryland offsite library. Weaving together handwritten notes from high-level meetings together with iconic images from the Peace Corps’ history, the unique internal tensions within this organization began to emerge, a compelling narrative of institutional rhetorical emerged, one nearly devoid of self-critique or of even self-awareness.

While my archival research certainly revealed a narrative of tensions within the organization's grassroots claims, the archives weighted Washington's rhetoric above the unscripted voices of volunteers. Even before my archival research, I understood that I would need to conduct interviews. Accessing the "grass roots" experiences of Peace Corps volunteers, however, was not an easy undertaking. My initial forays into this research followed a similar path to the above mentioned studies. I contacted and interviewed former volunteers throughout 2010 and staked out Peace Corps 50th anniversary celebrations in 2011. But in almost all of these cases, volunteers launched into well-recited, often heroic stories about their experiences.³⁴ Though fascinating in their own right, these recollections lacked the specificity required for this project. Questions about materials used during their pre-service training, for instance, were often met with bewildered expressions.

My preliminary interview experiences led me to pursue fieldwork research in Outer Mongolia, a country where I served for two years as a Peace Corps Teacher Trainer volunteer from 2003 to 2005.³⁵ I decided early on to prioritize interviews with volunteers at their actual work sites in order to have some way to evaluate their claims through direct observation. As many Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers work at inaccessible sites, this decision sent me to the four corners of Mongolia. Fortunately, my Mongolian language proficiency was enough to navigate the informal transportation options and chat with Mongolians during the long, cold trips by jeep to visit the volunteers. I interviewed roughly half of the 44 volunteers in one-on-one interviews and half in focus groups. My interviews were semi-structured, meaning that I had formal questions that I often followed with unstructured questions about a point of interest raised

³⁴ For an insightful essay on history, truth-telling, and autobiography, see Andrew Hudgins, "An Autobiographer's Lies," *The American Scholar* 65(1996).

³⁵ The TEFL Volunteer and Teacher Trainer distinction is somewhat nebulous in Peace Corps Mongolia. Theoretically, Teacher Trainers have more teaching experiences and are therefore placed in Government Education Centers to train teachers whereas TEFL volunteers most often work in local schools.

by the volunteers.³⁶ Most of my access to volunteers stemmed from a snowball sampling, in which one chance meeting with a volunteer at a café or a function led to an interview and several other meetings.³⁷ Through these interviews, a case study of current Peace Corps grassroots development in Mongolia emerged.

Though the organization has sometimes used homogenizing language towards their hosting countries, each country the Peace Corps entered has a diverse history and cultural context, and Mongolia is not an exception. Therefore, this study makes no claims that the findings are generalizable across national boundaries. An account of various Tibetan and Soviet outsider's approaches to educational and social "development" in Mongolia will highlight the complexity of approaching a country not as a *tabula rasa*, but a shimmering, elusive web of narratives of "progress," "freedom," and "living well" loosely saddled onto the lived realities of individuals. This context provided an ideal "field" in which to study the complexities behind the often static understandings of the US Peace Corps.

Each chapter of this dissertation serves to both bracket and also challenge an idea supporting the organization's narrative framework. The discussions of these ideas contrast an important aspect of the Peace Corps' organizational rhetoric to the perspectives of Peace Corps volunteers serving in Mongolia. In chapter two, I examine the ideal and real grassroots volunteer through a comparison between the Peace Corps organizational literature and the voices of actual volunteer interviews. In this chapter, I show that the imagined ideal grassroots aid worker was formed even before the organization itself through literary critique of the US State Department in *The Ugly American* (1958). Following the vicissitudes of this idealized image over the history of

³⁶ Thomas R. Lindlof and Bryan C. Taylor, *Qualitative communication research methods*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE, 2011).

³⁷ W. Alex Edmonds and Thomas D. Kennedy, *An applied reference guide to research designs : quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2013), 88.

the organization, I bring forward the voices of Peace Corps volunteers working at the grassroots level in order to illustrate the ways volunteers both fit and fall outside of this frame. Part of this analysis will include the unique volunteer training program in Mongolia. The greatest amount of contact between the US Peace Corps and Peace Corps Volunteers occurs during the three-month intensive language, culture, and project training. More than any other aspect of the organization, Peace Corps training has undergone dramatic shifts from the original conception. Whereas volunteers attended university-style classes and military-style training in the 1960s, today's volunteers usually train within a community context within their host country. Based on interviews with Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers and my own experience as a trainee and volunteer trainer for Peace Corps Mongolia, this examination will neither be an indictment nor an approbation of the three-month training. Instead, I will center my analysis the ways that Peace Corps Mongolia ranks and weights certain preparatory skills and competencies such as language and cultural awareness over historical knowledge. Most importantly, I will underscore the strategies in which Peace Corps Mongolia prepares and attempts to shape volunteers for grassroots development. The question that follows is whether or not the Peace Corps' organizational volunteer ideal is particularly relevant or even possible given the background and career trajectories of current volunteers.

Following the discussion of the volunteer's ambiguous place in the development process, the third chapter explores the distance between volunteer and organizational understandings of the grassroots development process. Here, the arc of the grassroots rhetoric and imagery in Peace Corps organizational literature. Through a discourse analysis case study of African agriculture, I highlight both the often obscure hierarchical trajectories of power in organizational decision-making practices through the example of Peace Corps' agricultural sectors in Africa.

As my field research on Peace Corps Mongolia did not cover agriculture or environmental sectors, this choice intends to give the reader not only a long-view of Peace Corps' theoretical bases for bottom-up development, but also a broader geographical perspective on the impact of Peace Corps development initiatives.³⁸ Starting from the 1960s, the Peace Corps pushed agriculture methods reliant on chemical fertilizers, designer seeds, and irrigation projects regardless of the conditions on the ground. Advocating scientific approaches of specialists such as "Green Revolution" promoters such as movement champion Lestor Brown, the Peace Corps linked with other governmental agencies such as USAID to spread these technologies. The historical analysis will focus on the ways terms such as "participation," "community," and "grass roots" have masked power dynamics in the Peace Corps as well as the ways volunteers and in-country staff promoted a re-examination and a course correction on this issue. As will be highlighted, the Peace Corps volunteers serving in Mongolia do not necessarily share the organizational understandings of participation and development. From this disparity and unstated power dynamics follows a discussion of the extent to which Peace Corps service can be understood as grassroots development.

The fourth chapter examines the both the successes and inherent contradictions of US government volunteers teaching at the grassroots. As both the Peace Corps' and Peace Corps Mongolia's largest volunteer sector, education has been a central focus of an organization largely comprised of liberal arts college graduates.³⁹ Though education is the largest Peace Corps volunteer sector, Peace Corps Mongolia boasts volunteers from the fields of business, health, and Community Youth development. While these other sectors conduct work unrelated to classroom-style teaching, their positions also contain a strong educational development

³⁸ Peace Corps Mongolia currently does not appoint agriculture or environmental sector volunteers.

³⁹Peace Corps, "An answer to the liberal arts graduate who asks: What can I do in the Peace Corps?," (1966).

component, and therefore are included in this discussion. Much like the broader concept of development, the Peace Corps staff and volunteers have struggled with the concept of “teaching” without influencing the minds of host-country nationals to the point of cultural colonization. As evident from my interviews, however, cultural impositions and relations of power are subtle. Chapter four will showcase varied perspectives of volunteers’ experiences as teachers, all replete with complexity. In trying to understand these various aspects of Peace Corps grassroots education in Mongolia led me to inquire about and observe the relationships between volunteers and the Mongolian teachers with whom they worked.

The fifth chapter focuses on the issue of Peace Corps Mongolia volunteer training, with a particular focus on history. When interviewing volunteers, a significant narrative of grassroots narrative became the issue of epistemological barriers to participation. In short, many of the volunteers knew fragments about the people they served, mostly within the realm of cultural practices. Chapter five therefore details the struggle volunteers face in serving Mongolians without appreciating and reflecting upon their own historical narratives of Mongolia through a discourse analysis of a Peace Corps historical manual *Land of the Blue Sky*. Though Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers raised questions about Peace Corps these training materials, few could articulate the various economic debates relevant to an informed discussion on these matters. Other volunteers appeared unconcerned with issues of history, a point also meriting consideration.

Though the Peace Corps is the largest national volunteer agency of its type, other countries such as Japan also send volunteer development workers to Mongolia. As Japan and the United States give the first and second largest aid packages to Mongolia, respectively, comparing these two countries will provide a reasonable contrast in the facets of volunteer preparation these

two organizations have chosen to weight and their respective outcomes. In addition to my interviews with American volunteers, I also interviewed 14 Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOCV) and staff members. This chapter will underscore similar organizational grass roots rhetoric, one based on the term “cooperation.” At the same time, the JOCV volunteers I interviewed had quite different experiences as volunteers. Throughout chapter six, I compare and contrast the JOCV institutional model and volunteer experiences with those of the Peace Corps.

In the final chapter, I bring together the three bracketed terms to discuss the future possibilities of Peace Corps grassroots development. With this analysis, the idea of participatory assessment for Peace Corps development project assessment will be advanced as a potential avenue for addressing power dynamics in development projects. Equally important, recommendations for improvements by volunteers and host-country nationals will be suggested to highlight potential improvement in the ways that the Peace Corps understands and supports development at the grassroots.



President Ronald Reagan poses with Peace Corps volunteers in Grenada shortly after the US invasion, which ended in 1983.¹

¹ Photo courtesy of the National Archives, College Park Maryland.

CHAPTER 2

Literally Fiction:

The Myth of the Grassroots Peace Corps Volunteer

"The typical person coming in is generally from an upper-class background with a college education. There seems to be other places in society that recruiters could look without too much trouble. These are all potential candidates with experience that would be pretty different, it would add some variety if we had different people coming from those corners of society instead of the majority of the people coming from one segment of society."

--Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer Interview, September 18th, 2011

For the US government, the grassroots volunteer was a new take on an old idea. Though American presence in the developing world had steadily risen from the end of World War II to the founding of the first Peace Corps volunteer groups in 1961, never had the government formulated a large-scale, non-military, community-based personnel to act as representatives and the same time agents of development.² But the image and reality of "grassroots volunteer" idea did not stem from a particular model. Granted, other agencies such UNESCO volunteers worked to rebuild war-torn Europe, providing some model for imagining the Peace Corps volunteers.³ Despite these precedents, the idea of the grassroots volunteer emanated only in small part from these sources. More centrally, however, this discourse drew inspiration from a singular type of

² Cobbs Hoffman and Gift in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps (Library of Congress), *All you need is love : the Peace Corps and the spirit of the 1960s*.

³ Cooper and Packard-Frederick Cooper and Randall M. Packard, *International development and the social sciences : essays on the history and politics of knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).-International Development and the Social Sciences--9

imaginative narratives of US benevolence and idealism. In formulating the ideal of the volunteer working in local communities, the Kennedy administration drew from their grassroots campaign success as well as *literary* critiques of US foreign policy, thereby engendering the image of the Peace Corps volunteer, a face of altruism, self-sacrifice, and magnanimity.

However admirable, these images do not take into account the actual people willing to live and work in developing communities. Along with their conflicting roles as grassroots development workers and representatives of US policy and culture, volunteers possess their own lives, interests, goals, and limitations. Taken together, these factors require volunteers to navigate a protean intellectual and emotional landscape. And yet, the grassroots development narrative suggests a unilateral push for empowerment and local participation, a selfless engagement in progress. These inconsistencies call into question a distinct, yet elusive narrative of the benevolent grassroots volunteer mythology. Peace Corps generated narratives are benevolent in that they put forward the best aspirations of volunteers front and center and mythological in that these narratives essentialize the volunteers through their good will and works, simultaneously refuting the myriad of inconsistent and paradoxical realities through semiotic strategies.⁴ The mythic image combines the cohesion of government bureaucracy and defined purpose, yet extolls democracy and free-thinking. The volunteer is idealized as demure, receptive, and modest, yet given exceptional leadership and organizing responsibilities. The volunteer is at once indispensable for local development, yet self-sacrificing. Peace Corps volunteers were and are a part of the US government and often explicitly the image of the power and reach of the US government in the developing world, yet independent advocates for local interests. Most importantly, the volunteer should have the spark and political vigor to organize

⁴ Barthes, *Mythologies*.

and motivate local actors, yet docile in terms of critically thinking about the goals and activities of the Peace Corps as an organization. Though these tensions are quite salient, the various textual and visual discourses glide over the complexity of volunteer relationships to the “grassroots,” obfuscating inconsistencies, thereby preventing further discussion.

Admittedly, many of the volunteers I interviewed in my case study in Outer Mongolia were working hard, honoring local customs, and developing strong relationships with local people at their sites. These successes, however, hardly came from their personal ownership of the Peace Corps grassroots volunteer myth. Even the most impressive volunteers had their own agendas, aspirations, and complex understandings of their roles as volunteers, cultural diplomats, and development agents. Further, these volunteers had little institutional support in thinking about the power of their roles in their liminal living experience or negotiating this power in the worlds of class and culture.

This chapter examines, and then elucidates, the organizational literature’s portrayal of the volunteer in relation to grassroots by comparing these idealized depictions to the volunteer’s own self-evaluations. Evident in these depictions is a preference for a theater of political expedience over the realities of volunteer experiences and the paradoxes of their roles as grassroots workers. Certainly, no volunteer’s experience as a grassroots development worker can be defined by their own best work or best day. Generating these imagined understandings is unrealistic and unhelpful for the organization itself, creating false expectations for the volunteers as they embark on their experiences. Relying on archival data from organizational literature, I deconstruct the Peace Corps’ depictions in reports and more public venues such as the “Volunteers” newsletter. Further, I illustrate the various ways the Peace Corps has trained volunteers that adds and detracts from this image. This examination demonstrates the lengths the

Peace Corps traverses to portray a consistent grassroots-volunteer dialectic, a relationship that starkly contrasts with the actual self-appraisals of volunteers from my case study interviews. This comparison clarifies the current organizational challenge: the Peace Corps' shallow imagination of grassroots volunteers and volunteers' multiple identities and associations of power as grassroots development volunteers, US government workers and citizens, members of an educated elite, and individual goals. Finally, I assess the ways that this imagined grassroots volunteer prevents a reality based understanding of the grassroots volunteer experience in the Peace Corps.

II.

The idea of a Peace Corps volunteer was nothing less than revolutionary at the organization's founding in 1961. The revolution was the grassroots approach. Embedded development Volunteers would live and work for two years among the people they helped in a horizontal relationship.⁵ When Kennedy imagined the model grassroots volunteer, he and his staff began to outline an idealized understanding of this development worker based on a fictionalized account of Americans abroad. In his Cow Palace pavilion campaign address in San Francisco, Kennedy explicitly references *The Ugly American*, a fictional book that nevertheless exposed the cultural ignorance among US Foreign Service staff abroad. In depicting his idea, he referred to the characters in this popular book, stating that "Many Americans have marveled at the selfless example of Dr. Tom Dooley in Laos. Many have shuddered at the examples in 'The

⁵ The Peace Corps' grassroots initiative came shortly after the insipient inception of a national development plan. After Post World-war era, the US government employed a number of professional development specialists who worked in a managerial capacity. These specialists directed a myriad of development assistance strategies including emergency food aid, government institution building, infrastructure and capital building, and small project assistance.

Ugly American.’ Both examples may be found in great numbers in our oversea missions.”⁶ Here, Kennedy delineates between two groups of American government workers abroad: the “Ugly Americans” who unlike current English usage refer culturally sensitive, self-effacing American government aid workers. Kennedy adroitly equates this image to the face of the Navy physician made popular through accounts of his humanitarian activities in Southeast Asia.⁷ In a few short lines, Kennedy seamlessly weaves together a comparison between two semi-factual narratives, the idealized Dr. Tom Dooley and the fictionalized critiques of American foreign aid officers abroad.

Particularly in the founding vision of the Peace Corps volunteer, the *The Ugly American* held an important fascination by President Kennedy, Sargent Shriver, and other framers of the institution. Read by Kennedy before his election campaign, the book influenced his later reforms in the State Department and descriptions of a grassroots Peace Corps. Though the novel is heavy handed and didactic, the book captured the US imagination through incisive vignettes of diplomatic frustrations faced by US allies and more importantly, non-aligned states.⁸ Describing their book as a “fiction” but “based on fact,” authors Lederer and Burdick pit the US diplomatic aid worker against their Soviet rivals. Whereas, the communist foreign diplomats were professionally trained, culturally sensitive, and linguistically capable in their country of service, the US equivalents were self-interested, bumbling, and bland. The authors argue that the US was losing the hearts and minds of developing countries through the incompetence of the State Department employees. The book underscores this point in the first scene in which the

⁶ John F. Kennedy: “Speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, Cow Palace, San Francisco, CA - (Advance Release Text),” November 2, 1960. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25927>.

⁷ See James Terence Fisher, *Dr. America : the lives of Thomas A. Dooley, 1927-1961*, Culture, politics, and the cold war (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1997).

⁸ *The Ugly American* gained even more popular recognition in the US as a feature length film starring Marlin Brando in 1963.

ambassador to the fictional Southeast Asian country Sarkhan contemplates a Sarkhanese cartoon drawn at his expense: “The cartoon showed a short, fat American, his face perspiring, and mouth open like a braying mule’s, leading a thin, gracefully-built Sarkhanese man by a tether around his next toward a sign bearing two of the few Sarkhanese words the ambassador could recognize—‘Coca Cola.’”⁹ In this succinct portrayal, the authors economically underscore the Ambassador’s cultural and linguistic incompetence through his knowledge of only a Sarkhanese word of an American product while simultaneously providing the Sarkhanese perspective of American diplomacy. The relationship is one of economic domination devoid of cultural appreciation. Through these negative renderings, *The Ugly American* sparked a bout of self-critical re-thinking of American foreign aid policy in the developing world.

The Ugly American provides a prescriptive picture for the ideal US aid worker, a composite of qualities quite similar to the later Peace Corps volunteer. In their epilogue Lederer and Burdick outline their formula for success as “...a small force of well-trained, well chosen, hard-working, and dedicated professionals. They must be willing to risk their comforts and—in some lands—their health...speak the language of the land...be more expert in its problems than are the natives.”¹⁰ The authors explore this point through a fictive interview with the president of Burma (Myanmar); the president voices the authors’ imagined response to the question “What would you do if you were the president?” In one telling passage, the Burmese president sketches the ideal type of grassroots foreign aid worker and diplomat:

“...Some years ago two Americans—a married couple named Martin—came to Burma as short-term advisors. They were quiet people about whom nobody seemed to know much, and they quietly went up north to the Shan States, which are pretty wild. They brought now pamphlets, brochures, movies, or any of the other press-agent devices

⁹William J. Lederer and Eugene Burdick, *The ugly American*, 1st ed. (New York,: Norton, 1958)., 12.

¹⁰ Ibid.

which are so offensive to most of us and on which most Americans rely. They had no automobiles and no servants. They just moved into a small town and settled down in a modest house and began to live there. Since the Martins spoke Burmese—a most unusual accomplishment for Americans in Burma—Burmans began stopping in their house and talking with them...”¹¹

As subtle as a brick throw at a window, this fictional passage shatters the conventional vision of US presence in the world. Aid workers and diplomats should be “Ugly Americans;” they should be ordinary Americans willing to live in local communities, learn the local languages, and perhaps most importantly, be able to soft sell the image of the US. For Lederer and Burdick, the Ugly American should be advanced first in terms of their political value. This point is particularly important in understanding the formation of the grassroots volunteer. Not only is the grassroots volunteer based on a fictionalized version of US presence in the developing world, but the model incorporates a narrative of political theater. Like the couple in the description above, Peace Corps volunteers would be missionaries.¹² But not for God. The Peace Corps volunteer would showcase the US and the American way of life at the local level.

When this seed image of the idealized volunteer entered the realm of actual practice, however, even the organizational literature presented a surprisingly amount contention. In Peace Corps publications ostensibly aimed at volunteers and staff such as *The Peace Corps Volunteers*, *The Peace Corps News*, *ACTION Update*, and *Volunteer Times*, the organization depicts the volunteer in terms of an American political body and grassroots change agent. This paradox, however, was not lost on many early contributors and editors of early iterations of these

¹¹ Ibid., 149

¹² The Peace Corps regularly rejects notions between missionary activities in organizational literature. A recent Peace Corps Mongolia pamphlet aimed at advertising the agency for potential counterparts, for example, clarifies this point for Mongolians, stating “Are PCVs missionaries? No. Peace Corps is not a religious organization. Peace Corps’ goal is to assist countries in reaching their development goals by providing technical assistance and cross-cultural exchange.” See Peace Corps, “Peace Corps Mongolia...Serving Mongolia Since 2001,” ed. Peace Corps Mongolia (Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia), 1.

magazines. Though the newsletter editors certainly presented their own narratives, volunteer letters fractured prescriptive images, often with challenges to the Peace Corps' organizational imagination of the grassroots volunteer.

From the 1960's into the late 1970's, *The Volunteer*¹³ and the *Peace Corps News* were perhaps the richest popular written sources for disseminating the various iterations of grassroots volunteers. Whereas the *The Peace Corps News* outlined the happenings of the organization, *The Volunteer* focused on issues vital to the day in the life of a volunteer. In the first issue of *The Volunteer* in 1961, the Peace Corps Support Staff Services editors formulate the reasons for their magazine as "designed to link PCVs everywhere-to keep the teacher's aides in the Philippines informed of the activities of the surveyors and engineers in Tanganyika, to create a bond between a community development team in Colombia and an agricultural team in Pakistan."¹⁴ While serving as an information conduit, *The Volunteer* editors also managed the particular presentation of the volunteers in their site context. In the article "Filipinos Welcome the Peace Corps," for instance, the editors choose voices of volunteers that connect memories of US military intervention during WWII and current Peace Corps service. In the article, the featured volunteer's letter notes that "We felt like we were all miniature Gen. Mac Arthurs once again 'returning'... The important thing is that they want us here much more than we ever realized, and it leaves us with an aura of humility..."¹⁵ Here we see the thread of benevolent patriotism combined with self-sacrifice and heroism wrapped in humility, the Ugly American incarnate.

¹³ The title soon changed to *The Peace Corps Volunteer*.

¹⁴ Peace Corps, *The Volunteer* 1, no. 1 (1961)., 1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

While some articles emphasize the humble, stoic heroism of the volunteers, others provide an ostentatious bravado permeated much of the volunteer discourse in early publications. In a cover story of the July 1962 *The Peace Corps Volunteer*, the editors chose to emphasize the flashy, champion quality of volunteers through a volunteer's Thai Boxing experiences at his post in Thailand. As imagined by the editors, "No westerner had ever escaped defeat at the hands (and feet) of a Thai boxer, until Peace Corps Volunteer national 'dare' gesture...Bob Pitts, one-time Yale puncher, scored a draw...while glaring over his shoulder at his adversary, daring him to cross the line, and finished by stamping his feet..."¹⁶ On one hand, the match was certainly a newsworthy, exciting event for the Peace Corps Thailand volunteers. On the other hand, the image muddies the image of the "Ugly American," the humble, self-sacrificing image set forth by the newsletter. The Yale boxer is literally fighting his Thai opponent, inhabiting the role of a "westerner" while fiercely engaging his Thai opponent. The paradox between volunteer images of patriotic humility and patriotic, occidental swagger establish an identity conflict prevalent throughout later Peace Corps newsletter discussions of grassroots engagement.

This conflicted understanding of the grassroots volunteer became nearly ubiquitous in newsletter discourses soon thereafter. By the mid-1960's, this organizationally focused newsletter, *The Peace Corps News*, began to publish optimistic volunteer voices, tempered by self-reflection about the ability of non-political volunteers to understand the dynamics of community organizing implied by grassroots development. Outlining this process, several articles feature volunteer reflections on two types of grassroots engagement: the do-gooder and the community organizer. In delineating this distinction, the featured volunteer Reeves explains that "A do-gooder type could easily organize a work group to build a school in a village forgotten by the ministry of education...But can you get people worked up so they'll go to the

¹⁶ Peace Corps, *The Volunteer* 1, no. 7 (1962), 1.

ministry office, which is two days away, and sit there until they get a teacher for the school?"¹⁷ Here, the sentiments about the grassroots volunteer role run close to the idea of the Ugly American in that they emphasize the idea that the development agent does not *do* the development. And yet, one line later the newsletter editor notes that "Getting ideas accepted, sometimes subtly with a sentence stated at the right time, sometimes blatantly with loudspeakers and movie projectors - that is the job of the Peace Corps Volunteers."¹⁸ This editorial analysis of the volunteer's position lacks a consciousness about critique set forth in the *Ugly American*. If Peace Corps volunteers are showing films and using loudspeakers to argue their perspectives, how do these devices promote a respectful conversation between equals? The leadership role expected by the editors of *The Volunteers* muddles the agency of the local actors participating in these projects. Furthermore, the ideal places high expectations on the organizing skills of the volunteers themselves; they must possess a high level of charisma, language ability, and understanding of the political organizing process to enact either scheme.

Other articles in *The Peace Corps News* specifically identify the problem of volunteers with little or no organizing experience, let alone the cultural solidarity to communicate with peoples at the grassroots. In the telling article "Culture Shock and the Peace Corps," the editors shed light on the challenges of working in another culture, noting that "The answer is always the same, 'We shall overcome.' But to say so doesn't make it so, and the hard reality of actually getting out and doing something usually hits Peace Corps Volunteers pretty hard."¹⁹ Despite the visions of grassroots organizing above, the distance between aspirations and reality were

¹⁷ Peace Corps, *Peace Corps News* 4, no. 5 (1965), 1 & 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

undeniable.²⁰ As noted by founding Peace Corps architect Warren Wiggins, "We still have the old goals of service, fulfilling needs in underdeveloped countries...but we desperately want to display this new viewpoint of social and political consciousness, the affinity in our Washington building for campus thought."²¹ Though the cultural divide faced by volunteers apparently stymied grassroots organizing, the influential Wiggins saw the ideal volunteer as a politically conscious figure, a person intellectually engaged in social justice issues in his or her own context. Moreover, Wiggins' Peace Corps was aligned with this process as an organization. But this same experiment with increasing the political consciousness heralded by Wiggins would soon test the organizational allegiances.

By the 1970's, Wiggins got his wish, at least in the pages of *The Peace Corps Volunteer*. No one could doubt the political edge present in volunteer voices of letters published on the cover pages of the newsletter. But the voices were not necessarily calling for an activist edge in volunteer activities overseas, but within the agency headquarters themselves. In a scathing estimation of the organization, one former volunteer letter suggested Peace Corps' own complicity in serving US interests as a US governmental organization, stating that "a majority of Volunteers and former Volunteers are dismayed by the fact that American foreign policy is largely insensitive to the needs, both economic and political, of developing nations...the omission of such an important aspect from a discussion of the Peace Corps' problems tends to increase the credibility of the Committee of Returned Volunteers' position that the agency be

²⁰ Voices in *The Peace Corps Volunteer* echoed the need for political consciousness. In discussing a Peace Corps volunteer abilities to connect as local organizers in project in Guatemala, one volunteer noted that "...during a previous regime, co-operatives were used for political purposes...Add to this 35 Peace Corps Volunteers, ill-trained in 'marginal efficiency' and then sent as co-operative 'specialists,' and the situation becomes explosive. Somehow a measure of success was attained, but at a terrific cost of time." The tone of these types of descriptions, prevalent in *The Peace Corps Volunteer* during this period, highlights the challenge of engaging in cultural situation wrought with a political history and the utter lack of experience in the volunteer specialists. See Peace Corps, *The Peace Corps Volunteer* June-July(1965)., 5.

²¹ Ibid, 5.

abolished.”²² This letter referred to Committee of Returned Volunteers (CRV), a group opposed to Peace Corps’ possible place in a “World-wide pacification program.”²³ Attacking the Peace Corps in a more specific way, another political volunteer letter raises the dubious relationship between the Peace Corps, the US military, and the former Peace Corps country Vietnam. The volunteer notes: “At a time when that portion of America which the Peace Corps once proudly claimed as its own speaks...against the invasion and destruction of yet another developing country it is incredible that on Connecticut Avenue it is business as usual...well-paid Peace Corps bureaucrats work silently in offices decorated with pictures of Asian children.”²⁴ The writer’s insight into the distance between using the image of Asian children and action towards helping them is striking. Evident in both letters, the Peace Corps volunteers *were* becoming politically savvy. Galvanized by a push for greater political awareness, volunteers may (or may not) have become more effective as grassroots organizers. But at the same time, they were challenging the vision and mission of the Peace Corps. How indeed could the Peace Corps operate within the US government yet remain on the side of the marginal people served by the agency?

Instead of facing these questions, broad organizational changes under the Nixon administration eliminated the newsletters and began to edge away from allowing volunteer voices in agency newsletters. These participatory experiments came to end in 1971, with the institution of ACTION, an umbrella organization folding multiple domestic volunteer

²² Peace Corps, *The Peace Corps Volunteer* May-June(1970)., 1.

²³ Stanley Meisler labels the organization as a “militant organization,” though little evidence exists for this classification. See Meisler and Gift in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps (Library of Congress), *When the world calls : the inside story of the Peace Corps and its first fifty years.*, 102.

²⁴ Corps., 1.

organizations into one umbrella agency.²⁵ At the start of this transition, the 1971 editions of *The Peace Corps Volunteer* newsletter echoed sentiments from an earlier, pre-political era. In the place of provocative volunteer letters, narratives return to focusing on heroic, romantic examples of model grassroots volunteers. In one vignette, the newsletter highlights the then longest serving Peace Corps Iran volunteer, noting that “When you meet Barkley Moore, you don’t realize instantly that he is truly the Beautiful American. It takes a minute or two... ‘Barkley is really a legend in Iran...A sort of magic goes on between him and other people...’”²⁶ This type of volunteer image sets a strong precedent for the ideal volunteer. In place of the humble Ugly American waiting for host country nationals to contact them, the *Peace Corps Volunteer* editors imagine a heroic, gregarious “Beautiful American.” The article continues to note this volunteer’s school building projects, followed by a hero’s sendoff when he finally left Iran. This new model, one that would dominate later newsletter discourses defining the grassroots volunteer, emphasized project leadership in development, not the social activism and community organizing for empowerment of the late 1960’s.

Following this efflorescence of volunteer voices, the political atmosphere in the Peace Corps newsletters became considerably muted. With the re-organization of the Peace Corps under ACTION, the *ACTION Update* newsletter became a primary textual mode for disseminating Peace Corps news amid news of other national volunteer agencies. Here, descriptions of volunteers are rare, particularly in relation to their grassroots activities. However, the ebb of conversation in these newsletters brought relatively staid, yet important waves of introspection about issues such as volunteer race and gender. In the February 1978 edition of the

²⁵ The Peace Corps remained under ACTION until President Jimmy Carter granted the organization autonomy in 1979 and then an independent organization in 1981. For a political discussion surrounding these organizational changes, see T. Zane Reeves, *The politics of the Peace Corps & VISTA* (Tuscaloosa, Ala.: University of Alabama Press, 1988).

²⁶ Peace Corps, *The Peace Corps Volunteer* IX, no. 3 & 4 March-April (1971), 12.

ACTION Update, for example, the issue of minority intake surfaces in an article on a report statistics from the previous year, noting that "...there were 326 "racial minority" trainees and volunteers in all peace corps programs. This is 5.2 percent of the total volunteer strength as of that date....'intended to...allow for the baselines of and comparison with U.S. population racial composition...in order to meet objectives for more balanced recruitment efforts."²⁷ While this type of volunteer article steers wide of any discussions of the central Peace Corps mission, engagement in development at the grassroots level, the organization was still clearly engaging in organizational contemplation. Missing from the article is the fact that the volunteers themselves, as representatives of the US, did not actually represent America. Though these newsletters shed little light in many ways on the Peace Corps' understanding of the grassroots volunteer experience, pamphlets and brochures from this period provide a clearer picture. In the brochure *Peace Corps: One Part of ACTION*, for example, the editors take a reserved attitude towards grassroots interactions. With this tone, the editors embed an unnamed volunteer's voice into their recruitment pitch, stating that "...a Volunteer finds his work only a small part of a much larger effort, where the chances for success may not be known for years. Deciding what to do and how to do it, in such uncertain circumstances can be a frustrating experience."²⁸ Though the expectations are set unambiguously low through this description, the volunteer, not the volunteer's host community has agency in this description. The grassroots volunteer experience is one of listening and reflection but also action, as the parent organization's title suggests.

With the restoration of the Peace Corps as autonomous agency in 1979 and an independent federal agency in 1981, the Peace Corps organizational leaders chose not to restore the critical voice of Peace Corps volunteers in the next incarnation of organization-wide

²⁷ Peace Corps, *ACTION Update* February(1978)., 8.

²⁸ Peace Corps, "Peace Corps: A Part of ACTION," ed. Peace Corps (Washington, DC1973)., 8.

newsletters. Remarkably, even after twenty years of service, the organization once again drew from fictional sources for inspiration of the grassroots volunteer. On the front page of an edition of the 1984 *Peace Corps Times*, for example, the Peace Corps director Loret Miller Ruppe explicitly draws from an unspecified literary account of a community development volunteer to address the volunteers. The literary parallels to the *Ugly American* and example of “The Beautiful American” above are arresting:

Recently I received a copy of a story from a friend of mine. In a way, the story was a eulogy of a young man who had died long before his time...It was paean to virtue and goodness...a story about something of the light in the world...The accomplishments of that young man and the legacy he left to the people whose lives he touched reminded me a great deal about what you as Peace Corps Volunteers are doing. He didn't move mountains. He made stone fences. He didn't walk on water, but he played an important role in ensuring that the water people drank was clean and pure. He was very simply, living proof that an individual plays an important role...The person I mentioned in the beginning of this letter made his contribution on a person to person basis. That is what you do. And you do it so well.²⁹

Strikingly, Ruppe's letter ends by defining the role of the Peace Corps volunteer. Peace Corps volunteers are akin to personal trainers working for development at the grassroots. The idea of “organizers” is noticeably absent in this letter. Yet the examples of water purification and fence building suggest a certain amount of collective action. Do people of the developing world truly need help with the first extolled example, building fences? The contrast between the mythic moving mountains and walking on water and the work of volunteers obscures the parallel myth of the Beautiful/Ugly American. Though the expectations of the Peace Corps volunteer was considerably mollified on this person to person ideal, at least in part, the virtue attributed this task is remarkable. Just as this fictionalized biography of an unnamed young man was a “paean to virtue and goodness,” the volunteer lives in this reality, “on a person to person basis.” The underlying assumption that volunteers' motives are *that pure* is at least fanciful, if not entirely

²⁹ Peace Corps, *The Peace Corps Times* May-June(1984), 1.

false. How could anyone live up to an example set in a eulogy of a partially fictionalized development here? Once again, the Peace Corps understanding—the director of the program no less—of volunteer work at the grassroots entered squarely into the realm of myth.

The *Peace Corps Times* depicted grassroots volunteer work in a relatively subdued way throughout the 1990's and 2000's, continuing the focus on the one-on-one role of grassroots volunteers. In the winter 1995 edition of the newsletter, the article "Friends: Counterparts are More than Just Co-workers," an Office of Communications editor, Patricia Cunningham, encapsulates this experience through an extended description of several model counterpart relationships followed by the mention of "rare failures."³⁰ After several descriptions of volunteers receiving cultural skills from their counterparts, the article transitions into the ways volunteers work with counterparts, stating: "Volunteers aren't the only ones who benefit from the counterpart system—the rewards are mutual. And from their newfound American colleagues, counterparts gain invaluable guidance and much needed encouragement—the stuff of the heart of the Peace Corps mission."³¹ Here, descriptions of Peace Corps volunteers as heroic models take a back seat to ideas of mutuality. The emphasis lies on a relationship of cultural learning on the part of Americans and organizational and professional assistance given by the volunteer. As the "soul of the heart of the Peace Corps mission," the connotation is that the grassroots volunteer serves as a type of aid or advisor to the host country counterpart, a starkly alternate depiction compared with the understanding of volunteer as leader and organizer portrayed in earlier iterations.

³⁰ As the Peace Corps model has always used this Counterpart (CP) working relationship model, the near absence of counterparts in earlier newsletters is surprising. Earlier descriptions seem to suggest that volunteers operate quite independent of local collaboration. The narrative of the "Beautiful American" has no mention the role this volunteer's Iranian CP played in organizing various school projects and relationship building.

³¹ Peace Corps, *Peace Corps Times* Winter(1995)., 18.

Yet, equally muted are the voices of volunteers themselves. Absent is any kind of discursiveness or reflection on the agency; most of the negative volunteer letters chosen for the *The Peace Corps Times* are quite innocuous, griping about missteps such as mislabeled photographs in the newsletter.³² The letters selected have the distinct feel of “inoculation,” that the newsletter permits minor protests in order to psychologically immunize the organization from the possibility that larger issues remain undiagnosed.³³ Surely, if volunteers protest the relatively minor issues of mistaken labels, the organization has safely dealt with charges of the organization’s hand in a “US worldwide pacification scheme.” Granted, country-specific newsletters allow space for individuals to voice their concerns or differing understandings of the organization. In Mongolia, for instance, the monthly “Kindling” newsletter potentially provided a sounding board for volunteer’s questions and concerns about their grassroots development roles. While this milieu provided a potential for exchange between country-level Peace Corps staff, the dialogue between volunteers, their peers, and the organizational leaders of the Peace Corps lost or subdued a vital discursive link to the volunteers.

The arc of discourses in the various Peace Corps newsletter illustrates the vicissitudes in the organization’s understanding of volunteer roles as grassroots development workers. These volunteer archetypes ranged from the Ugly American to the political agitator to the Beautiful American to the ideal Counterpart. The variations between these ideal types are indications of organizational re-figuring of the relationship of the volunteer to the grassroots. At the same time, the depictions have a certain degree of cosmetic change. While the face of the volunteer undergoes distinct revisions, several questions remain unaddressed, yet present in all of these formulas. The representations of volunteers as occupying leadership roles are the most

³² Ibid., 4.

³³ Barthes, *Mythologies*.

inconsistent with the Peace Corps grassroots model. Granted, these volunteers may have accomplished impressive feats beneficial to community project success. The idea that these projects develop sustainable leadership skills at the community level, however, is difficult to imagine. While the latter “ideal counterpart” depictions of volunteers emphasize the need to engage with the host country nationals, the way the volunteer mitigates underlying power relations of being an American citizen and government agent in relation to a person of the developing world and perhaps equally important a person with narratives and paradigms of development and success predicated on class, culture, and national biases that do not necessarily coincide with their counterpart. Understanding the ways the Peace Corps has addressed and addresses these nagging aspects of the grassroots volunteer experience requires greater insight into a particular manifestation in ways the organization shaped the volunteer beyond media representations. The following section will elaborate on these organizational ideals by probing the motivations of actual volunteers through case study interviews from one Peace Corps country Outer Mongolia.

III.

One of the first sights Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers see upon landing for service in Mongolia is a long queue of current volunteers lined up to greet them. As the group of about sixty-five jet lagged volunteers roll their overloaded baggage carts through the tiny Chingis Khan International Airport, seasoned volunteers from the previous year’s group cheer them on, offering bits of the pungent Mongolian cheese *arul* to the unsuspecting newcomers. Like Peace Corps volunteers serving all over the world, these volunteers embark on eighteen months of volunteer service. From the time volunteers roll past the complex history and volunteer greeters in the airport, they officially start their three month Pre-Service Training (PST). Only when they

have mastered the skills such as Mongolian language and competencies such as mastering Mongolian culture through living with a host-family will they become full-fledged volunteers, a status demarcated by a swearing-in ceremony at the end of the three month training.

Much like other Peace Corps countries, Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers enter a nation with a complex history and a diverse cultural setting. The stark, natural beauty of Mongolia permeates the senses. From the rolling grassy hills of the central plains to the sandy dunes of the southern Gobi to the craggy peaks of the Western mountains, the unbroken landscape stretches endlessly. Though many Mongolians now live in concrete apartments in the capital Ulaanbaatar and the handful of other urban centers, about a third of the country lives in a circular felt covered tent called a *ger*, which provides a mobile, airy living space in the torrid summers and insulated protection during Mongolia's long, icy winters.³⁴ While Mongolians take much pride in their cultural heritage, their nation has family resemblance to many countries in the developing world: rapid urbanization, polarized income inequality, and high unemployment.³⁵ Peace Corps volunteers must learn to live in this striking cultural setting while making a positive impact on the Mongolian development process.

But before becoming Peace Corps volunteers in Mongolia, each volunteer had a particular understanding of their role as a grassroots volunteer, notions that complicate if not nullify Peace Corps organizational discourses on this relationship. In my 44 interviews with Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers, I came across a diversity of reasons cited for service. But

³⁴ In interviews, Peace Corps volunteers often cite National Geographic articles as sources for their understanding of contemporary Mongolian culture. One example includes: Don Belt, "The Urban Clan of Genghis Khan," *National Geographic Magazine* 2011.

³⁵ According to International Labor Organization statistics, for instance, "Mongolia's labor force at 1.577 million people of whom 27% were unemployed. Of those who were employed, 53 percent were own-account and unpaid family workers, 14.1 percent workers in public sector, and the rest paid employees (40 percent) and employers (9 percent)." ILO, "Decent Work Programme 2006-2011," (International Labour Office, 2011), 5.

notably, few of the volunteers mentioned their roles as grassroots volunteers as motivations for service. Unlike the selfless images in much of the Peace Corps organizational rhetoric, volunteers have deeply set attitudes and agendas upon their entry into the program.³⁶ Though some volunteers echoed concerns of the organization, others voiced completely alternative or even oppositional reasons.

In some cases, volunteers asserted political reasons for joining the organization. According to one English education volunteer, “I have abandoned a legal career to be here. I wanted to live abroad for an extended period of time. I wanted to do service for my country...I was inspired by Barak Obama’s election. I wanted to help restore America’s reputation in the world.”³⁷ This volunteer embodies two organizational concerns at once. The description envisions a restoration of US standing as a benevolent status, going so far as to claim a particular election as the genesis for joining the organization. In this way, the volunteer work of the Peace Corps is equated with the United States’ image and presence abroad, which the volunteer indicated diminished by recent US military activities in Afghanistan and Iraq. This volunteer and others held the idea that a vital role of the Peace Corps was in fact political. For these volunteers, the tarnished national image required volunteers to humanize and add complexity to already established negative impressions of the United States. Further, the idea of personal sacrifice, indicated in the line “I have abandoned a legal career,” is prominent in the assessment. The lessons I observed in this volunteer’s lessons indicated a great deal of autonomy and personal ownership in lessons. The volunteer was clearly at the head of the classroom, with a Mongolian counterpart arriving nearly twenty minutes late to the class and then inexplicitly

³⁶ Peace Corps Mongolia takes in one group each summer. The following interviews came from volunteers who had served from one to three months or a year to a year and three months.

³⁷ Interview with a Peace Corps Mongolia volunteer, September 28th, 2011.

translating the volunteer's English lesson into Mongolian. The volunteer's patriotic notions of self-sacrifice for American image seemed intertwined with the enactment of duties, quite similar to the "Beautiful American" ideal, taking charge of situation, being the light and inspiration for Mongolian teachers.

Most of the volunteers in the study sample, however, did not join the organization with explicit political ends. For many of these volunteers, the cultural and travel experience ranked first in their reasons for service. One volunteer noted that "I guess what I wanted to join the Peace Corps...to be exposed to a different culture...my goal is to find something different...To go and do something totally different off the beaten path..."³⁸ This volunteer's desire for experiencing the *other* resonated in the travel aspirations of other volunteers. According to another volunteer, "I had an interest in traveling to Central Asia for a long time, and Peace Corps was one of the best options to do that on a long-term basis. It would've been possible to come here as a backpacker for a summer, but I wanted to spend a long period. And I wanted to continue my vocation, which is teaching."³⁹ Here, the volunteer indicates specific travel interests in conjunction with professional goals. Notably, the other consideration was becoming a backpacker. In other words, Peace Corps was a cost-effective vehicle for travel and that granted free access to a cultural immersion experience. Some volunteers similarly noted a desire for a non-American living experience. One volunteer wanted to "be a Peace Corps volunteer because I wanted the experience of living in another country, but not living like an American. I wanted to live like real people live outside of America. I wanted to see a different way of life."⁴⁰ These reasons indicate a specific understanding of the Peace Corps as an entry point into a grassroots

³⁸ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 12th, 2011

³⁹ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 18th, 2011

⁴⁰ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 22nd, 2011

experience, but not necessarily an interest in development per se. These mostly young college graduates had a great deal of enthusiasm, but very little or no actual professional experience as teachers or organizers to provide assistance to their counterparts.

A fair number of volunteers approximated the image of the “Beautiful American” in their motivations for joining the Peace Corps. As recalled by one volunteer, “Sometime in middle school my friend and I decided that we were going to do Peace Corps...Volunteering was something I was always interested in whether doing the Special Olympics scoring college. I was in a service organization where you are required to do at least 25 hours of service week. It just kind of stuck with me.”⁴¹ As evident here, some volunteers do represent their motivations as benevolent acts. Yet other volunteers cited self-serving reasons for joining. Several volunteers noted financial or job uncertainty as primary motivations for becoming volunteers. One volunteer revealed that “My parents told me that this was the best option, but there was no way is going to do it....So [I found out that] some of my grad school loans would actually decrease if I did this. So I want to be an art school teacher when I get back, and I definitely need a big kick to get into any kind of art school program. So I started to love the idea of stripping away some of the conveniences: hot water...”⁴² Here, the volunteer saw the Peace Corps experience as both a way to decrease his financial burden after school and bolster a future job application as a teacher. Together, these examples illustrate a quite mixed relationship between program enrollment, volunteerism, and other incentives.

Only one volunteer interviewed possessed a litany of organizing credentials, saying that “I was a skilled tradesmen and the union representative I worked as a union representative for a

⁴¹ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 4th, 2011

⁴² Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 22nd, 2011

few years...I was teaching as an adjunct to the University. My life was already much like it is now. I do volunteer work. I organize and work for national healthcare. So in a lot of ways I was already living the life of a Peace Corps volunteer...”⁴³ In this instance, the volunteer actually possessed many of the grassroots organizing skills envisioned by the Peace Corps in the late 1960’s. In addition, this particular volunteer possessed a particular education and political awareness of both US and Mongolian politics not evident in other volunteer interviews. Notably, this same volunteer expressed the most reservations about Peace Corps training methods and organizational philosophy; this volunteer refused to attend the Interim Service Training (IST) follow-up portion of the training. In contrast, most volunteers seemed unaware that the organization might have connection to some ulterior political motives. One volunteer expressed the reason for joining the Peace Corps, “...I wanted to do it through an organization that had no agenda. I know that there's a lot of organizations that do work overseas and do volunteer work but have an outlying agenda, whether it's Christian or something like that.”⁴⁴ The notion that a US governmental organization has no particular agenda while working in the developing world highlights a level of unwarranted acceptance and trust in a governmental international development organization. As these examples suggest, the distance among volunteers’ critical awareness of the politics of development is quite drastic.

Just as the multitude of motivations and ability levels in Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers shatter the images of “Beautiful American,” actual interviews with these volunteers call into question later newsletter representations focusing on the counterpart system. Admittedly, many volunteers expressed warm feelings about their Mongolian counterparts, despite admitting some cultural differences in work styles. One volunteer said, “It’s great. I’m

⁴³ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 13th, 2011

⁴⁴ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 20th, 2011

friends. I only have three counterparts. Sometimes I get frustrated because of the ways that Mongolians work. Being on time is an issue. When I want to plan ahead for the event we have in six weeks, they think we have six weeks...because I have a very good relationship with my counterparts, I feel like we can talk.”⁴⁵ Here the volunteer clearly partners well with the Mongolian counterparts, with the important note that they have negotiations based on friendship. Though these relationships may be based on discussion, however, they do not necessarily mean that the Peace Corps volunteer and the counterpart team teach or work together. Several volunteers noted that the counterpart system becomes a division of labor, meaning that the Peace Corps volunteer becomes a substitute for a Mongolian who normally performs this position. One volunteer noted that “My school is pretty good in comparison to what I hear about others. They *try* to lesson plan, but the way they lesson plan is so different. They just go through the book and say you do this one, I’ll do this one...”⁴⁶ As indicated by this volunteer, a clear separation between being colleague and enacting collaborative planning or team-teaching.

Other volunteers indicated even clearer divisions of labor. One particular challenge to the idea of the grassroots volunteer is the way host country nationals understood their roles. The problem of communicating the idea of volunteer as professional developed verses free employee is evident in several volunteer responses. One such volunteer stated that “My counterpart and I keep different schedules she does the bureaucratic side of this work and I do a lot of the practical everyday kind of work which is actually meeting and being with teachers, she does a lot of the paperwork is required and there's a lot of it in the Mongolian education system. And I don't have anything to do with that...”⁴⁷ This volunteer was putting on an education seminar at the time of the interview, and yet the Mongolian counterpart was absent. In these instances, the long term

⁴⁵ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 5th, 2011

⁴⁶ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 23rd, 2011

⁴⁷ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 13th, 2011

educational benefit of the counterpart relationship is far from the ideals presented in the *Peace Corps Times*. What pedagogical impact will this volunteer's absence leave after his counterpart has focused on administrative duties for two years?

In volunteer comments about their training in counterpart relationships, several voiced their perception that the Peace Corps training did not adequately address issues of grassroots relationships. Volunteers with experience outside of Peace Corps were the most vocal in their criticism. One volunteer stated that:

... I think the Peace Corps could do a better job. Coming from my experience as a union organizer, I think that Peace Corps could do much more about training people to keep things sustainable and to organize things leadership succession things like that they can talk about. But there's just things about organizing things that come natural for me with my experience to you as a union organizer. I'm not really sure that they teach those skills-I think some people have the skills. But I don't think they address the skills specifically at PST or anything like that. And I think it would be more helpful if they did. Community needs assessment-oh God that thing-that thing was a piece of shit.⁴⁸

Admittedly, other volunteers mentioned some training on the idea of sustainability. But the fact remains that the most experienced volunteers left the training with frustrations about the ways volunteers form these counterpart relationships. In the interview data, the volunteers with the most collaborative experience, some exceptions aside, were based on circumstance more often than any one volunteer's appreciation of their role.

IV.

Comparing the ideal volunteer types found in the Peace Corps newsletters and the actual volunteers in Peace Corps Mongolia presents illustrates little evidence of overlap between the two groups. Even if the real volunteer can approximate the work set out by the newsletter, the

⁴⁸ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 14th, 2011

Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers' motivational complexity shoots far outside the newsletter's fictional and factual examples. Whereas the examples of the Ugly and Beautiful American types suggested a personal integrity and volunteer spirit motivating their service, most Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers cited a personal interest in travel, adventure, employment, and personal gain as motivations for their volunteerism. While the newsletter types of both leader organizer and ideal counterpart underscored the skills of the volunteer to lead community projects or pair well with and support a counterpart, the motives of the volunteers themselves do not necessarily coincide with these images.⁴⁹ This lack of cohesion between these groups raises two questions. First, do the organizational leaders fail to understand their own volunteers? In other words, is the presentation of volunteer types in the *Peace Corps Times* fiction? Second, do the volunteer responses indicate a deficit in working as grassroots volunteers? That is, aside from the rare volunteer who stated an overwhelming interest in volunteerism or community organizing, do volunteers have the critical skills necessary to both understand and empathize with their counterparts and communities?

In answer to the first question, the Peace Corps has probably always known that volunteer motives have not aligned with organizational ideals for some time. Though "free travel" was a mantra among Peace Corps volunteers in this study, this reason does not discount the potential for these volunteers to participate in advocacy and empowerment at the grassroots level. At the same time, the organizational training must not only teach these volunteers, more often than not liberal arts majors, vocational skills during their training, but also a theoretical understanding of counterpart empowerment, organizational skills, and forming relationships to meet the archetypes illustrated in their newsletters. Further, the gulf between the newsletter

⁴⁹ Chapter 3 will give a more in-depth analysis of the role of counterparts in development.

examples and the volunteers highlight the fact that the Peace Corps' goals and actual volunteers suffer from misalignment about their relationships at the grassroots. While the organization sends an ambiguous depiction of grassroots relationships, fluctuating from emphasizing various self-congratulatory volunteer accomplishments to modesty, volunteers understandably have their own agendas and narratives for volunteering.

Clearly, not all of the volunteers understood their role in a critical light. Politically driven reasons for volunteering, for instance, seem out of step with the grassroots aspects of this development organization. In restoring the benevolent face of the US, the volunteer takes such a strong international symbolic presence that the role of a grassroots volunteer would challenge the role of grassroots advocacy. The disparate interests, local and global, would certainly make strange bedfellows. For volunteers serving for self-interested reasons, their roles and relationships to grassroots concerns are uncertain. However, their benevolence is certainly not inexorably tied to their counterparts or community concerns, as suggested by the Peace Corps newsletters. Instead, their concerns rest firmly only their personal aspirations, which are safely beyond the scope of their counterparts.

In terms of the counterpart relationship, the Peace Corps own statistics suggest that volunteers did make an impact on skills training. The Peace Corps agency compiles annual volunteer feedback statistics on a range of issues including training, satisfaction with in-country staff, and the ways volunteers evaluate their achievement of organizational goals as grassroots volunteers. In the *2011 Annual Volunteer Survey*, two telling data sets indicate an overall positive grassroots development experience.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Data from Peace Corps, "2011 Annual Volunteer Survey," (Washington, DC2011)., 18.

	Not at all	Minimally	Adequately	Considerably	Exceptionally	Total
Build local capacity for sustainability (Goal 1)	3%	17%	34%	34%	12%	6665
Transfers skills to host country individuals and organizations (Goal 1)	2%	12%	29%	39%	19%	6689

To the queries on building capacity for sustainability and transferring skills to host country nationals, many volunteers reported adequate or quite positive outcomes in the most cases. Despite these positive assessments, a full 20% of volunteers in this large sample reported minimal or no sustainable outcomes from their relationships with community members. Likewise, 14% reported minimal or no transfer of skills to the host country nationals. The general nature of the survey questions fact that many volunteers had little work experience from which to judge their own success as compared to another experience, the reliability of the figures at the positive end of the survey should be viewed with some skepticism. Even if the data is accurate, the inability of a fairly large proportion of volunteers to report low sustainability and skills transfer to their counterparts and community raises a flag on this relationship, prompting further investigation into the ways volunteers and organizational leaders could better communicate their understanding of roles and current limitations of grassroots volunteers. Though not without great organizational resistance, this understanding would stem from a shedding of the political theater inherent in newsletter discourses, followed by a restoration of an

organization-wide forum for discussion of the relationship between the grassroots experience and volunteers.



A Peace Corps volunteer training to become an agricultural advisor in the 1960s.¹

¹ Photo courtesy of the National Archives, College Park Maryland.

CHAPTER 3

Above and Below:

Reaching for the Grassroots in Peace Corps Development Initiatives

“There’s still constant debate among many layers of volunteers and staff on whether the Peace Corps is a development organization or a cultural exchange organization. I believe it is a development organization with a cultural component.”

--Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Country Director, November 3rd, 2011

“It’s really hard coming at this from a non-imperialistic viewpoint because I see so of our task as culture sharing. But it’s really hard not saying, well here’s the American way, here’s how you do it. Let’s change your school or health system to match ours, so that part I’m finding to be a little difficult.”

-- Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 15th, 2011

Peace Corps existence is predicated on the intersection of two nebulous, contested concepts: “grassroots” and “development.” Whereas chapter two bracketed the idea of the grassroots volunteer,” illustrating the organizational confusion about this idea, this chapter enters an even murkier area. As elucidated in the first chapter, the very idea of “development” has a host of spirited proponents and detractors. Adding a government grassroots volunteer to this idea appends further complexity to this debate centered on the perceptions and realities of power inherent in this exchange. As part of the US government, the Peace Corps has not escaped the grand economic and social narratives coinciding with American economic and political interests. This chapter illustrates the ways that hierarchical organizational model muddles the Peace Corps grassroots development claims primarily through the example of Mongolia followed by a brief excursus into Peace Corps Africa for greater historical context.

Even before the Peace Corps entered the ranks of international development organizations in 1961 and established Peace Corps Mongolia in 1991, the field was already populated to some extent with players from wealthy nations. The wholly US and European invention came into being shortly after WWII. In the case of the United States, President Harry S. Truman's proposed the first international development scheme the "Point Four Plan" in his 1949 inaugural address, later passed into law as the Foreign Economic Assistance Act in 1950. Budgeted at 25 million dollars, the plan ushered in a new era of US economic interest in non-industrial economies.² The US government's development rationale stemmed from two concerns, both connected with an increased American global presence following the international activities of the Second World War. The ideological Cold War between the USSR and the US became a strong narrative arc, framing US international aid benevolence against that of the Soviet Union. The philosophical reasons, however, did not stand apart from the increased awareness of the low standards of living outside of Europe and the US. The war exposed Americans to the glaring disparities between their country and much of the rest, many of which US politicians perceived as "fixable" through technology and innovation. As Truman noted, "For the first time in history, humanity possesses the knowledge and skill to relieve suffering of these people. The United States is pre-eminent among nations in the development of industrial and scientific techniques...our imponderable resources in technical knowledge are constantly growing and are inexhaustible."³ Even in these early formulations, international development reached far beyond the scope of material re-distribution. Knowledge was seen as a far greater gift.

² Sergei Y. Shenin, *The United States and the Third World : the origins of postwar relations and the Point Four program* (Huntington, N.Y.: Nova Science Publishers, 2000).

³ George V. Allen, State United States. Dept. of, and President United States, *The President's point four program. [The President's] recommendations [for technical assistance program for underdeveloped areas sent] to the Congress. [Where do we stand on point four?]* ([Washington: Office of Public Affairs, Dept. of State, 1949).

But the delivery of this knowledge came packaged with cultural assumptions and colonial paradigms. In the imagination of wealthy Euro-American countries, materially poor countries entered a rough dichotomy of “developed,” “underdeveloped” and “developing” nations, later reimagined as the global North and South. Though in many ways the Euro-American consciousness of the world had expanded from global conflict, these categories continued antiquated cognitive patterns of the colonized and the colonizers, wealthy and impoverished, industrialized and pre-modern.⁴ In grouping quite disparate countries in one rubric, development agencies flattened important distinctions, histories and relationships that shape that country’s citizens to understand and overcome issues of food security, public health, agriculture, and education. These top-down seed paradigms contribute to self-serving development solutions, reflecting Euro-American interests in terms of power, culture and economic gain.

As a bottom-up, grassroots development program, the Peace Corps in Mongolia and other host-countries ostensibly precludes these narratives from reigning decisions about development. The volunteers ideally work in a cooperative fashion within a community, serving to support and empower their counterparts in their field of work and within their community. However, organizational discourses suggest that certain paradigms, particularly in the field of economics, bear family resemblances to grand development narratives produced by US scholars. In post-development scholar Arturo Escobar’s work, for instance, he notes that solutions tend to rationalize Euro-American economic interests in the developing world. For Escobar, one of the most influential discourses in development economics is the “vicious cycle of poverty,” an economic model developed by Nurske and Lewis in the early 1950s. In their examination of the “third-world,” they found that “poverty is produced by a circular constellation of forces that links

⁴ Maggie Black, *The No Nonsense Guid to Development* (Oxford, UK: New International Publications LTD., 2009), 17.

lack of food and ill health with low work capacity, low income, and back to lack of food.”⁵ The solution resided in an enlarged market, one in which Euro-American capital was the base ingredient. In another case, W. Arthur Lewis’ model of the “dual economy” posited a division between modern and traditional socio-economic spheres. In evaluating this theory, Escobar states that “Lewis’ construction equates tradition with backwardness, a burden to be disposed of as quickly as possible and a part of the economy with nothing to contribute to the process of development.”⁶ This theoretical amalgam created a basis for post-WWII development economics discourse, a dominating explanation that devalued local “traditional” economic activity while asserting the centrality of Euro-American capital investment in the solution. As demonstrated below, the Peace Corps ideas of development in Mongolia partly rely on the notion of traditional and modern economies and the idea of integrating national markets into global exchanges.

A later prominent economic theoretical narrative neo-liberalism, currently quite influential in Mongolia, influenced and had a symbiotic relationship with the Peace Corps’ ideas of development.⁷ The political-economic theory of neo-liberalism suggests that “human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”⁸ Because this doctrine espouses a weak state planning and the primacy of market consumers, social and cultural concerns became less important than market interests, which were

⁵ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering development : the making and unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton studies in culture/power/history (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995)., 76.

⁶ Ibid., 78.

⁷ Though chapter 6 will explore neo-liberalism and Mongolian economic history in more depth, Morris Rossabi’s scathing critique of neo-liberal economics in Mongolia should be noted here: Morris Rossabi, *Modern Mongolia : from khans to commissars to capitalists* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

⁸ David Harvey, *A brief history of neoliberalism* (Oxford, England ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005)., 3.

controlled by Euro-American states.⁹ Under this paradigm, nations financed by Euro-American that fail to repay their high interest loans must restructure their government policy to receive bailouts. Common solutions include the privatization of national resources “austerity reforms,” or cutting social services such as health care and education. As US backed banks demanded these cuts, Peace Corps volunteers in countries such as Mongolia.in part fill the gap left by the decimation of national social services.

Unlike economic policy solutions to empowerment of these nations, the Peace Corps’ entry into development took a bottom up, grassroots approach. Whereas other US development agencies such as USAID engaged in development through project based, top-down approaches to development, the Peace Corps would emphasize new type of development, embedding skilled volunteers in communities. With this understanding, the organization connected the idea of development work (“manpower”) to ideas such as “community based,” “cooperative,” and “grassroots.” In some ways, this rhetoric is factual. Volunteers do in fact work in marginalized communities and in many cases marginalized people of a community. But between the spaces of rhetoric and reality, two questions cloud these labels. One important aspect is the locus of power. Whereas theorists of grassroots movements and organizations emphasize the collectivist notion of power, the Peace Corps literature de-emphasizes this notion. The second important aspect is interest, that is, whose interest grassroots development should prioritize. As a US governmental organization, certain aspects of the organization’s understanding of grassroots development fail to discard theoretical economic narratives and private interests espoused by the US government.

In order to better understand the vicissitudes of the organization’s flirtations with these development discourses, this chapter will first focus on the institutional literature first in

⁹ For a wider ranging discussion of this process, see Peet and Hartwick, *Theories of development : contentions, arguments, alternatives*.

Mongolia and then on agricultural sector development in Africa. Through a historical review of the Peace Corps' fascination with the "Green Revolution," this exploration reveals an institutional discourse quite distant from the bottom-up ideals of other grassroots organizations. A discourse analysis of the institution's archival literature highlights an early understanding of leadership power structure coming from above, not from below. A comparison to Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers' understandings of grassroots development will further highlight a lack of connection between the ways volunteer's understand this phenomenon and the organization's development discourse.

II.

While providing manpower for schools, health clinics, and community development organizations, Peace Corps Mongolia also supports certain development initiatives the volunteers called "task forces" not necessarily grounded in currently serving volunteers' host-communities. Alcohol abuse is one global issue the Peace Corps Mongolia task force chose to address in 2011. Admittedly, alcohol abuse in Mongolia is an undeniable challenge for the country. In a survey conducted by World Vision of 7,000 Mongolian teens between July and September 2009, the data highlights several unsettling realities in the lives of Mongolian teenagers. In this sample, 10.2% of respondents reported drinking alcohol 2 to 4 times a week, 5.2% drank two to three times a week, and 2.6% imbibed alcohol more than four times a week, with teenage boys reporting consumption at almost twice that of teenage girls.¹⁰ These alarming statistics reveal nothing short of health crisis among teenage Mongolians. In response, Peace Corps Mongolia helped fund a combination drama and testimonial video productions to inform teenage Mongolians about the causes and consequences of alcohol abuse.

¹⁰ World Vision & The Association Against Alcoholism and Drug Abuse, "Survey determining alcohol use, its trends and awareness of the effects of alcohol abuse among teenagers, 2009," (Ulaanbaatar 2009), 12.

Peace Corps' presence is prominent as the video "After Sunset" begins. The Peace Corps logo appears, fading in center screen then dissolving to reveal the two executive producers, former Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers . Then, Mongolian hip hop artist Battsengel gives a short speech, contrasting the greatness of proud Mongolian culture and history to the current state of decline among drunken teenagers. As Battsengel notes, this film depicts a "story that could happen at any school."¹¹ The plot is a classic, yet edgy teen tragedy, with a love relationship gone wrong followed by four teenage boys, through personal frustrations and peer pressure, end up at a Mongolian bar. Their experimentation with vodka leads to a drunken fight with older men, trouble with the police, and the hospitalization of the most academically inclined friend. The message of the film is quite clear in the closing scene, as the bandaged wrapped boy intones "because of this bitter water, people lose their lives."¹² Even more striking than the actual drama, however, are actual interviews with Mongolian teens affected by alcohol in the latter part of the film. One teenage girl reveals that she fears her own home because her drunken father whereas a teenage boy describes his own drunken violence and feelings of rage. Through these narrative strategies, interspersed by Battsengel's narration and a final hip hop video, the film makes a sophisticated, variegated appeal to teenage Mongolians through drama, statistics, pop culture, and personal testimonies.

Though the film has several arguably positive messages, Peace Corps volunteers I interviewed did not utilize this top-down development project in their communities for a variety of reasons. In one focus group interview discussion on the Peace Corps Mongolia task-force projects, the volunteers noted an interest, but had no firm plans to use "After Sunset" or other pre-packaged consciousness raising programs. According to these volunteers [1-3], "[1] the

¹¹ Kiley Larson and Kyle Olson, "After Sunset," (Ulaanbaatar: Peace Corps, 2010).

¹² Ibid.

alcohol thing has a DVD format. And then there's one that's more Southeast Asia-based about human trafficking. The alcohol one was made by Peace Corps volunteers. [2]. We crapped out on that. [3.] I know, there is so much stuff going on. [1]. I had lost two counterparts... [2]. And there's the STD one. [3] STI. No one wants to learn about that over Valentine's Day..."¹³ The three volunteers in this focus group gave a number of personal reasons for avoiding these projects, followed by lightly voiced skepticism over the STI project in particular.

Another focus group interview underscored problems with the idea of the film, labeling the attempt ill-conceived. As one of the volunteers argued, "People make an issue of the alcohol here, but what is the situation? I went to three weddings, and I don't believe people here would actually come up and say thank you for not having alcohol. I lived in Alabama for a year and would go to dry weddings and people would complain. It's not just like it's a Mongolian thing...All parallels this to George Bush and his safe sex policy...Peace Corps was telling people to completely abstain from alcohol..."¹⁴ Here, the volunteer offers two critiques of "After Sunset," one based on personal experience that the US alcohol situation is no better than that of Mongolia and that the policy mirrored failed policies in the US. Though this group of volunteers had strong negative opinions about the discourses in "After Sunset," notably, none of them had actually seen the film. In fact, before the interview, only one of these volunteers knew that the Peace Corps had sent the film to their site.

The unreceptiveness of the volunteers underscores two important points. First, the volunteers themselves heavily filter the top-down development initiatives by the Peace Corps, though arguably "After Sunset" provides Mongolian teenagers with a broader perspective of choices and information about the topic in an engaging format, volunteers decided against

¹³ Focus group interview with Peace Corps volunteers, October 12th, 2011

¹⁴ Focus group interview with Peace Corps volunteers, October 29th, 2011

initiating this project because they valued their own work more than this project or openly disagreed with the messages in or surrounding this film. Second, these responses are particularly important in evaluating the ways that Peace Corps organizational rhetoric succeeds or fails to manifest as actual grassroots development initiatives. Though the Peace Corps literature contains a number of development projects initiated by the organization, volunteers may (or may not) have ignored these forays into project-based development.

While the Peace Corps Mongolia funded film “After Sunset” contains no overt economic conflict of interest in framing “grassroots development” as an anti-alcohol campaign, not all organizational development initiatives are equally neutral. At this point, a brief geographic excursus to Africa will elucidate the ways Peace Corps top-down understanding of grassroots development advocated damaging development practices that Peace Corps volunteers may have propagated at their sites. From the founding of the US Peace Corps in 1961 until the launching of African Food System Initiative (AFSI) in 1985, the organizations’ top level administrators extolled the virtues of the so-called “Green Revolution” in Africa.¹⁵ Though some nuance exists between Peace Corps staff and other Green revolution advocates, the movement centrally argued for the benefits of pesticides, fertilizers, and high-yield seeds in order to rapidly increase food production.¹⁶ While the Green Revolution methods did in fact produce high-yielding crops in Latin America and Asia in the 1950s and 60s, they fell short on Africa continent.¹⁷ Despite compelling evidence of flaws in this approach to African agricultural development, the Peace

¹⁵ Throughout this essay, “Africa” does not unreflectively imply homogeneity within this historically, culturally, and economically diverse continent, but to highlight the way that the US Peace Corps identifies this area of the world. Between 1961 and the late 1980’s, most of the institutional literature employs the term “Africa” as a semi-differentiated, self-explanatory term referring to African countries non-contiguous with the Mediterranean region.

¹⁶ H. K. Jain, *Green revolution : history, impact and future* (Houston: Studium Press LLC, 2010).

¹⁷ David Rieff, “A Green Revolution for Africa?,” *The New York Times* 2008.

Corps pushed this corporate-backed approach, which exacerbated the subsequent social, environmental, and economic lived realities in Africa.

The Peace Corps literature on African agricultural development seamlessly connects a vision of exploding agricultural productivity and the Peace Corps mission to provide “manpower” to African communities. Intertwined with selective weighting of “manpower,” this literature historicized the end of hunger, engendering a romantic vision of solving the African food crisis through teaching and training native Africans to utilize Euro-American agricultural technologies. Movement champion Lester R. Brown’s *Faculty Paper for the Peace Corps*, for instance, begins his exuberant historical narrative of the Green Revolution stating that “A few years ago the threat of famine loomed large in the poor countries [of Asia]...Today that threat is receding, thanks to the instruction of high-yielding wheat and rice...Peace Corps has been providing the vital manpower link at the village level since 1967, helping to speed the spread of new seeds...”¹⁸ As these first lines reveal, Brown’s logic provides a romantic narrative frame, evoking an American quest to end world hunger.¹⁹ Evident in his interpretation of Peace Corps mission to provide “manpower” has a distinctly hierarchical connotation with the addition of “link” to the first Peace Corps mission statement. In this interpretation, volunteer manpower creates the trickle-down information connection from Washington, DC to rural Africa farmers.

During the Peace Corps’ entrance into the Green Revolution in Africa, forgetting colonialism was a particularly damaging. The deletion of history not only enabled a narrative of victim blaming for environmental harms, but also flattened the variegated history of the post-

¹⁸Lester. Brown, ““The Green Revolution: The Role of the Volunteer as a Manpower Link”,” *Peace Corps Faculty Paper* No. 7 (1970.), 3.

¹⁹ Here I do not understand “historical narrative” or “historical emplotment” in a general sense, but refer directly to Hayden White’s observation in *White, Tropics of discourse : essays in cultural criticism.*, that all historical renderings have prefigured narrative emplotments. In other words, before historians begin to write, they begin with a categorical understanding of events given their time and place in society, culture, and history. Therefore, they emplot events their historical narrative much the same as a novelist might use the narrative conventions of a romance, tragedy, satire, or comedy.

colonial terrain.²⁰ Because Green Revolution proponents ignored the specter of agricultural initiatives under colonial rulers from the movement's memories, the world in which movement leaders such as Lester Brown had little basis in reality. In his Peace Corps Faculty Paper, for example, Brown notes in a section titled "Seeds of Instability" that "Regional disparities, often due to geographical factors, will become particularly acute as the new seeds spread. Variations in the supply and control of water supply and the control of water resources from region to region may cause severe problems..."²¹ Granted, Brown notes here (alone) that water will be an issue for the engineered seeds of the Green Revolution. Nowhere in the reports, however, does Brown mention that many of the irrigation systems available for the "successful" Green Revolution miracles in India were the result of colonial forced labor. In Punjab, often touted as the model for Green Revolution agriculture in the developing world, the British Raj enacted a colossal colonial agriculture project in order to prepare this region for export oriented sales. As one Indian Green Revolution agriculture specialist notes, "The most significant intervention of the British in Punjab was the creation of the so-called 'canal colonies'...which brought over 10 million acres of wasteland under cultivation through canal irrigation."²² Even an area in the developing world with considerable rainfall required a mobilization of unpaid or underpaid workers years to prepare fields for Green Revolution seeds to work.²³ Without taking this

²⁰ The phrase "worldmaking" here refers to the term defined in analytic philosopher Nelson Goodman, *Ways of worldmaking* (Indianapolis,: Hackett Pub. Co., 1978)., a text that discusses the ways scholars *create* the world through their textual editorial choices. Some of Goodman's categories include composition and decomposition, weighting, ordering, deletion and supplementation, and deformation. Goodman argues that scholars cannot evade constructing a new reality within their text through these ways of arranging a narrative exposition of any given subject.

²¹ Brown, "'The Green Revolution: The Role of the Volunteer as a Manpower Link'", 9.

²² Himmat Singh, *Green revolutions reconsidered : the rural world of contemporary Punjab* (New Delhi ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001)., 25-26.

²³ As noted later in this critique, Punjab now faces considerable environmental degradation on account of the water needed for Green Revolution seeds and stress of chemical fertilizers.

colonial agricultural history in conjunction with geographical differences noted by Brown, the idea of transplanting this “success” to the African context was unrealistic.

By forgetting African and Asian colonialism in the Green Revolution rhetoric, the Peace Corps re-inscribed colonial dependency psychology onto agricultural and other volunteer-host country relationships. Whereas the mission statement of the Peace Corps plainly embraces intercultural sharing and learning, the US Peace Corps literature in the mid-1960s conveyed a patronizing tone towards African farmers. Despite the fact of French occupation for sixty years ending in 1960, for instance, the tone of the *Fifth Annual Report to Congress* was a mix of self-elation and condescension towards farmers of Niger. In an extended special Country Report entitled “Niger: The Job of Social Change,” the Peace Corps defined underdevelopment as “a lack of developmental values: enlightened self-interest, the profit motive, the work ethic, fair play, community pride.”²⁴ Who, we might wonder, is not “self-interested?” In terms of “work ethic,” just one section earlier in the report the writer notes in the section “The Virtues of Patience” that “That the Peace Corps did not leave Niger is a testament to the Peace Corps' devotion to patience.”²⁵ Apparently, living and working in Niger was too difficult for the initial volunteers and staff, a fact resulting in an extremely high attrition rate that threatened to cancel the program. In other words, American volunteers could not last more than a year in conditions that the various peoples amalgamated by colonial boundaries lived through every day. In a particularly condescending vignette entitled “Mr. Perhaps Gets Things Done,” a volunteer Peter Easton notes “that the very presence of an American Peace Corps Volunteer is 30% of the job: “The way we walk, talk, gesture, operate is an education in itself. It gives them the idea there is

²⁴ Corps, “Peace Corps 5th Annual Report to Congress.”, 22.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 22.

another way to be, another way to do.”²⁶ In this quotation, “another” is clearly a thinly veiled euphemism for “correct.” In light of generations of French colonialism in Niger, the idea that the people of Niger are unfamiliar with this kind of cultural attitude profoundly lacks insight into the history of this country.

While perpetuating certain colonial discourses in literature concerning African agriculture, the Washington Peace Corps administration embraced the ideas of an export driven, agri-business economy as the *mechanism* to raise the standard of living in African countries. In a glossy Peace Corps agricultural pamphlet from 1975, for example, the story of University of Chicago anthropologist Professor McKim Marriott in India answers the question emblazoned in the section title “Is Success Really Possible?” In Marriott’s narrative, the 850 small plot farms were forced to consolidate into 75 larger plots in 1958, followed by tube wells in 1961, and then “improved seeds” and fertilizers in 1962. Marriott then relates that “Because of the reinforcement of success, the farmers were then willing to go into debt to drill tube wells, and they now tell me that they can amortize their debts in three years... Suddenly the villagers had some cash...”²⁷ Though Marriott paints a rosy portrait of technological advancement in agriculture, albeit not the history we might imagine from his Green Revolution testimonial. Closer scrutiny, however, flattens several notable crinkles in the pages of this tale. First, what happened to the 850 small farmers when the government removed them from their land? Did the Indian government disenfranchise and/or impoverish a certain group or groups through land distribution? Are the villagers counting on uncontrollable factors such as heavy rainfall to be able to pay off their investments? As with much of the Green Revolution literature, the passage relies on an uncritical acceptance of this narrative of progress and agricultural development.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 31.

²⁷ Peace Corps, "A Place in Agriculture through the Peace Corps," (Washington, DC1971)., 19.

Part of this argument centered on the idea of job creation through Green Revolution export-driven farming practice. In reviewing a USAID report in New Delhi, Lester Brown concludes that “The Green Revolution has definitely been employment-creating. In the Punjab...there have been serious labor shortages during the April-June period when wheat is harvested, threshed, marketed, and the summer crop is sown...”²⁸ Even Brown admits that the rapid mechanization of farming to meet the labor shortage in this boom harvest cycle could be a “curse.” The social cost of this shift from “labor intensive to capital intensive” agri-business took a heavy toll on many African nations, creating rapid rural to urban migration in countries such as Nigeria, which saw the explosion of urban slums and skyrocketing unemployment.²⁹ Whereas subsistence farming requires a steady workforce throughout the year and thereby required the workforce to remain in the countryside, Green Revolution farming first relied on migrant workers only part of the year and then upon mechanization to meet the new harvest realities.³⁰

In 1985, the pervasive food crisis in Africa demanded ideological course correction from the Peace Corps in the form of a ten year initiative called the African Food Systems Initiative (AFSI). As many of the drawbacks had become apparent by this time, the Green Revolution tactics were no longer in vogue with the agency. The AFSI training manual, for instance, concludes with a sobering assessment of the African Food Crisis.

²⁸ Brown, ““The Green Revolution: The Role of the Volunteer as a Manpower Link””, 13.

²⁹ Andra P. Thakur, *An introduction to the nature and scope of rural sociology* (Benin City, Bendel State, Nigeria: McOliver, Uhimwen Partners, 1984)., 52.

³⁰ In an instructive comparison between actual outputs from Green Revolution seeds in contemporary Japanese rice farms and Ming Dynasty Chinese farming, Francesca Bray notes that while the Green Revolution seeds indeed produce almost three times the outputs in terms of food, they require three times the amount of inputs in terms of fertilizers and pesticides. Likewise, the outputs of a Chinese Ming dynasty seed crop also produced other non-food outputs such as animal feed and seeds for the next year’s crop that ensured the sustainability of the farm. In addition, the farming work cycle allowed for steady continual employment integrated with other pursuits such as silk worm farming and handicraft making, pursuits largely unavailable in the boom and bust cycle of the Japanese Farmer, who must find wage labor outside of the narrow, yet intensive harvest and planting seasons. Francesca Bray, “Agriculture for Developing Nations,” *Scientific American*, no. July (1994)., 33-35

The challenge dramatically presented by the African food crisis is unprecedented. There are no easy solutions, no quick fixes. The unique technical problems facing African agriculture mean that a dramatic “green revolution” to provide all the answers is unlikely. The solution will lie only in an intensive, long-term, international effort.³¹

Despite the great expectations by Green Revolution proponents, the technologies implemented at the grassroots level by Peace Corps volunteers had not spurred a food production boom in rural Africa. The high yielding varieties (HYVs) of seeds that had exploded food production in Asia had failed to deliver in Africa. In truth, HYVs did not produce more output than local grains, but instead responded better to expensive imported chemical fertilizers.³² In addition, trans-national transnational corporations did not invest African agricultural infrastructure and development because of slow profit returns, leaving a tremendous financial strain of governments. For “Miracle Rice,” for instance, the Nigerian government had to protect the crop from disease, provide appropriate fertilizers, and ensure proper drainage and irrigation. As such projects take as many as fifty years to pay the initial costs, the pursuit of Green Revolution crops quickly intensified the Nigerian indebtedness to Euro-American banks.³³

Though the US Peace Corps actively participated in worsening the food crisis in Africa, the rhetoric of the African Food Systems Initiative was not entirely pessimistic. As the US Select Committee on Hunger testified, “While improvements are possible, it is well recognized that the Peace Corps has the potential for playing a unique and significant role in the huge task of

³¹ Peace Corps, “Peace Corps Africa Food Systems Initiative,” (Washington, DC1985)., 8.

³² As progressive agriculture specialists now agree, “The central myth that has led to the displacement of diverse farmers’ varieties by supposed high yielding varieties (HYVs) is that the former are low yielding and the latter are high yielding. HYVs are not intrinsically high-yielding. They merely respond well to chemicals and are more appropriately called High Respond Varieties (HRVs). HRVs exhibit low total system productivity—the increase in marketable output of grain and soil has been achieved at the cost of decrease of biomass for animals and soils and the decrease of ecosystem productivity due to overuse...many native varieties have higher yields in terms of grain output as well as in terms of total biomass output (grain + straw) than the supposed HYVs that have been introduced in their place.”Vandana Shiva and Research Foundation for Science Technology and Ecology (New Delhi India), *Betting on biodiversity : why genetic engineering will not feed the hungry or save the planet* (New Delhi: Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, 1999)., 7.

³³ Thakur, *An introduction to the nature and scope of rural sociology*., 49.

eliminating hunger and fostering global security”³⁴ Though the AFSI would continue Peace Corps agricultural initiatives such as irrigation, other changes were dramatic. In place of imported agricultural solutions, the initiative stressed the importance of “green manure crops suitable to the local area,” “pest management stressing alternatives to chemical pesticides,” and improved integration of animal husbandry into crop producing systems.”³⁵

Despite the new focus on local materials, the US Peace Corps continued to promote well-intentioned African agriculture projects with mixed results. The Peace Corps simply could not resist planning grassroots agriculture projects from a Washington. In the first AFSI country Mali, for example, the Washington staff decided that “the program will focus on three separate agricultural systems—rain fed, irrigated and mixed. Volunteers will work with technologies in each area appropriate to those farmer groups. A major emphasis will be to incorporate strategies designed to reach women farmers.”³⁶ As these broad categorical project divisions entered Mali, however, volunteers had to contend with local realities. As Peace Corps Mali volunteer Jim Kimetz (1988-90) recalls, “The Peace Corps is wholeheartedly in favor of these rice dams. I’ve had trouble getting my supervisor to understand that they could cause problems... We’re going back to the good old days when they had schisto[miasis] in their seasonal riverbed.”³⁷ Just as the Peace Corps encountered problems with top-down agriculture programming through their advocacy of the Green Revolution from 1961-1985, symptoms of hierarchical development and an over-weighting of the manpower-link plagued many of the AFSI projects in Mali. The

³⁴ Select Committee on Hunger, 14.

³⁵ US Peace Corps, *African Food Systems Initiative*, 7.

³⁶ Select Committee on Hunger, “The Peace Corps: 25 Years of Alleviating Hunger,” (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Press, 1986), 4.

³⁷ Karen Schwarz, *What you can do for your country : an oral history of the Peace Corps*, 1st ed. (New York: W. Morrow, 1991), 250.

development rhetoric of the Peace Corps' African Food System Initiative in many ways clung to the hubris of the earlier era.

The first twenty-five years of the Peace Corps' administrative policy towards African agricultural development policy traversed an arc of near complete disregard for the variegated realities within this enormous continent through advocacy of the Green Revolution to some self-restrained reflection through the African Food Systems Initiative. In both cases, however, the underlying policies that prevented success centered on three issues. First, the Peace Corps administrative discourse largely ignored the Peace Corps volunteers' grassroots mission to appreciate existing culture and knowledge in Africa. As contemporary scholarship indicates, the pre-colonial and current African practices of soil improvement such as nitrate enriching termite colonies and the use of certain trees and "weeds" to enrich soil and prevent erosion have great potential to re-instate sustainable agricultural in Africa.³⁸ A single-minded focus on volunteer "manpower" precludes an appreciation for the local agricultural knowledge base that in many cases surpasses Euro-American innovations. Second, the US Peace Corps ignored the history of colonialism in Africa, an oversight that cost the local communities. Inserting Peace Corps volunteers as petty bureaucrats in rural Africa only served to re-inscribe historical relationships of power. Possibly, many Peace Corps agricultural volunteers in Africa sidestepped these organizationally initiated projects just as Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers avoided showing the Alcohol Task Force film "After Sunset." The following section will provide a clearer comprehension of volunteer's perceptions of grassroots development and the ways these understanding affect their relationships with organizationally backed ideas of development.

³⁸ In termites, for instance, "nitrogen fixing spirochetes live symbiotically within termite guts where they fix nitrogen, and provide up to 60% of termite nitrogen." See James and Scoones Fairhead, Ian. , "Local Knowledge and the Social Shaping of Soil Investments: Critical Perspectives on the Assessment of Soil Degradation in Africa," *Land Use Policy* 22 (2005)., 36.

III.

Given Outer Mongolia's freezing winters and short growing seasons, the Peace Corps never pressed the Green Revolution in this country. In interviews with Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers, however, the idea of grassroots development remains elusive, if not full of contradictions. Though the Peace Corps has no current agricultural volunteers in Mongolia, the organization charges all volunteers to "provide manpower" to Mongolia, much as in the case of Africa above. According to the 2012 Mongolia annual report, "In all assignments, volunteers work with several counterparts to help increase the counterparts' skills. Community development projects are created after a volunteer has spent enough time working with the community to help determine what the community wants and needs. Together they design a relevant project that addresses a true community need."³⁹ Though the organizational literature sets clear goals for grassroots development in Mongolia, volunteers voiced a range of other opinions, pointing out in several inconsistencies with the ideas of grassroots development.

A number of the volunteers rejected the idea that their work related to a development goal, framing their volunteer work as a grassroots cultural exchange. According to one of these volunteers, "Development is kind of a strange thing to wrap your head around because it's kind of a never-ending process. When are you finished developing? I feel like Peace Corps is more on that cultural exchange aspect...Basically, I see myself as someone who does what they ask of me. I'm just another set of hands to help teach."⁴⁰ This volunteer astutely points out the development conundrum: if the process is eternal, who can claim to be "developed." At the same time, certain nations clearly provide citizens with greater access to medical care, education,

³⁹ Peace Corps, "Peace Corps Mongolia Annual Report 2011," (2011)., 2.

⁴⁰ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 5th, 2011

stimulating child-care and technological support for farmers. Equally unclear from this response is the implications of providing another set of hands. Does the free service of providing a Peace Corps volunteer teacher fill a gap or displace another potential Mongolian teacher? When I asked, the volunteer admitted not knowing the answer. Other proponents of volunteer service as cultural exchange noted that “I think we often feel that we take for granted how inundated we are with information from all over the world. Most people here have no experience traveling internationally...So I just think that being Americans and being here just speaking to people, that's development. That's exposure to things all over the world that people might not have known.”⁴¹ Cultural exposure to US volunteers certainly may have some positive effects on Mongolians, prompting them to re-evaluate their own perceptions of global trends and images they already come into contact with on television and through the internet. In these cultural assessments, however, the unequal power between the worldly (and relatively rich) volunteer and Mongolian community member would most likely affect the outcome towards an interpretation of US culture as modern, enriching, and better. While this perception of development as an inductive process of cultural evaluation could or could not be valid, volunteers adhering to this perception seem to discount “manpower” as their primary development task.

A few volunteers raised their Pre-Service Training to frame their definitions of development, yet still voiced a myriad of understandings. An education volunteer expressed the idea of material development as their perceived grassroots development goal. One teacher asserted that “After training, I kind of had the idea that they meant physical development or resource development. Now I’m not quite sure what it means, but I focus on my two big projects. Getting English books donated and getting posters. My school just literally doesn't have a basketball, so I got also to money to buy volleyball polls and. I went through World Vision. They

⁴¹ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 18th, 2011

promised us the money, but we haven't gotten it yet.” While this volunteer framed development as providing access to educational materials, other volunteers noted the qualitative aspects of development. In this vein, another education volunteer noted “sustainability” as the cornerstone of development, saying that “I think the big Peace Corps things that we heard a lot of training is sustainability...That means that whatever we do here we have to make sure that it's around when we leave. It should have a lasting impact in some way, however small. Development means a step towards progress, moving in the right direction.”⁴² Here, sustainability is the central point in the Peace Corps grassroots development, yet gives a much less precise about the content of development. When pressed, this volunteer explained that development meant capacity building; training teachers would be sustainable in that they would remain after volunteers left.

Though capacity building has a presumably positive effect on Mongolian communities, several volunteers raised skepticism over this approach to development. One education volunteer observed that “You can't force somebody who doesn't really care. Some people think that just by having a counterpart that person is going to learn English. But you've got to put in the effort...I don't feel like I've always had the proper training and support to get it there...My counterpart wants it, but she isn't necessarily putting for this step to make it happen.”⁴³ Other volunteers echoed this sentiment, one noting that “If it's on the first goals, I agree...I don't feel like I'm indispensable in any way. I'm a dictionary and a CD player when there is no CD player. That's what they organize in my lessons is to have me sit up and read something so they can listen to my voice and then I have to sit back down ...Oh this is my lesson plan for today. Stand up and read the correct answers. Yeah, this will be useful.”⁴⁴ The low levels of morale I encountered at some sites were notable, prompting me to step out of my observer role and make

⁴² Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 19th, 2011

⁴³ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 20th, 2011

⁴⁴ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 18th, 2011

suggestions and give encouragement based on my own experiences. Some of the volunteers seemed at a loss at finding ways to communicate their role in grassroots development. Set adrift, these volunteers rejected the idea altogether, one stating “No, well, I don’t think it’s actually man-power. Maybe Peace Corps isn’t entirely clear about this, but we’re not substitutes. We’re not like the teacher that fill in for other teachers...we’re supposed to be a supplement, we’re supposed to build the capacity of our Mongolian counterparts. But yeah, I think after being here for a year, our ability to do that much in our capacity is limited.”⁴⁵ The question of limitations of providing “manpower” to Mongolian counterparts and communities seemingly uninterested in volunteers was certainly not ubiquitous. But a majority of volunteers questioned the “development” aspects of their grassroots experience.

IV.

Though the Peace Corps makes a strong case for “manpower” in terms of grassroots counterpart capacity building, this chapter underscores two strong limiting factors. First, the organization’s grassroots approach of embedding culturally aware volunteers into communities has not necessarily prevented the bureaucratic arm of the Peace Corps from directing. As in the case of the Green Revolution rhetoric filtering through the Peace Corps approaches to agricultural development, the organization clearly has a history of supplanting grand development narratives from the US to volunteer work projects. The conundrum here is that while the US has knowledge, experience, and technology that would arguably improve the lives of Mongolians. If the Peace Corps would wait for Mongolians to request certain types of expertise, would that not mean certain technologies and knowledge would remain untapped from sheer lack of awareness of opportunity? This line of thinking seems flawed in several instances.

⁴⁵ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 22nd, 2011

First, as US government bureaucracy, the Peace Corps simply cannot ignore the temptation to rely on expertise of scholars and enlightened bureaucrats to make educated, yet overly general guesses about development schemes in quite diverse environments. Second, the idea that experts understand the needs of a community as well as an embedded volunteer is erroneous. If the Peace Corps truly embraced the grassroots development model, deriving policy from the local experiences of Peace Corps volunteers and their counterparts, these inconsistencies in policy and place along with issues of power would subside. However, the fact remains that many of the Peace Corps volunteers themselves are technically unsophisticated, often with little personal experience in their sectors, whether education, community development, or agriculture. If the Peace Corps chose to derive development policy from the ground up, then they would need to trust the perspectives of some volunteers with an adequate level of training and some with minimal background in their field. Perhaps a compromise lies in pushing the second limiting factor of grassroots development, the volunteer's rejection of the idea of development as providing manpower. In the Outer Mongolia case study, the response indicated that a majority of the volunteers themselves reject their place as providing "manpower" to Mongolians in the way the organization frames this issue. For some volunteers, their development role centered on cultural sharing, also part of the Peace Corps' mission. But the idea that a Mongolians' lives become better through simply knowing an American somehow seems even more self-impressed than suggesting a certain type of seed will change your life. Admittedly, inter-cultural understanding is important. But surely the Peace Corps can aspire to more than an international friendship organization. Providing a grassroots capacity building through volunteers would require a greater emphasis on educating volunteers about ways to cope with host-country disinterest or to negotiate better management of their time at their work sites. Certainly, a

volunteer sitting alone in an empty office for months on end or becoming a human tape recorder, as several volunteers claimed, serves no one. However, cultural sharing and grassroots development are not interchangeable; these goals are rightly separate in the Peace Corps' mission statement in that cultural knowledge does not directly address real health, environment, social, and education challenges faced by peoples of the developing context. Knowing an American is not the same as entering a collaborative training towards empowerment of the host-country national.

Despite the ideal of grassroots empowerment, my own experience as a Teacher Trainer has complicated my perception of this “manpower” aspect of the Peace Corps. My Mongolian counterpart was an incredibly hardworking woman with whom I worked daily on English speaking and writing, grant-writing, computer skills, and pedagogy. Before entering the Peace Corps, I had two years of teaching experience and an MA degree. By the end of my two years, however, my counterpart had calculated that she could earn more as a private business woman, not an educator. She now works as an extremely successful distributor of a Swedish line of makeup and soap products in Mongolia. Likewise, in my field visit to the site of my volunteer service in Gobi-Altai, I found that several of the teachers whom I worked with intensively now sit in local branches of foreign NGOs. They seemed bored with their new jobs, saying that they did not perceive any value in the boiler plate reports they wrote all day. Yet the money was so much greater that they could not say no. I am completely happy with their choices on a personal level; I want them to have a higher standard of living. In my own narrative, however, my volunteer work was about helping improve educational standards and opportunities for young students in my city, not train a successful makeup salesperson and NGO report writers. But in the end, these people made their own choices, based on their own values and needs, and I respect

them for doing so. All the same, this example illustrates the complexity of grassroots development. Even after two years of living in Altai, Mongolia, I doubt very much my impact on the education development of this provincial capital.

CHAPTER 4

Grassroots Pedagogy: A Hidden Curriculum?

“Last year, I taught a teacher’s methodology class. It only managed to meet three times because people wouldn’t come. But those three times we couldn’t—it was useless. Except for two or three of them, they didn’t speak English well enough to speak about methodology. I don’t see a point in teaching people about methodology unless I can speak about methodology...”

--Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 3rd, 2011

“It’s too much. You can’t cover this all in one day. Not to this country. Not to these students.”¹ The Peace Corps Mongolia education volunteer stood at the front of a large room before a circuit of teachers, some busily transcribing the volunteer’s every word. In day two of this seminar for Mongolian English teachers working in the most rural parts of the province, the volunteer outlined essay writing techniques on a dusty, portable chalkboard. Curiously, the room full of normally gregarious Mongolian teachers was quite silent, aside from other Peace Corps volunteers voicing their occasional opinions from the audience. Whenever this happened, the Mongolian teachers appeared confused; the English in these exchanges required knowledge of cultural reference far removed rural Mongolia, let alone comprehension in another language. None of the Mongolian English teachers asked questions during the presentation, though a few whispered in Mongolian to each other. The seminar leader continued to critique jot down a few bullet points on the chalkboard: “Intro 5-7 [sentences]; Body 5-7 [sentences]; Conclusion 5-7 [sentences].” In giving a topic example, the volunteer continued to critique the textbook, noting “It’s a mess...the present perfect! The books are not consistent...The Swedish scientist Andrew Celsius. Who cares? Here we go, Mickey Mouse. That’s better. Maybe would should use people from Japan, Korea, and Malaysia.” Notably, the volunteer presented only one side of the

¹ Peace Corps Mongolia teacher training seminar observation, November 14th, 2011.

argument, never requesting a counterargument from the audience or any critical thinking exercises. The teachers were not included in even a rudimentary critical thinking exercise such as a group brainstorming exercise on the positive and negative aspects of the Mongolian English textbooks.

As I observed this seminar session, I contemplated two aspects in particular. First, and most immediately, I pondered the takeaway message from the session. What were Mongolian teachers learning? In a broader sense, the excuse to meet together in the provincial capital was certainly a welcome aspect. But of the actual session, the only clear message I found was that the volunteer thought the textbooks were too difficult for Mongolian students. No modeling of critical thinking or forum for debate was presented during this session. No teachers were invited to give their own strategies for teaching writing. In a wider sense, this seminar session and other classes I observed throughout my six month field study in Mongolia caused me to question the relationship between Peace Corps programmatic goals and grassroots education. As the largest sector, the Peace Corps Education sector comprises mostly Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) volunteers along with a smaller contingency of Teacher Trainers (TT), who work as methodologists in Mongolian Education and Culture Centers or attached to high schools. Though the Education sector volunteers specifically focus on grassroots education development, the organization supports three other sectors, namely in Health, Community Youth Development (CYD), and Community Economic Development (CED) volunteers. Throughout my interviews with volunteers in these sectors, I realized that these volunteers faced nearly identical issues in terms of grassroots classroom relationships. In truth, many of the non-education volunteers teach English language courses to their colleagues and communities in classroom environments. Further, health volunteers often teach courses on various best practice techniques (usually in

translation) to medical college or hospital staff members. In the case of Peace Corps Mongolia, therefore, grassroots education is the main thrusts for volunteers in every sector.

Like other aspects of the Peace Corps program, grassroots education programming has a continuum of possibilities. On the most literal, non-reflective end of this continuum, the mission of the Peace Corps provides a teacher for a Mongolian school, university, or education center in a local context. In this case, embedding a western educated volunteer brings a new cultural perspective and expertise, and therefore educational benefit. Pushing this concept towards recognizing the agency and value of these communities, however, presents a number of additional possibilities. Given the position of volunteers as representatives of America, wealth, epistemological dominance, one particularly important aspect of ideal grassroots education development includes a deep consideration for leveling the power between the Peace Corps educator, counterparts, and students: to the extent possible, “non-prescriptive negotiation” honoring the culture and knowledge of Mongolian teachers and students should precede a class or curriculum design.² In observing volunteers from various sectors in their classrooms, however, I noticed a dearth of critical awareness of any connection between the Peace Corps grassroots approach and their classroom presentation style and attitudes towards their Mongolian colleagues.

In pursuit of an egalitarian grassroots education model, one that Peace Corps might consider, theorists have examined the relationship between the classroom experience and grassroots participation on the basis of democratic presentation and curriculum content. According to Paulo Freire, a democratic teacher and student relationship should avoid a subject-object, oppressor-oppressed relationship. In Freire’s view, this education need not be one

² Gareth and Hodkinson Harvard, Phil, ed. *Action and Reflection in Teacher Education* (Norwood, NJ: Apex Publishing Corporation, 1994)., 221.

completely hierarchical, but instead embody democracy. On this concept, he states that “Education as the practice of freedom—as opposed to education as the practice of domination—denies that man is abstract, isolated, independent, and unattached to the world...”³ This quotation underscores the need for democratic education to jettison reified “abstractions” in the teacher-student, developer-developed relationship. Extending Freire’s view to the developing context, “abstractions” leading to social domination of the “developed” may manifest in ingrained student and teacher misconceptions of their roles and governmental powers among others. Freire’s prescription for this un-democratic relationship is dialogue followed by analytical reflection. Describing this relationship, he notes that “Dialogue is meaningful precisely because the dialogical subjects, the agents in the dialogue, not only retain their identity, but actively defend it, and thus grow together... Dialogue is not a favor done by one for the other, a kind of grace accorded. On the contrary, it implies a sincere, fundamental respect...”⁴ In Freire’s nuanced presentation of dialogue, participants are not leveled through objectification. Instead, each member becomes an active, participatory subject with a valued perspective.⁵ In order for this dialogue to become “democratic,” the participants must act with the above understanding of objectifying abstractions, contingent aspects of personal history grant no true distinction within the *value* of perspectives. In terms of democratic capacity building in the developing context, the ways that dialogue and objectification shape volunteer and host-country national

³ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 81.

⁴ Paulo Freire and Ana Maria Araújo Freire, *Pedagogy of hope : reliving Pedagogy of the oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 101.

⁵ Defining this complex, paradoxical process will require more extensive, discursive analysis in the actual dissertation. According to Professor Carlos Torres, leader in Freire’s scholarship, “Individuals are not by nature themselves ready to participate in politics. They have to be educated in democratic politics in a number of ways, including normative grounding, ethical behavior, knowledge of the democratic process, and technical performance. The construction of the pedagogic subject is a central conceptual problem, a dilemma of democracy. To put it simply: democracy implies a process of participation where all are considered equal. However, education involves a process whereby the “immature” are brought to identify with the principles of the “mature” members of society.” See Carlos Alberto Torres, *Democracy, education, and multiculturalism : dilemmas of citizenship in a global world* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998), 162.

relationships become indicators of “democracy” and “cooperation.” Further, the institutionalized ways that the Peace Corps fosters or ignores volunteer consciousness-raising on abstracted “role-power” (based on factors such as wealth, education, and international advisory status) reflects the level of their commitment to a dialogical, democratic educational process.

The Peace Corps volunteer’s path towards a dialogical partnership requires an understanding of various forms of educational domination, ways the educational experience shapes student attitudes and beliefs about their democratic rights and autonomy, the “hidden curriculum.” Revealing the varied dimensions of this concept, Elizabeth Valiance states:

(1) Hidden curriculum can refer to any of the *contexts* of schooling, including the teacher student-teacher interaction...classroom structure, the whole organizational pattern of the educational establishment as a microcosm of the social value system. (2) Hidden curriculum can bear on a number of *processes* operating in or through schools, including values acquisition, socialization, maintenance of class structure. (3) Hidden curriculum can embrace differing *degrees of intentionality* and depth of hiddenness...ranging from unintended by-products of curricular arrangements to outcomes more deeply embedded in the historical social function of education.⁶

In highlighting a social-political aspect to the learning experience, these three aspects provide tools for highlighting un-democratic aspects of Peace Corps education sector. The seminar observation above, for instance, underscored the first aspect of the hidden curriculum in that the *context* framed the teacher-student relationship in such a way that the Mongolian participants had no voice in the process. The relationship mirrored Freire’s concept of the banking method, in which teachers deposit packets of information into the memory banks of students.⁷ Simply put, the banking method flies in the face of Peace Corps grassroots, democratic rhetoric. Similarly, the *process* of this session reinforced perceived nation-power structures in that the American teacher presided over the Mongolian teachers. Finally, the volunteer’s *degree of intentionality* of

⁶ Henry A. Giroux and David E. Purpel, *The Hidden curriculum and moral education : deception or discovery?* (Berkeley, Calif.: McCutchan Pub. Corp., 1983), 10-11.

⁷ Freire, *Pedagogy of the oppressed*.

this arrangement was certainly low; the ways the Peace Corps supports training for alternative presentation styles, however, certainly raises the issue of organizational intention.

Given that a hidden curriculum exists in education to begin with, how has the Peace Corps dealt trained volunteers to deal with their presence as grassroots educators in such a way that they promote a critical consciousness in volunteer pedagogies? The following examines the Peace Corps' grassroots education programming using the frames of the hidden curriculum considering context, process, and degrees of intentionality. The first part of this analysis centers on the Peace Corps organizational rhetoric of volunteer training. In this critical historical review, an investigation will explore ways the Peace Corps particularly emphasized or de-emphasize a grassroots, participatory pedagogy. Thereafter, interview data from Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers will complicate these organizational ideas, revealing a distance between rhetoric and reality. The comparison thereby reveals the ways Peace Corps training succeeds and fails to address the latent socio-political messages within volunteer educational activities.

II.

The Peace Corps employs an extensive job training component to educate volunteers on their roles and provide skills training. From the start of the organization, Peace Corps volunteers have completed a two to three month Pre-Service Training (PST) before entering their work sites as volunteers.⁸ In the initial training component, volunteers learn language, culture, history, development theory, and work skills. Particularly in the earlier years of the organization, PST reflected the aspirations of Peace Corps directors such as Sargent Shriver. Describing Shriver's philosophy of the ideal, Warren Wiggins noted the director believed that "Sargent Shriver's precepts for working effectively overseas are few and simple. 'First, he says, 'learn the language

⁸ Corps, "1st Annual Peace Corps Report.", 15.

of the people. Second, make up your mind that the work of developing nations is worth the price of personal sacrifice. Third, anchor yourself in the customs and traditions of the country where you are serving, get down to ‘eye level’ with the people. Fourth, believe in the power of personal integrity, humility, and determination.”⁹ These ideas translated into a particularly rigorous training component. In Fritz Fischer’s *Making them Like Us*, for instance, he characterizes the first ten years of the Peace Corps’ history as Sergeant Shriver’s neo-pioneer fantasy, an experiment in recreating and transmitting core American colonial characteristics of individualism and self-reliance to the developing world through rigorous physical and mental conditioning. In addition to two months of long hours of coursework in places such as University of Michigan, volunteers regularly practiced rigorous exercises such as rappelling.¹⁰ The idea was to create not simply a competent volunteer, but an inspiring, self-reliant human being. For the Peace Corps education volunteer, this translated into the formula of a part community organizer and part classroom leader, an idea that reverberates throughout most of the Peace Corps’ organizational literature. Textual and visual discourses encapsulating various stages of the education volunteer experience, both in training and at their work sites, shed light on the organization’s understandings of grassroots education training.

The images of Peace Corps education volunteers are strikingly homogenous. Both in the early and recent organizational images, the favorite image is the context of a classroom, a volunteer teacher standing at the front of the classroom or in the center of a shot, encircled by attentive students. In comparing the images, the primacy of the volunteer is quite conspicuous. Granted, the purpose of much Peace Corps literature is to recruit volunteers or justify

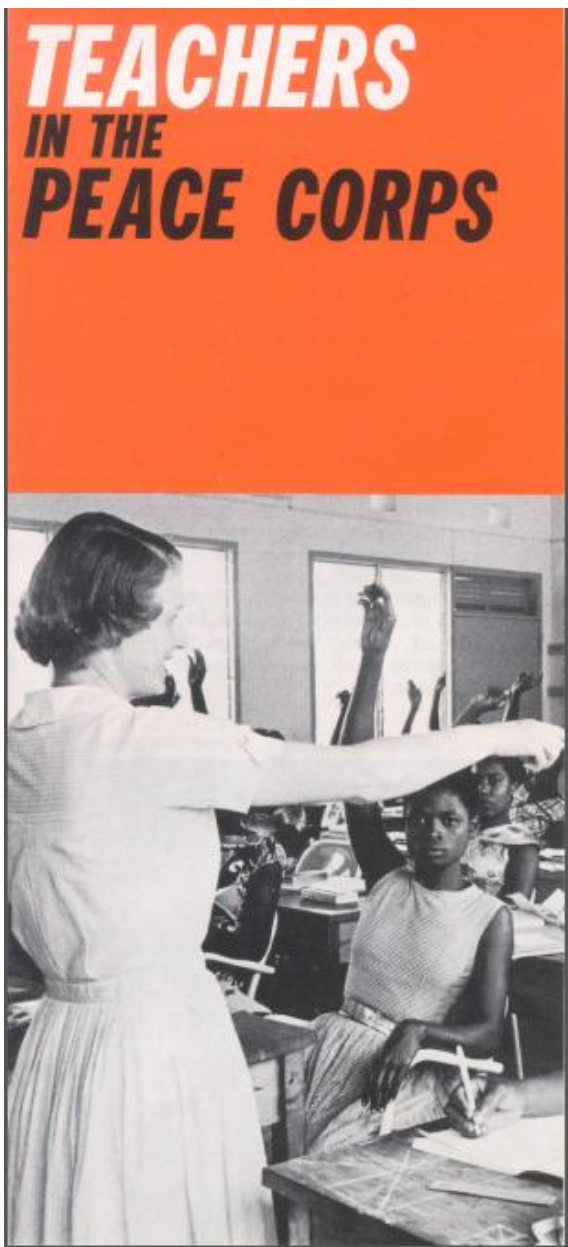
⁹ George Sullivan, *The story of the Peace Corps* (New York,: Fleet Pub. Corp., 1964)., 77.

¹⁰ Fritz Fischer, *Making them like us : Peace Corps volunteers in the 1960s* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998).

congressional budgets. Despite these understandable ends, the organization prides itself in placing volunteers with counterparts, which are conspicuously absent from these photographs. If the primary role of Peace Corps education volunteers centers on bolstering the skills and empowering community teachers, how do these pictures communicate this goal? Though some photographs show educators in various informal situations, usually with children, rarely (if ever) do the editors of these organizational photographs feature host country nationals as teachers.¹¹ As a great majority of these images depict the classroom setting as teacher-centered, the educator standing at the front of the classroom explaining a concept, the underlying connotation is that the education volunteer's primary role is as a knowledge conduit; the volunteer will provide host students with access to US knowledge and skills. The ways this image meshes with the idea of grassroots pedagogy, however, is much less clear. Unlike images of Peace Corps education volunteers, the rhetoric in early education brochures expressed an awareness of the idea of teaching critical thinking. In a brochure from the 1960s, for example, the editors stress the idea of critical thinking, stating that "For the first time, because of the Volunteers' emphasis, students are thinking their subjects through, not just memorizing facts and rules... *'This is the real educational revolution,'* said one Volunteer, *'but it is hard work to induce students unaccustomed to relying on their own intelligence to reason together.'*"¹² Evident here, the organization's pitch to teachers included a critical thinking aspect in their classes. At the same time, a certain orientalist discourse pervades quotes about non-Western students. Educational styles aside, does any person *not* rely on their own intelligence to reason? The embedded quote suggest a divide between a deductive,

¹¹ After scouring a number of brochures, congressional reports, and newsletters, I could not locate any pictures of Peace Corps teachers with their counterparts aside from the rare articles focused on the idea counterpart.

¹² Peace Corps, "A Special Message to Teachers in the Peace Corps," (1965)., 7.



1 *Teachers in the Peace Corps, 1960s*



The Peace Corps Performance and Accountability Report, 2009



A Special Message to Teachers in the Peace Corps, 1960s

13 Peace Corps, "A Special Message to Teachers in the Peace Corps," (1960s)., Cover Page.
 14 Corps, "Performance and Accountability Report.", 59.

16 Peace Corps, "Teachers in the Peace Corps," (1962)., Cover Page.

discursive, empirical experience in US classrooms and unreasoned, memorization based experience in this international setting. Though critical thinking certainly should be a central part in any educational curriculum, the quote overly celebrates the “educational revolution” ushered in by the Peace Corps.

If the Peace Corps other organizational literature depicting the education volunteer experience is mixed in terms of grassroots pedagogy, the Peace Corps education manuals mince few words about the ways grassroots volunteers should approach grassroots education. Particularly starting from the 1980s on, the organization provides ample discussion in training manuals on teacher-centered verses student-centered pedagogies. When not directly focused on promoting student centered ideology, however, these materials are much murkier. In one Peace Corps teacher training reference manual, for example, the editors try to make a distinction between adult and child learning styles, and seem to contradict the idea of student centered education. In the andragogy versus pedagogy section, the editors state that “With children, education is often the one-way transfer of data and information from teacher to the student. This is not always appropriate for the adult learner who brings a wealth of experience and wisdom into the learning environment.”¹⁷ As evident here, the manuals tend to forget themselves when not directly focused on the culture issue. Certainly, adult and child learning styles are different. But describing pedagogy in metaphorical computer terms as a “one-way transfer of data” directly mirrors Freire’s critique of the banking system of education, wherein teachers implant bits of knowledge into students. Perhaps this contrast would be more understandable in the context of teaching students from your own culture. However, the idea of being a grassroots educator in an

¹⁷ Peace Corps, "Teacher Training: A Reference Manual," *Information Collection and Exchange* T0045(1986)., Andragogy vs. Pedagogy section.

international context suggests relationship built on cooperation and mutual learning, whatever the age of students.

In other Peace Corps education manuals, however, the rhetoric illustrates a more considered understanding of the intersection of culture and Peace Corps volunteers' classroom relationships to students as Americans. One interesting example is a teaching activity booklet revised several times and re-published in the 1993 called "Looking at Ourselves and Others," a guide for volunteers to challenge students' understanding of culture. As noted in the booklet introduction, the guide functions as a tool to help volunteers prompt students to understand the issue of culture from multiple perspectives, with the stated goals to "1. Recognize and appreciate differences in perception among individuals and cultures; 2. Define culture and recognize its role in developing perceptions of ourselves and others; 3. Challenge assumptions, promote cross-cultural awareness, and provide opportunities for communication."¹⁸ To this end, the editors compile classroom activities such as "The Iceberg" to prompt classroom discussions, in this case the aspects of observable and invisible aspects of culture. Though the manual does not specifically challenge cultural conceptions of development, the implications of this discursive heuristic indirectly underscore the perspectival nature of knowledge and pedagogy.

Like Peace Corps education manuals centered on critical thinking and cultural awareness, recent development-focused teaching manuals underscore activities that prompt group critical thinking exercises. The booklet "Teach English Prevent HIV: A Teacher's Manual," for example, highlights various student-centered teaching methodologies to include students in classroom discussions. In the section explaining preferred teaching methods, the editors emphasize inclusive attitudes during classroom discussions, stating that "Brainstorming is another frequently used technique throughout the manual....Ideally, the teacher does not need to call on

¹⁸ Peace Corps, "Looking at Ourselves and Others," *World Wise Schools* (1993), 3.

students to answer—he or she simply encourages students to call out their answers. As the students call them out, the teacher writes each one on the board or flip chart, while continuing to encourage students to call out more. In this way, the teacher validates everyone’s ideas...”¹⁹ The instructions continue, advising the teacher not to label any information as incorrect during the actual brainstorming, but afterwards in the clarification stage of the activity. If the teacher does in fact include all student ideas in brainstorming student perceptions HIV, this activity could indeed combine a much needed public health development service while encouraging debate and discussion among students considering this issue.

The rhetoric of Peace Corps pamphlets and teaching manuals on grassroots development does not necessarily limit a volunteer’s pursuit of grassroots education development. Though the photo editors in pamphlets seem unconscious of the importance and equality of the principal beneficiaries, the students, they in no way discourage an examination of a hidden curriculum. Ideally, these documents would communicate the importance of sustainability and equality by including Peace Corps volunteer counterparts and emphasizing the agency of students. Likewise, the teaching reference manuals contain numerous exercises geared at eliciting critical thinking about culture and pedagogies that for the most part emphasize a critical approach to *context* issues such as culture and society, which could be read into the microcosm of an educational setting. Further, in addressing issues of culture in a critical way, the addresses the *processes* inherent in maintaining cultural values such as gender roles, though perhaps to a lesser degree issues of class. However, the *degrees of intentionality*, an issue directly related to hierarchy and power, remains absent from most or all of the Peace Corps educational material. In eliding this consideration of the hidden curriculum, the organization removes much of the

¹⁹ Peace Corps, "Teach English Prevent HIV: A Teacher's Manual," *Information and Exchange Publication* NO. M0090(2011), 3.

impetus for analysis on the multiple intentions, benevolent and self-interested, inherent in the US volunteer education development program.

III.

While the rhetoric of Peace Corps education literature does not overtly limit grassroots education development, interviews with volunteers revealed a mixed understanding of ways to accomplish the program's goals. In my field research study, I found a similarly varied understanding in the English and Community Development project, Peace Corps Mongolia's largest program. Consisting of sixty-five percent of all volunteers (81 volunteers in 2011) in the program, education sector volunteers concentrate on three stated goals: teacher capacity building, student capacity building, and community development.²⁰ During my interviews with Peace Corps Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) and Teacher Trainer (TT) volunteers, however, their reflections on the mandatory three-month Pre-Service Training (PST) indicated only a partially reflective understanding of grassroots education development. Though three months long, PST is by all volunteer accounts a whirlwind of experiences. Including daily three to four hour language classes, an approximately three month homestay, Mongolian culture lessons, a community development component, and practice teaching, the training was considered a challenge by all of the volunteers.

Upon interviewing the volunteers, I found myself challenging some of the volunteer's answers. As a former volunteer PST trainer, I have experienced both sides of the volunteer training. The Peace Corps Mongolia PST combines a team of paid staff and currently serving volunteers from various sectors to teach education, nursing, community youth development, and community economic development specific content. From this background and from continually

²⁰ Peace Corps, "Peace Corps Mongolia Annual Report 2011.", 6

learning more through other volunteer interviews, I occasionally played the devil's advocate, pushing volunteers to consider more deeply the ways their Pre-Service Training prepared them to become grassroots educators. In these interviews, I found that not all volunteers had a grasp on some of the most basic aspects of materials or training sessions provided by Peace Corps. As this interview reveals, volunteer's criticisms were not always valid: "...I would have liked a grammar book. [*You do have one. Check your zip drive. Peace Corps provided everyone with a copy of Betty Azar's Grammar book in electronic form.*] Oh, we do?"²¹ In these situations, I felt compelled to defend the Peace Corps from unfounded criticisms. At the same time, I probed equally celebratory assessments. Most often, however, the volunteers had thought about their experiences in sophisticated, informed ways, providing a rich tapestry on insight into the ways Peace Corps prepared educators for grassroots development.

For many volunteers, the most indelible part of the Pre-service training was the homestay experience with a Mongolian family. Many of the volunteers expressed unbridled enthusiasm for aspects of the Pre-service training, but their host family experiences usually reigned as the best or worst aspects of training. In the early years of the Peace Corps, volunteers would live in barrack-like buildings or dormitories for most of their initial months of their training, which took place in US university campus setting. Gradually, the Peace Corps staff favored extending the in-country training to the full three months of PST.²² Though one rationale for this move was overall cost-savings, additional contact with actual host country nationals during training provides ethnographic insights the ways peoples of various Peace Corps countries live. This

²¹ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 18th, 2011

²² This shift from centralized to community training started in the incipient years of the organization. In 1963, volunteer language training increased from 50 to 250 hours and training in the host community began to be a priority. However, each country slowly phased in various versions of volunteer training within host country communities, from volunteers living together in dormitory type situations to the recent host-family model of training. See the "1963" section of Lawrence F. Lihosit and Corps Gift in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Peace, *Peace Corps chronology, 1961-2010* (New York: iUniverse, 2011).

inductive training further increased as volunteers became more embedded into communities through extended host-family living experiences. In the community based training model currently employed by Peace Corps Mongolia, volunteers live with Mongolian host families during their three month training. Further simulating the isolation of their actual experience, volunteers live in clusters of six to ten people in neighboring towns. Most volunteers found the language and culture learned with the host family matched or excelled that of their formal training. As one volunteer noted, “I loved PST others with a great host family. The only thing I would change was I wanted more time to learn the culture and the language...Because that is the goal of PST is to become culturally adjusted and I wish I had more time with that. So I had a wonderful time and PST and I will continue to visit my host family many times.”²³ As underscored by this quote, the host family experience not only effectively imparts language and cultural skills vital for grassroots education, but also creates deep empathetic connections between American volunteers and their Mongolian counterparts.

Not all volunteers, however, felt this way about their counterpart experience. Particularly for volunteers accustomed to more independence, this training method. As one volunteer expressed, “I think, being 40 years old, was difficult for me to get used to having a family again. I am used to living by myself, so that was difficult.”²⁴ The issue of age present in this quote reverberated throughout my interviews on the subject of host families and many other facets of the pre-service training. Both older and younger volunteers noted a clear distinction between volunteers straight out college and older volunteers with more life and work experience. One younger volunteer noted that “I loved my host family I loved my Language Coordinators, I loved my teammates... I think the hardest thing about PST were the older people. They were like, ‘I’ve

²³ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 16th, 2011

²⁴ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 17th, 2011

been teaching for 20 years why are you teaching me how to teach.”²⁵ Clearly, the training sessions with mixed younger and older volunteers created pressures for both groups. Whereas recent college graduate volunteers were learning the skills for the first time, more experienced volunteers expressed boredom and frustration about the remedial aspects of education focused sessions.

One of the most relevant critiques of PST education training sessions centered on the ways Peace Corps trainers and staff accepted input from the volunteers themselves. Though grassroots education should value and seek to validate the experiences and opinions of students, counterparts, and host-country partners, many volunteers expressed ways in which their input was devalued or disregarded. One quite experience volunteer critiqued the practice teaching component, stating that

“...there's no objective for these. They're just a dog and pony show, where you have to get up and get feedback....I said, 'Look, I've been teaching for 10 years and you don't even have objectives for this practice teaching all-you're just wasting my time.' And they took it personally. I said, 'we've got two University teachers six have their doctorates and two masters between that to us compared to someone as a one year of experience teaching six graders in Mongolia.' Yeah I think next year they will have to improve the qualifications of the teachers.”²⁶

This extended critique underscores two surprising aspects of the Peace Corps Mongolia education volunteer training: the lack of student centered andragogy and the lack of organization. In a group such as this one, including the volunteers themselves in collaborations on practice teaching objectives would not only model a grassroots student-centered teaching approach by valuing student input, the approach would have improved the activity through accessing the wealth of educational experiences in the participants.

²⁵ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 27th, 2011

²⁶ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 12th, 2011

The lack of organization undoubtedly impacted the quality of this experience. In my own experience as a summer volunteer trainer in 2006, my fellow trainers and I would often wonder why Peace Corps Mongolia seemed not to have the most basic training modules such as instructions for practice teaching already in place after 16 years of training. We ended up designing and planning almost everything, making for a truly exhausting summer. According to the volunteer trainers I interviewed, this dearth of standardization and structure was undergoing much needed radical revision under the direction of the current Programming and Training Officer. If and only if these modules can be debated and refined by future trainers in light of volunteer experiences, this change will be most welcome. Having basic training modules pre-packaged would allow trainers to refine and re-think ways to push the limits of grassroots education. In one interesting suggestion, for instance, an education volunteer told me that “Practice teaching was good. It would've been nice to get a Mongolian counterpart to practice with. It would have been so much more useful to practice with a Mongolian CP. There was not enough practical experience in my opinion.” Granted, bringing volunteer’s actual counterparts to the training site would be expensive and impractical for the counterparts themselves. If most of the basic modules were already completed, however, the Peace Corps training staff would have more time to recruit community members to simulate and discuss an actual grassroots working relationship with the volunteer and a Mongolian.

While these relationships were not practiced, the education volunteers did recall theoretical sessions devoted to community relationships. However, the volunteers gave negative reviews of these sessions. One volunteer noted that “For example, there was the session on networking that went on for what seemed like three hours they gave us all of these different terms about relationships, but at the end the trainer just said: in the end you just get a get out

there and make relationships. And I thought well obviously...I got to site and suddenly I'm a teacher.”²⁷ Some volunteers noted a distinct separation between the Peace Corps teacher preparation and the demands of the actual job as concerning. In answer whether or not the volunteer felt qualified to teach, this volunteer replied, “No, honestly, as far as the training. I have common sense and I have taken education classes, so I feel with life experiences. But as far as Peace Corps training made to do the job I was here to do, no.”²⁸ Other volunteers offered more specific criticisms about their education training. English grammar was often cited, as this volunteer stated, “They would try to do an activity to show us something we could use in our classroom. Reading was pretty good, but grammar was pretty botched. I didn't know most of those words. I didn't know what a conjunction was. They made us do a pre-test to show us that we didn't know it, but then they didn't teach us what the grammar was.”²⁹ In this case, the volunteers received a grammar pre-test on distinctions such as type 1, 2, and 3 conditionals, but were not actually taught the distinctions after the test. Likewise, volunteers voiced concerns about the level of practical classroom management skills in the training. One volunteer noted that “Teaching fifth graders versus teaching 11th graders-they made no effort to talk about this. We spent about 45 minutes talking about what an objective was...”³⁰ Though the volunteer objected to the importance of understanding of learning the finer points of lesson planning in favor of age-differentiated classroom management, both skill sets are important aspects of teaching. Volunteers should have confidence in lesson planning and varied classroom management techniques. But realistically these techniques and theories take time to learn, and the training is a mere three months.

²⁷ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 3rd, 2011

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 12th, 2011

³⁰ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 3rd, 2011

While including everything necessary in the training was not possible, the Peace Corps training staff did model grassroots educational style in group training sessions. However, the repetitiveness of these exercises was a frequent complaint among respondents. One volunteer exclaimed, “Man, brainstorm and present it is not a way to teach. I hate the flipchart! Most of the time you just have to tell them what they want to hear.”³¹ Here, the volunteer refers to the pattern of small group discussion and brainstorm about an issue, write answers on a flipchart, then present to the larger group. For some volunteers, these brainstorming sessions had little or no impact because the answers were predetermined or for the purpose of a type of group therapy, not for actual an actual analytical instructional purpose. In these cases, the volunteers viewed their participation as a perfunctory requirement for ending the session, not appreciative inquiry.

IV.

The organizational discourse and interview analyses revealed various indicators in which the Peace Corps education sector both pushes the boundaries and falls short of a grassroots education development. In organizational discourses, the Peace Corps meets the requisite lowermost rung of this concept. Pamphlets, training manuals, and reports all illustrate an accurate depiction of volunteers working with mostly students at the “grassroots,” herein understood as a community of people living in a developing context. While these texts underscore the embeddedness of volunteers, they rarely show or mention host-country counterparts. Though critical thinking and inclusive methodologies such as brain storming are frequently mentioned, processes (class structure) and degrees of intentionality (deeply embedded historical functions) of a hidden curriculum.

³¹ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 3rd, 2011

While the organizational discourses pushed the grassroots, the interview data indicated challenges to the implementation of grassroots education development on all places on the continuum. For the idea of the grassroots education volunteer as embedded worker, the volunteers highlighted the fact that for the least experienced volunteers, the training did not provide adequate teacher training. Three months is simply not enough time to learn language, culture, development theory and teaching. In responses from volunteers with previous education experience, the gaps in the curriculum did not impact their ability to integrate into their positions as educators. This trend points to the importance of volunteer selection for the Peace Corps. Though the organization would not be able to meet current expansion initiatives without drawing from the ranks of recent college graduates, enticing those with suitable teaching experience to the Peace Corps education development program should be a vital objective to meet the most conservative envisioning of a competent grassroots educator to the developing world.

The volunteers cited the host-family experience as the most positive aspect of cultural learning, reporting strong emotional bonds formed through these relationships. Inevitably, these connections increased the volunteers understanding and empathy of Mongolian, paving a road towards greater potential for cooperative work with future counterparts. Likewise, a community based training model avoided the problem of volunteers circulating only with other volunteers.

Conversely, sessions focused on theoretical aspects of education, particularly on the relationships of US and Mongolian educators did not impress the volunteers. Further, volunteers by and large viewed sessions that modeled cooperative education approaches forced and repetitive. Pre-Service training is an ideal time to model approaches to cooperative learning volunteers could later use during their service, yet the organization missed this salient opportunity. In addition, the education training sessions did not address the socio-economic and

historical aspects related to exposing the hidden curriculum. In order to push a self-reflective grassroots education development, Peace Corps would need to highlight these aspects of the hidden curriculum.

CHAPTER 5

Historical Hierarchies: Volunteers' Grassroots Consciousness

“I think in general, most volunteers don’t know enough about history. I didn’t think the ‘Land of the Blue Sky’¹ was very good. I think that’s one of the things that I think they could have got rid of: ten of those cross-cultural courses, and then given us more information about Mongolia. I think most volunteers are interested in that kind of stuff. There was one session for all of Mongolian history.”

--Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, 2011²

For Mongolians, the idea of the Peace Corps volunteer is an old idea in new packaging. Though the discourse of selfless benevolence at a grassroots, community level seems original, the idea of sending emissaries of education and development projects, cultural ambassadors, and symbols of national power is far from original. In her analysis of Mongolian educational import, Gita Steiner-Khmasi usefully outlines four distinct periods of educational influence: Tibetan (17th century to the 1930s), Manchu (1791 to 1911), European (via Russia from 1911 to 1918), and Russian (1921 to 1990).³ During the contraction of the world’s largest continuous empire under Chingis Khan (Genghis Khan), the Mongolian leader Altan Khan formed a formal religious-educational relationship with the Tibet in 1578 to help consolidate his rule.⁴ In this period, Mongolia built numerous Tibetan temples, staffed by thousands of monks. These institutions provided a curriculum centered on medicine, logic, and ritual studies, and resulted in rise of male literacy.⁵ As the Manchus rose to power in the Qing dynasty, they exerted political influence over Mongolia in a number of ways, including the establishment of secular political

¹ Refers to the Peace Corps issued Mongolian history and culture booklet, Matt Grieger, ed. *Land of the Blue Sky: A Guide to Mongolia* (Ulaanbaatar Peace Corps, 2008).

² Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 10th, 2011

³ Gita Steiner-Khamsi and Ines Stolpe, *Educational import : local encounters with global forces in Mongolia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)., 26.

⁴ Robert L. and Savada Worden, Andrea Matles, ed. *Mongolia: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1991). 100.

⁵ Michael K. Jerryson, *Mongolian Buddhism : the rise and fall of the Sangha* (Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2007).

schools in Mongolia in hopes of developing an educated, loyal elite echelon of society.⁶ The collapse of the Qing dynasty allowed for a brief period of embattled autonomy between 1911 and 1921, a period in which the high ranking Buddhist leader Bogd Gegeen Javdzandamba became Khan and functioned as a state leader.⁷ A revolution in 1921, backed by the USSR, led to Mongolia's socialist turn and a strong Soviet relationship. Whether this relationship positioned Mongolia as a "developed satellite" or the Soviet Union or a "dominated colony" is debatable.⁸ Unlike other Central Asian countries, the Soviet Union never formerly occupied Mongolia. Yet the presence of the Soviet state is still remarkably present in the educational system, from the Cyrillic alphabet to the school and university building projects, the seventy years of socialist influence had a deep impact on the educational system. The Peace Corps rides yet one more wave of influence, one simultaneously embraced and rejected by Mongolians. Even Mongolians sanguine about the democratic, capitalist ideas associated with the US recognize the social costs of widening income inequality and the rise of homelessness in recent years. For volunteers working through education and development issues with these recently marginalized peoples, understanding the genealogy of structures and ideologies influencing these trends is indispensable for empowering these community members. *Reading* history, therefor, is a *sine qua non* for approaching the various subjectivities based on assumed norms of culture, gender, and class.

At the very least, Peace Corps volunteers should be conscious that even my own brief history above, though contains cited facts and dates, does not tell the whole story, let alone one

⁶ Paula L. W. Sabloff, *Modern mongolia : reclaiming Genghis Khan* (Philadelphia; Ulaanbaata: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology ; National Museum of Mongolian History, 2001).,28

⁷ Alan J. K. Sanders, *Mongolia : politics, economics and society* (London; Boulder: F. Pinter ; L. Rienner, 1987)., 15.

⁸ Stephen Kotkin and Bruce A. Elleman, *Mongolia in the twentieth century : landlocked cosmopolitan* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).12.

with which Mongolians might agree. The idea of historical objectivity, of climbing outside of our own skin into a value free perspective of the past, is chimerical at best. Historians such Peter Novick attack this idea by historicizing the concept itself. In *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession*, for example, Novick provides a genealogy of German inspired American historiography, which turns out to be fraught with dubious interpretations of the German language let alone the role of the historian. One of the most salient aspects of Peter Novick's work is found beneath the text. Early in his presentation of terms in *That Noble Dream*, for example, he thoroughly explains the historical distinction between the terms "Relativism" and "Relativist." In this discussion, he notes that "the labels stuck, and have entered historians' language, so I have used them."⁹ He continues explaining his attitude towards the word "objectivist," a word that he tried to circumscribe on account of his "conservative resistance to neologisms," but decided in the end to employ throughout his work.¹⁰ Though this information is not vital to understanding the text, we learn something of the author's analytical, yet highly personal preferences. In a text specifically addressing the impossibility of objective histories, this notation illuminates the inner workings of the author's predispositions, exemplifying the author's overall point of inexorable historical subjectivity. If Peace Corps strives to provide a grassroots or at the very least critical history of Mongolia, multiple voices from various perspectives, particularly Mongolian, should be present within the presentation at the very least to highlight views not sanctioned by the US government.

Among these myriad of voices recounting Mongolian history, women's historical perspectives are both overlooked and crucial to understanding the relationships between marginal peoples and power structures. Whereas Novick employs detailed footnotes to unveil the

⁹Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). , 3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

subjective inner workings of historiography above, Joan Wallach Scott manumits Women's History through a pithy epigraph in *Gender and the Politics of History*. In her first chapter, she adroitly employs Virginia Woolf's writing from *A Room of One's Own* to introduce the subject of Women's History. Woolf's voice breaks open our normative androcentric histories with questions ranging from "at what age did she marry; how many children had she as a rule; had she a room to herself..."¹¹ to observations such as "but why should they not add a supplement to history? calling it, of course, by some inconspicuous name so that women might figure there without impropriety?"¹¹ Admittedly, these questions do not automatically lead to feminist historiography; answers may manifest in through the lens of male-domination. Likewise, women's history continues to undergo dramatic changes as feminist theory contends with different perspectives in generations, race, and class.¹² However different, feminist historiographies all highlight women's voices as an import part of the historical conversation. As inhabiting a particularly marginalized place within history and within the developing world, women deserve a prominent place in any grassroots development historiography.¹³

Whether misconstruing history as "objective" or obfuscating gender, class, race or religious bias, history possesses exceptional power of defining reality and therefore action at all narrative levels. Though volunteers themselves explained with exceptional clarity the power structure in the organizational hierarchy above them, the degree to which the volunteers themselves have utilized their grassroots experience to develop an inclusive, skeptical historical narrative is less certain. The volunteer produced history *Land of the Blue Sky*, a history written

¹¹ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia U. Press, 1988)., 12.

¹² Nancy A. Hewitt, *No permanent waves : recasting histories of U.S. feminism* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2010)., 1-10.

¹³ In making this point, I do not mean to indicate that the intersection of women and development has been issue free. A nuanced discussion of the process can be found in: Kathleen A. Staudt, *Women, international development, and politics : the bureaucratic mire* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

by volunteers and one Mongolian Peace Corps Mongolia staff member, is a troubling example. At the time of this research, Peace Corps Mongolia provided each volunteer with this text as an introduction to Mongolian history and culture. This glossy ninety-eight page booklet contains divisions deemed vital for Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers. With limited resources and access to research materials, volunteers wrote short chapters on topics such as geography, religion, festivals, and arts. Most importantly for the following discussion on the intersection of history and grassroots development, the booklet provides chapters including politics and the economy. Through analyzing the various discourses in this booklet, this chapter reveals two challenges in connecting with the concerns of host country nationals. The analysis of the textual discourses illustrates a blind spot among Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers themselves in understanding the ways their historical narratives re-inscribe hierarchies at the grassroots. Alternately, interviews with currently serving volunteers show that the one training event which this text rejected epistemological debate of any kind. These contrary facets of critical consciousness lead to the question of whether any real difference exists between staff-volunteer and grassroots volunteer-counterpart power hierarchies.

II.

Visually, the *Land of the Blue Sky* presents Mongolia with copious glossy photographs ranging from rural landscapes to vibrant city scenes. With a fair balance between representations of Mongolian men and women, children and adults, cultural events and daily life, monuments and prosaic homesteads, the photographs depict the great breadth and variety of Mongolian life. Even within the overall positive arrangement, however, sections of visual representation of the country leave notable holes in the representations. In the “economy” chapter, for instance, the editor displays showcases men with shovels and a man shearing a sheep, but no women at all.

Given Mongolia's highly educated female population, this oversight delineates "economy" in a sector specific way.¹⁴

Just as the visual discourses of *Land of the Blue Sky* address the issue of development variously from chapter to chapter, the text sections present development specific narratives in variously self-reflective ways. In the "Economy" chapter, for instance, the author begins with the transition from the Soviet planned economy to the market based economy in the early 1990's. According to the narrative in this chapter, the collapse of the Soviet Union brought on two trends in the Mongolia economy: a loss of financial support from the Soviet Union resulting in rising poverty and positive trends of Mongolia's privatization and economic internationalization. As noted by the chapter author, the upswing of the transition included the following:

In addition to rapid political changes ushered in by the collapse of the Soviet system, Mongolia also saw swift economic changes as the country began its transition from a command economy to a market-oriented one virtually overnight. Mongolia experienced a sharp depression and rising poverty in the early 1990s after the GDP plummeted when the Soviets pulled out; at its apex, the Soviet assistance constituted one-third of Mongolia's GDP. But there were positive economic events during this period, too. Mongolia laid the institutional and policy foundations in the 1990s for a market economy: price and trade liberalization; large-scale privatization of the retail and livestock herding sectors; curtailing of budget transfers and lending to state enterprises; and the establishment of a commercial banking system. Additionally, Mongolia became a member of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1991. Six years later, Mongolia acceded to the World Trade Organization (WTO).¹⁵

Granted, economic growth and internationalization is undeniably important to any world market based economy. But the simplistic narration paves over the rough edges of these benchmarks and association. First, the dearth of information about the Soviet economic system gives almost no qualitative information important for evaluating the transition. The terms "command-economy" and "market-oriented" provide the most general description of these typologies. Both

¹⁴ World Trade Press, "Mongolia Women in Culture, Business & Travel a Profile of Mongolian Women in the Fabric of Society," World Trade Press, <http://public.eblib.com/EBLPublic/PublicView.do?ptiID=536095>.

¹⁵ Grieger, *Land of the Blue Sky: A Guide to Mongolia*, 39.

economic systems have weaknesses, and this passage obfuscates the ways that Soviet and Capitalist power structures both create losers. In terms of the Soviet system, planned central economic growth led towards mass inefficiencies in terms of capital generation.¹⁶ But one person's inefficiency is another person's wealth and welfare. The Mongolian version of capitalism embraced a privatization of state enterprises with vastly unequal opportunities for Mongolian citizens. Whereas a small percentage of Mongolians profited from the privatization of state banks, factories, herds and agriculture, most Mongolians lost a great deal of wealth in the transition. In the banking sector, for instance, corrupt privatization led to a great wealth losses for Mongolians during the 1990s.

The historian Baabar, who had been appointed minister of finance, and the American trained Jigjidiin Unebat, head of the Mongol Central Bank, acted over a long holiday weekend on June 1 to deal with this problem. They forced through the ill-considered Resolution Number 80, which merged the state-owned Reconstruction Bank with the commercial Golomt Bank. By acting over a holiday weekend, they clearly hoped that few would notice and that the merger could be presented as fait accompli. The resolution was cleared with the IMF and the World Bank, but the Khural [Mongolian Parliament] was neither consulted nor its approval sought. Resolution 80 simply transferred a state bank's assets to a favored commercial bank without issuing a tender or calling for an auction. No other bank had been contacted or allowed to bid for the failing bank.¹⁷

As this quote demonstrates, the Mongolian "free market" is not actually free, but rigged towards those in power, as in the majority if not all capitalist societies. Curiously, other chapters of this booklet cite Morris Rossabi's *Modern Mongolia*, quoted above and one of the most systematic critiques of current political and economic affairs in Mongolia, yet the author of the economics chapter, the focus of this book, does not make the works cited page. The point is not that Rossabi's take on Mongolian transition to capitalism is entirely correct, but that a historical debate about contemporary Mongolian economic reforms exists.

¹⁶.Pradumna Bickram Rana and Bank Asian Development, *Mongolia : a centrally planned economy in transition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

¹⁷ Rossabi, *Modern Mongolia : from khans to commissars to capitalists*.83

The other curious aspect of the above paragraph is the blind celebration of Mongolia's entrance into relationships with the World Bank, IMF, and the WTO. Given the wide criticism of these institutions, this credulous optimism masks the downside of these international relationships. One particularly damaging aspect rests in the loss of sovereignty under the gaze of international influences. Critics of the WTO, for example, raise the issue of unfair trading practices between rich countries and poorer countries such as Mongolia. As numerous skeptics contend, the much greater staff support, legal expertise, and familiarity with the English language instantly put most negotiators from the developing world at a disadvantage.¹⁸ In the case of Mongolia, the process of membership had political undertones, none of which were democratic:

“Despite not having the institutions or the know-how necessary for a meaningful negotiation of its position and rights after adhering to WTO, Mongolian politicians went on with the process, motivated by political objectives to complete the accession before their neighbours Russia and China, and to be able to point to concrete steps in the transition towards a market economy (Tsogtbaatar 2005). The move was hoped to bring political prestige and development aid to the rulers of the time. The unilateral decision process, which led to the outline of the accession conditions, and the lack of influence on the process from the part of the private sector (McKinley 2003; Tsogtbaatar 2005), suggest that political interests came before socio-economic concerns in the process.”¹⁹

Admittedly, the benefits of Mongolia's accession to organizations such as the WTO may outweigh the costs. But to present these international relationships as unambiguously positive obfuscates the complexity of Mongolia's entrance into the world market. Particularly for grassroots development workers, the ways these hierarchical relationships affect the livelihood of their work communities.

¹⁸ John W. Head, *Losing the global development war : a contemporary critique of the IMF, the World Bank, and the WTO* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2008).

¹⁹ Andrei Marin, "Between Cash Cows and Golden Calves: Adaptations of Mongolian Pastoralism in the 'Age of the Market'," *Nomadic Peoples* 12, no. 2 (2008), 79.

When I read this paragraph to volunteers, most claimed they had never read the chapter closely, but voiced a great deal of skepticism towards the celebratory tone towards free market reforms. After listening to the paragraph, one volunteer typically noted that “I can't remember what I thought that the time, but looking at it nowTrade liberalization, privatization...I feel like with government control, there is at least a gesture toward some kind of controls in terms of work place conditions. Private organizations are not interested in these things. It's not a criticism, it's a fact. So...I don't buy into this paragraph.”²⁰ Another volunteer raised a nuanced conflict between the development work of Peace Corps Volunteers in relation to some of the economic changes in Mongolia, stating “The market economy has definitely benefited the people, yet there's been this urban migration of people who are now living in slums in the worst conditions...It gets back to the different forms of development-this idea that were given these Western ideas of privatization and democracy-but it's kind of counter intuitive to what we're doing which is capacity building.”²¹ The reactions of these volunteers to readings of the economics chapter suggests not that volunteers wholeheartedly dismissed economic changes in Mongolia as counter-developmental, but that they recognized the complexity of the issue. And with further discussion, they could certainly have learned more about the various opinions and narratives surrounding this debate.

Though the “Economics” chapter of the *Land of the Blue Sky* most directly relates to the topic of grassroots development, the quality of other chapters were similarly top-down and non-discursive. Admittedly, some of authors' chapters included hints of Mongolian perspectives. In the “Religion” chapter, for instance, the author employs a passage from Eric Thrift's *The Cultural Heritage of Mongolia* quoting a Mongolian stating that “We never lost *Buddagiin*

²⁰ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 2nd, 2011

²¹ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 21st, 2011

shashin (Buddha's religion). We suffered...but I am happy that I have lived to see the time when we can chant again."²² As the quote reveals, Mongolians, particularly monks, have quite strong opinions on the subject of religion. However, the reader may wonder why did the Peace Corps volunteer author use another person's quotation instead of investigating the matter in the volunteer's own community? Certainly, a long block quote from an actual interview with an elderly Mongolian would not only provided a more timely perspective on Buddhism in Mongolia, but also demonstrated the importance of asking Mongolians for their perspectives. An even more informative exercise would include interviewing a younger non-religious and/or religious Mongolian for a comparative perspective. This type of comparison could have elicited a discussion about religion at a Peace Corps training. Similarly, in the "Politics and Foreign Policy Chapter," the author indicates Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers' perceptions of police brutality in Mongolia, yet offers a single line of paraphrase from one interview. A quote would at least let volunteers in training reading this text understand the qualitative aspects in which "Peace Corps Volunteers have reported witnessing incidents of police brutality and corruption in locales throughout the country."²³ This statement gives little information; un-quantified indications of widespread police corruption could be true of most any country. More germane question for future grassroots development volunteers includes the community's relation to this corruption and violence: How does the community describe these events?

While the *Land of the Blue Sky* demonstrates an inclination for traditionally authoritative, scholastic and news sources over interviews with actual Mongolians, some materials produced by Peace Corps Mongolia staff indicate a greater sensitivity towards inclusion. In the Peace Corps Mongolia *2011 Annual Report*, for instance, the content and presentation invites both

²² Grieger, *Land of the Blue Sky: A Guide to Mongolia*, 53.

²³ Ibid.

Mongolians and English speakers into the conversation through a bi-lingual English-Mongolian format. Further, the report includes quotes from Mongolians evaluating their volunteers. In one quote, a named school complex director notes that “Our Volunteer was able to contribute to developing the English skills of teachers, students, and community members...She has worked hard to build her CPs’ capacity, not only in methodology and team teaching, but she also organized life skills seminars as well.” While the Peace Corps Volunteer may be leading more than facilitating in this description, the counterpart’s capacity is certainly a central concern. Though the actual counterpart’s voice would have given more credibility to these claims, the Peace Corps staff, unlike the volunteers in their history of Mongolia, used actual Mongolian voices. Admittedly, the purposes of the history and the annual report are quite different: the former trains volunteers and the latter informs Mongolians and advertises the Peace Corps. And perhaps the staff only picked the most promising Mongolian evaluations to advertise the organization. Despite these divergent audiences and possible editorial distortion, the annual report’s format invites a grassroots dialogue about the organization’s activities over a given year. Though undoubtedly inaccurate and romantic, the Peace Corps staff members manage to construct a text that includes grassroots partners in terms of voice and accessibility, an accomplishment that volunteers living and working with the grassroots constituents failed to achieve in *Land of the Blue Sky*.

III.

Despite the fact that former volunteers themselves advanced the non-discursive historical narratives of *Land of the Blue Sky*, current Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers expressed criticism both for the bias of this heuristic and the efficaciousness of the training sessions on Mongolian

history. On the one session dedicated to history, one volunteer commented, “That was one of our debacle sessions...we all know about Chingis now...”²⁴ As many volunteers complained, the bulk of their historical knowledge of Mongolia focused on the vast Mongolian empire of Chingis Khan (Genghis Khan), which arguably ended with the collapse of the Yuan dynasty in 1368.²⁵ Along with the focus on distant events in Mongolian history, however formative in Mongolian culture, the amount of time spent understanding the country’s history also fell short of volunteers’ expectations. Another volunteer mentioned, “I was shocked and deeply disappointed when I saw our PST schedule and saw that there was only one class on Mongolian history. And I think it was mixed with something else like culture...ours [history class] was before we even studied it [the booklet]. I think most of the trainers don’t know a great deal about Mongolian history.”²⁶ Here, the volunteer expressed doubts that Peace Corps volunteers know more than a cursory outline of Mongolian history, an impression that my interviews confirmed in almost all cases.

In gaging volunteer’s understanding of Mongolian history, I asked them to tell me about Mongolian history, particularly any facets important to their work as grassroots development volunteers. In most cases, the volunteers recited facts about the Mongolian empire, yet had only a cursory command of recent historical changes. On this point, one volunteer criticized the training curriculum, stating that “...I think the focus should be on the last 25 years in the transition and the realities. You're here for two years and you're not here 30 or 40 years ago. I remember doing trivia is games about Chingis Khan’s birth name. Who gives a fuck? We need to

²⁴ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 3rd, 2011.

²⁵ Recently, revisionist historian Jack Weatherford has argued for the wider impact of innovations of the Mongolian Empire on contemporary society. Undoubtedly, an appreciation of these aspects of early Mongolian culture would bolster volunteers’ appreciation for Mongolia. However, the global scope of Weatherford’s books would not necessarily provide a foundation for the important aspects of contemporary Mongolian political economy. See J. McIver Weatherford, *Genghis Khan and the making of the modern world* (New York: Crown, 2004).

²⁶ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 8th, 2011

know what happened recently.”²⁷ Here, the volunteer underscores the link between recent historical movements leading to Mongolia’s current socio-economic situation to volunteers’ grassroots development, trends that have directly impacted the people with whom they work. Part of connecting with and empowering Mongolian counterparts and community members is certainly tied to understanding the socio-economic forces impacting their lives.

Though recent Mongolian history barely registered in the training for Peace Corps Mongolia three month Pre-service training, several volunteers took the initiative to learn about Mongolian history for themselves. One volunteer noted that “As soon as I knew I was going to Mongolia, I got my hands on anything I could to read. I think a lot of volunteers would like that stuff if it were offered, but aren’t going to take the time to learn about it...I think a lot of volunteers don’t even know the name of the president. But in terms of history being useful to our work, it’s useful to know about the Soviet education system.”²⁸ In this response, the volunteer unconsciously delineated a particular divide in the ways volunteers viewed their roles. Whereas volunteers who knew almost nothing about contemporary Mongolian history knew little about their roles as grassroots development workers, volunteers who trained themselves about contemporary Mongolia tended to understand their role within the framework of Mongolian socio-economic trends. One volunteer embodied the latter, stating that “My understanding is the Soviets basically ran the country for many years. In 1990, there was a peaceful revolution and the country became a democracy...they have challenges like corruption, but they are able to vote. There have been tremendous problems with a change to a free market economy...the people that came in to change the country, did so without putting in any safety nets to the country.” Although knowing little in terms of specifics of the revolution and particular ways the free

²⁷ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 9th, 2011

²⁸ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, October 4th, 2011

market economy affected social safety nets, this volunteer's self-study led to a less sanguine narrative of the free market direction taken by the Mongolian government.

While few volunteers could name specific events tied to the collapse of these social safety nets, most recognized this point from relationships and experiences with their communities. Noting this aspect of the current socio-economic realities, one volunteer recognized that "For everyday people, they are not seeing much of the economic growth in this country."²⁹ Another volunteer offered further analysis, equating the Mongolian free-market situation to a more familiar context, stating that "I know back home there's also occupy Wall Street...I think the wealth disparity is growing just like it is back home. The disparity between the wealth is-you people building homes here that if you put him in America to be million-dollar homes but you also have people living in one room and can barely afford a new notebook for a new student."³⁰ In a similar assessment, another volunteer noted that "the people who know how to make money in this country do very well, the people who don't are suffering."³¹ Even with these impressions from their experiences, several volunteer raised the point that their experiential access socio-economic realities in Mongolia were limited. On this point, one volunteer explained that "As far as the economy goes, one of these can be the flood of herders coming from the countryside to the city. None of the Peace Corps volunteers have a good idea what UB's about because we all hang out in the same 15 block radius. But the slums are just outside the city..."³² The volunteer recognized both the broad trends of Mongolian migration and the economic realities Mongolians suffer as a result. But the volunteer astutely couches these observations within the limits of experience: Peace Corps volunteers may in some cases live and

²⁹ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, December 3rd, 2011

³⁰ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, September 24th, 2011

³¹ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 8th, 2011

³² Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 9th, 2011

work in impoverished communities, but few if any live in the poorest Mongolians currently flocking to the outskirts of the capital in hopes of eking out an existence. Whereas volunteers frequent the restaurants and bars of the capital catering to foreigners and rich Mongolians on their visits to the capital, few volunteers know the extent that Mongolians have suffered on account of the rapid privatization and governmental economic restructuring.³³

From the experience of living in Mongolia, a few volunteers learned that Mongolia's international aid relationships with more powerful do not always result in economic and social gains for Mongolia. As one volunteer argued, "There may be a lot of international relationships with things like the mind where they might have more negative impact on positive... Even the road here to UB and the paving the road and it's all imported labor: it's all Chinese. So I don't know. On an individual level they hate the fact of Chinese, Russians, and Germans coming in making profits..."³⁴ Notably, this volunteer did not include US corporations in the list of international profiteers.³⁵ In the vein of national interests, one volunteer raised the realities of Mongolian unemployment and underemployment in light of aid-based projects employing foreign staff notably skewed towards the interests of foreign governments, stating, "According to the US Fact Book, unemployment is a lot 11.2%. Mongolia has that third neighbor policy that they're going to be good friends with everyone. And the only way they do that is if your economic friends with everyone, meaning that you're going to give things away. So they have this immense amount of wealth is flooding into the country. [But] they're not doing what they

³³ Numerous observers have noted the steady, overwhelming rural to urban migration in Mongolia's capital city, including Don Belt, "The Urban Clan of Genghis Khan: An influx of nomads has turned the Mongolian capital upside down," *National Geographic* October(2011).

³⁴ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 3rd, 2011

³⁵ One example, *inter alia*, includes US coal mining company Peabody's bid on south Gobi mine site Tavan Tolgoi in 2011. According to Newsweek's Green Rankings study, Peabody scored 9th place of the US's *least* environmentally responsible companies. See *Newsweek*, October 16th, 2011.

promised the government they're going to do.”³⁶ In this volunteer’s estimation, the Mongolian government’s focus on building relationships outside of their two neighbors China and Russia, the “Third Neighbor Policy,” has allowed non-Mongolian companies take advantage the country’s situation. Therefore, the “free market” economy is in reality strongly influenced by Mongolia’s need for political relationships, which in turn further weakens the country’s bargaining position with multi-national corporations. Despite these insights into contemporary Mongolian socio-economic history, most volunteers could not cite particular evidence for their assertions, only speculation.

One reason for this lack of evidence-based historical knowledge among the volunteers stems from Peace Corps Mongolia’s weighting of culture over history. Volunteers spend many more sessions learning Mongolian manners, customs, and cultural expectations. Volunteers described the culture sessions with varying appraisals, some appreciating the hands-on sessions such as learning to take down and put up a traditional Mongolian felt home. Others felt the training wasted time, and that the host-family experience more than covered this category. One volunteer note that the Peace Corps is “...very concerned with you offending people. So lots on daily rituals. I’m not sure if people really benefit from them. People point at me all the time, and people put their feet anywhere. I saw someone throwing keys at someone else the other day... Even some classes on the ways Mongolians view foreigners. I wasn’t aware how much Mongolians hate Chinese people would have been helpful...”³⁷ Here, the volunteer underscores the ways Mongolians break their own customs, and thereby questions the importance of these rules. Though arguably volunteers following Mongolian rules of etiquette are more effective in developing relationships with Mongolians, the puzzle for Peace Corps Mongolia Pre-Service

³⁶ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, December 2nd, 2011

³⁷ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, December 3rd, 2011

Training becomes a question of finding the right ways to address culture relative to other important topics such as history. Volunteers certainly had their own ideas about this balancing act. A volunteer who read books on Mongolia before arriving suggested that “There’s two books in particular I would recommend for any Peace Corps volunteer coming to Mongolia. One is...*Modern Mongolia: From Khans to Commissars*. How could you come here without reading that? I recommend reading the Naomi Kline’s *Shock Doctrine*. It puts this in context...There’s still a lot of unanswered questions why USAID puts all these constraints on loans. This whole free market thing.” Here, a volunteer succinctly describes two texts that challenge the narrative of free market ideology with concrete examples. Granted, several of the chapters in *Land of the Blue Sky* cite the first suggestion *Modern Mongolia*. But the bibliography of the “Economics” chapter includes no such citation or similar counterargument to this dominant narrative. The point is not that some version of capitalism is unsuitable for development in Mongolia. Rather, the fact that many volunteers have only slight inklings and vague anecdotes that challenge this narrative suggests a need for bolstering volunteers’ access both to contemporary Mongolian history and to varied interpretations of this history.

IV.

As Peace Corps is a grassroots development program, the relationships between historical epistemology and power hierarchies are undeniably key considerations for volunteers. The analysis above highlights three aspects of Peace Corps Mongolia’s training program that limit the approach to this consideration. First, the training booklet *Land of the Blue Sky*, an edited volume created by volunteers serving in 2008, narrates the Mongolian transition to a “free-market” economy in a simplistic manner, which for the most part minimizes critiques and alternate narratives. International institutions such as the IMF and World Trade Organization,

for instance, are valorized as progress without underscoring the ambiguous role these organizations play in maintaining economic dominance over developing nations through structural inequalities. Further, the near absence of Mongolian interviews in this book, in which the subject is largely about the experience Mongolian life, suggests a prescribed understanding of these events. Even though all of the writers of this text were living among Mongolians as they wrote the book, almost none of them sought quotes or multiple opinions from actual Mongolians.

Whether or not the middle-school textbook style of level presentation of Mongolian history contributed to a certain presentation style is unclear. But the fact remains that the way the Peace Corps trained volunteers with a quiz game, which according to the volunteers, elicited no discussion about the presentation of the book. In my interviews, when I asked volunteers about a paragraph in the “Economics” chapter, on the contrary, volunteers eagerly discussed and challenged the romantic narrative of this text. Admittedly, a sophisticated discussion of Mongolian politics and economics would take more than the one session devoted to Mongolian history. Yet, many volunteers felt unchallenged by course schedule of the Pre-Service Training. As one volunteer noted, “...I think given our days, were not very rigorous, strenuous, I think we could have taken more time to talk about history and it would've been beneficial...”³⁸ Clearly, room exists for at least a change in the format of historical training, if not more sessions devoted to Mongolian history. If preparing volunteers to engage in grassroots service is truly a goal of the Peace Corps, these sessions would include a discussion of the content, which ideally contains multiple perspectives on important development topics such as economic history.

The fact that volunteers wrote and assembled *The Land of the Blue Sky* underscores a central challenge of the volunteers as grassroots development workers. As the volunteer writers themselves lived and worked in Mongolian communities, the mono-narrative present in the text

³⁸ Interview with Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteer, November 18th, 2011

indicates a troubling possibility for the grassroots development volunteer idea. The ideal possibility is that volunteers go to their service sites and gain a more complex understanding of the myriad of factors in Mongolian political, economic, and social history. Their experience of living among Mongolians shifts their perspectives in such a way that they could see complexity where once existed historical ideology. The text itself, however, indicates a certain preconceived perspective brought to the work site. In other words, volunteers could go to site and simply reconstruct the hierarchical, romantic economic narratives of the US government at a local level. This possibility, that living among Mongolians does not greatly affect prescriptive narratives of local history, would raise a major hurdle for the whole idea of grassroots development.

While the journey to a more complex understanding of culture and history may require greater foundation in development theory than many current volunteers possess, the Peace Corps Mongolia training staff can certainly push them in this direction through the pre-service training. If grassroots development requires reading, listening, discussion, and consciousness-raising, playing a trivia game with a middle school level textbook on Mongolian history is not entirely helpful. Admittedly, many of the volunteers lack a basic knowledge of Mongolian geography, economics, politics, religion, and cultural practices upon their arrival. As all of the volunteers have some form of higher education, however, this remedial level of introduction is unnecessary. Regardless of whether volunteers become free-market advocates or hold a more nuanced appraisal of the costs and benefits of neo-liberal ideologies currently reigning in Mongolia, they should arrive at site with awareness that their own government, which they represent to local communities, has a stake in this debate.

CHAPTER 6

Varieties of the Grassroots Development Experience: The JOCV Mongolia Volunteers

“What distinguishes humans from other animals is that people are creatures of signs. Signs carry conceptual meanings which are structured in multidimensional code systems. These systems are mirrors reflecting the identities of an individual, a group, a culture, etc. In modern theatre, these images are limited to the ‘real world.’”

--Masakuni Kitazawa, *Myth, Performance, and Politics*¹

The preceding chapters have highlighted the ways the Peace Corps’ organizational understandings of “grassroots” in conjunction with the vital concepts of volunteer, development, and education programming have revealed inconsistencies on several levels. In examinations of organizational literature, these concepts manifest in quite varied ways, suggesting both internal reconsideration or under consideration of the concepts. Moreover, interviews with Peace Corps Mongolia at their work sites volunteers revealed a quite distinct divide between volunteer and organizational views of the Peace Corps grassroots approach. When considering this situation of such conceptual diversity, an important question includes whether or not the Peace Corps is unique in this respect. As promised in the introduction of this dissertation, a comparison to Japanese version of the Peace Corps, the Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers (JOVC), will test this avenue of inquiry. In truth, historians of the Peace Corps have largely overlooked the existence of the myriad other governmental grassroots volunteer agencies such as the JOVC in their analysis of the Peace Corps. The gift that these organizations provide is a window into the ways culture and national history shape ideas of grassroots development. One notable exception, however, includes Harvard Historian Elizabeth Cobbs Hoffman’s *All You Need is Love*, a critical treatment of the Peace Corps’ overly idealistic social culture in the 1960s.

¹ Masakuni Kitazawa, "Myth, Performance, and Politics," *TDR* (1988-) 36, no. 3 (1992)., 167.

Hoffman devotes an entire chapter to Canadian, Danish, and Australian equivalents, noting their idiosyncratic cultures. In her fascinating description of the Canadian University Service Overseas (CUSO), for instance, she describes the organization's cultural factionalism between English and French sectors over the issue of Quebec's autonomy.² Though Hoffman's exploration delves into the cultural drama of these organizations, her review only partially covers institutional and volunteer understandings of the development processes promised and theorized by these agencies. This chapter will tread further in this direction with a focus on Japan's version of the Peace Corps, the Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers more commonly known as JICA volunteers.³ Interviews with fourteen Japanese volunteers in Mongolia indicate that both the JOCV organizational discourses and volunteer diversity nearly mirrors those of the Peace Corps.

Though the JOCV and Peace Corps entered Mongolia at the same time, these organizations arose out of disparate socio-political situations. As the US advanced an inchoate version of development in the wake of post WWII world military and economic supremacy, the demilitarized yet gradually rising economic star Japan formed a similar government volunteer organization called the Japan Overseas Volunteer Corps (JOVC) in 1965. Almost as an afterthought, the JOVC was one small department of Japan's Overseas Technical Cooperation Agency (OTCA), an agency that would later become consolidated into the current Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) in 1974. According to the Japan International Cooperation Agency Law, the purpose of JICA centered on "contributing to the economic and social development of developing areas and promoting international cooperation," whereas the

² Cobbs Hoffman and Gift in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps (Library of Congress), *All you need is love : the Peace Corps and the spirit of the 1960s.*, 245.

³ The Japanese name for this organization is *seinen kaigai kyouryokutai* (青年海外協力隊)

JOCV “dispatches young volunteers to the developing countries where they will cooperate in economic and social development of the welfare of the general public while they live and work together with the local people.”⁴ With this vision, Japan’s larger national development organization JICA sent only a handful of Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers to five countries initially, gradually increasing to a modest 486 volunteers working in the developing world in 1975.⁵ Though initially created in the vision of the Peace Corps, the JOCV developed both inwardly as an organization and also outwardly in host country communities in ways that resonate with Japan’s particular socio-political realities.

Though the JOCV’s organizational history diverges from Peace Corps, several commonalities make a comparison warranted. First and foremost, the JOCV employs a similar emphasis on grassroots participatory development through the central term “cooperation.”⁶ Second, the JOCV is a part of the Japanese government, much as the Peace Corps is a US governmental organization, and thereby faces the conflict of national self-interest and the interests of host-country communities in their development strategies and relationships. Given these two similarities, this examination will trace the ways the JOCV understands the grassroots volunteer role in development vis-à-vis their power dynamics as representatives of the Japanese government. Much like the Peace Corps’ use of grassroots, JOCV organizational literature employs the term “cooperation” in a variety of ways, at times with more self-awareness than other instances. Exploring these two aspects of the JOCV, organizational rhetoric and volunteer roles, will clarify the ways that aspects of power inherent in the process of embedding development volunteers into communities.

⁴ JICA, "JICA: Organization & Functions," (1976).3-7.

⁵ JICA, "Dispatch of Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers," *JICA Annual Report* (2001).

⁶ Just as in the English title, the word “cooperation” (協力 *kyouryoku*) is in the actual Japanese title of the JOCV.

This chapter presents two types of evidence of JOCV/JICA's understandings of grassroots development, archival discourse analysis and ethnographic interviews in Mongolia. In the former case, I explored both Japanese and English materials published by JICA on the concerns of the organization. In the end, I decided to showcase both Japanese and English journals. Whereas the Japanese language materials revealed Mongolia specific understandings of grassroots development, the English language materials impart agency's self-explanations constructed for the widest audience, particularly a readership from the developing world. Though the JOCV projects a largely benevolent understanding of cooperative development, visual and textural discourses reveal blindness in the way the organization understands hierarchies of power inherent in governmental volunteer practice. Interviews with volunteers serving in Outer Mongolia further reveal inconsistencies in the ways that volunteers view their roles and their development work. The last section of the chapter highlights the ways that Japanese volunteers discussed and internalized their understandings of "cooperation" in relation to development in Mongolia.

II.

In 2011, the *JICA Volunteer's Magazine* featured an entire issue to JOCV activities in Mongolia, thereby providing discourses on grassroots development. Written in Japanese, this magazine has a slick, professional quality, and this particular issue displays an array of images of Mongolia. Though the magazine is for Japanese volunteers, the first pages feature Mongolians, from a young boy at play on the cover to a middle-aged professional Mongolian engineer on the first page, with only small photographs of Japanese volunteers and technical advisers. The editors included mostly photographs that feature Mongolians in a positive light or Japanese and Mongolians working together. However, a few photos depart from this strategy, featuring

volunteers alone or as leaders at a work site. One article written by volunteer Ayako Nozawa, “The Situation of Disabled People,” features photographs of this volunteer leading a group of kindergarten students, helping with a Mongolian teen’s physical therapy, and playing games with a teenage girl.⁷ The volunteer writes, “My activities are that of an occupational therapist. In other words, I work to improve the lives of a target group of people...For me, giving trainings of things such as institutional improvements and work therapy (training in of itself leads to a broader sense of meaning) was quite difficult. However, I may have been able to introduce methods to a group of people for making a place more livable in a particular area through their own hands with a particular focus on disabled people.”⁸ Throughout this volunteer’s reflections, “development” is a transfer of knowledge, particularly in the sense of methods. While the volunteer is clear that Mongolians must take actions into “their own hands,” the negotiation of this knowledge hierarchy is not apparent in the article. Granted, Mongolians can clearly not take the volunteer’s advice. But the fact that volunteer does not discuss the ways these trainings are negotiated spaces between equals implies that the volunteer does not think in these terms. For Nozawa, cooperation and cooperative development seems to mean Mongolians enacting the advice of the volunteer.

In contrast, one of the final articles of this 68 page magazine includes an interview with a Mongolian woman working for JICA. Described as a “JICA office worker,” Oruntuya provides insight from Mongolians, albeit token opinions by a Mongolian employee of the Japanese government, on the relationship between Japan and Mongolia. After asking series of background questions about Oruntuya’s background and interests in Japan and learning Japanese, the interviewers pitch a series of more pointed questions. Answering the question on the future of Mongolian and Japanese relationships, Oruntuya explains that “Both countries possess a

⁷ JICA Mongolia Office, “Baasan” *JICA Volunteer's Magazine*, no. 48 (2011), 11.

⁸ Ibid., (My translation from Japanese.)

deepening respect for one another, and I think that concerning mutual trust, it is excellent...I am moved that I can work as a support staff for volunteers working for the benefit of Mongolia...not only do all of the members of course hand over their [development] activities, but they also know a lot about Mongolia and make a lot of friends here after being sent for two years.”⁹ Although the interviewer might have found a Mongolian not tied to the organization for these questions, Oruntuya’s answers underscore a notable point of emphasis. In her brief answer about Mongolian and Japanese relations, the Mongolian staff worker highlighted the fact that volunteers “hand over their activities” to Mongolians when they leave. Whether this is actually what happens is another matter. But that the Mongolian narrative emphasizes this point is striking when set against the volunteer’s article described above. Although the volunteer Nozawa mentions training Mongolians, she did not indicate through text or image that a Mongolian would take over her activities when she leaves; the narrative of counterparts and cooperation is invisible in her reflections. Despite these reservations on the definition of grassroots cooperation, the development discourses in the *JICA Volunteer’s Newsletter* show a high degree of respect and inclusion of Mongolians. At the same time, the newsletter does not thrust Japan forward as a benevolent savior to an overwhelming, patronizing degree.

Not all organizational literature, however, meets this standard of discourse on grassroots, cooperative development. A brief excursion into non-Mongolian specific JICA literature reveals other motivations for embedding JICA/JOCV volunteers in host countries. In January of 1992, for instance, the Japan International Cooperation Agency published the first issue of the *JICA Newsletter*, a bi-monthly publication detailing the agency’s technical assistance to developing countries. Though JICA certainly provides certain services to the developing context, this newsletter is far from an unadulterated report on Japanese official development assistance (ODA).

⁹ Ibid., 61.

These eight to twelve page documents function as a showcase of Japanese benevolence towards impoverished nations, many of which are former Japanese or European colonies.¹⁰ If the good works are depicted as national trophies, then the hero of this romantic serial is JICA. The *JICA Newsletter's* overly simplistic narratives, however, reveal a mixed picture of the organization's motivations for international development. The following discourse analysis reveals that the *JICA Newsletter's* aim is not only to detail Japan's role in supporting international development, but also bolster Japan's image of benevolence and justify national economic interests.

The publication's September 1995 narrative of the 30th Anniversary of the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers takes the form of a pastiche of selective memories. The managing director of the JOCV secretariat Takahashi Akira is named as the narrator of the piece, admitting that "it is difficult to put into words how we have contributed to the development of our partner countries overseas."¹¹ Despite this modest beginning, Takahashi weights the JOCV as a grassroots organization through anecdotes such as a women's goat deposit in Bangladesh, which has no mention of follow-up research.¹² Most notably, Takahashi's address includes a section entitled "The Need for Participatory Cooperation." Within this section, Takahashi explains that JOCV's understanding of participation is twofold. First, the meaning of participatory cooperation is that any resident of Japan, whether or not they possess special skills or training, can participate in cooperation activities. Following this explanation, Takahashi illustrates his point of a group of volunteers' mothers in Kumamoto, Kyushu organizing a group to study countries in which their

¹⁰This English publication's audience is people of the developing world. The editors regularly publish positive letters from readers in JICA's sphere of international development.

¹¹ JICA, "JICA Newsletter," no. September (1995), 2.

¹² Though invisible in the JICA Newsletter's advocacy of the Women in Development (WID) approach, the idea of giving preference to women in development projects has a tangled, contentious history in that many well-intentioned projects simply add work for women in the developing context with few gains and sometimes significant losses in income and power. For an insightful discussion on the distinct approaches and pitfalls, see Peet and Hartwick, *Theories of development : contentions, arguments, alternatives.*, Chapter 10.

sons and daughters serve.¹³ Before this definition, however, the author notes that participatory cooperation demands that JICA and JOCV listen honestly to the demands of the local people themselves.¹⁴ Of all the projects and theories Takashi notes, this aspect of participatory cooperation is the only one without an anecdote. On one hand, this elision attests to some honesty on the part of the newsletter; the editors could not imagine such a project. On the other hand, Takahashi's statements that he is aware of the necessity to reorganize this system into a bottom-up system and that "The change is inevitable, since our activities will never succeed with the understanding and cooperation of the local people," are far from reassuring. Do these statements imply that he intends to act upon this need? Further, the latter statement implies that if only the local people understood the JOCV projects that they would cooperate and the projects would succeed.¹⁵ This equation places all of the pressure on the local people to consent to conform to this prescriptive vision. The accompanying photos, chosen by the *JICA Newsletter* editors, reinforce this non self-reflective stance. Centered in the photograph, a young beaming male JOCV volunteer holds an African baby while several African women and children flank him with lackluster expressions; all four sit in a dirt-floored ambiguous interior space.¹⁶ Within the surrounding text, the photo most likely serves to emphasize the grass-roots participatory development lauded by Takahashi. But this mythology's denotative message collapses under the languor of the *JICA Newsletter* editors. The very names of the women are absent; they are not quoted in any way, and their expressions betray resistance to their role as poor African women.

Through the JICA and JOCV histories, the *JICA Newsletter* bolsters the image of Japan through a non-discursive political narrative. Whereas Japan's colonial incursions before and

¹³ JICA, "JICA Newsletter.", 3

¹⁴ Ibid., 3.

¹⁵ Ibid., 3.

¹⁶ Ibid., 4.

during WWII are never mentioned, the Soviet communist sphere of influence is ubiquitous, positioning Japan in heroic opposition. In the April 1994 issue of the *JICA Newsletter*, for instance, the editorial entitled “A message from JICA’s President Kimio Fujita” meanders through JICA’s development milestones while accentuating the Soviet Union’s collapse. The report notes that “In the twenty years since JICA was established, the situation throughout the world has changed dramatically, as evidenced by the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.”¹⁷ While the world did indisputably change in 1990, the *JICA Newsletter*’s presentation carefully ignores Japan’s own imperial past. Though the failures of the Soviet Union are certainly indefensible, their discourses serve not as examples of poorly designed national development strategies, but as a foe, a characterization that serves to buttress Japan’s heroic stance within world development.

The fall of the Soviet sphere of influence posed a problem for the *JICA Newsletter*. Though the romantic emplotment can operate in an abstract way, the simplistic characterization of international development within this publication precludes this nuance; JICA needs a new set of problems to fix. Miyakawa’s address conveniently signals this shift, stating that “Against such a rapidly changing background, international cooperation must now seek a new direction...It is vital that problems such as environmental degradation, the population explosion...be addressed on a global scale.”¹⁸ Here, the focus of the organization shifts towards JICA and JOCV roles in confronting new issues. While population and the environment are great concerns to almost every nation, the unreflective way in which the Japanese economy ties cooperative development to these concerns, particularly the latter, betrays an unreflective narrative masking connections to Japanese economic concerns in the development process. In understanding Japan’s environmental aid to

¹⁷ JICA, “Facing New Issues and Moving Beyond,” *JICA Newsletter* 10(1994), 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

developing nations in the 1990s, the impact of Japan's own agricultural methods on Japanese farmland during this period will provide some context. In Tokyo University Emeritus Professor Kikuo Kimazawa's 2002 comprehensive study of Japanese fertilizer use in Gifu Prefecture during the 1990s, for instance, he underscores the dangers of the commonly used petroleum based fertilizers. In his analysis of Gifu prefecture groundwater, Kimazawa discovered that "During the last few decades, NO₃-N concentrations in groundwater in Japan have increased steadily due to the development of intensive agriculture...The Japanese...In 1999, 173 of 3,374 (5.1%) wells and 64 of 1,362 (4.7%) wells used as drinking water exceeded the criteria level."¹⁹ Therefore, during the same period as the *JICA Newsletter* narratives, Japanese farmers' use of petrochemicals was literally poisoning the well of surrounding Japanese households. Given the backdrop of Japan's own environmental pollution and degradation under Japanese farming and industrial practices, the *JICA Newsletter's* enthusiasm for JICA's environmental protection programs requires a blind eye. In the January 1998 issue, for instance, the *JICA Newsletter* highlights Japan's efforts in international environmental protection through education, which in this case centers on a 36 day training course for environmental administrators for Hungarian professionals. In a quote resurrecting the specter of communism, the anonymous article editor notes that "Szirbik agrees that it might be difficult to change many peoples' perceptions about environmental issues that were formed during the Communist era."²⁰ Here, the tacit message is that in spite of Russian mismanagement, the JICA training may give Hungarian professionals administrative tools to regulate the impact of industrialization on the Hungarian environment. Unfortunately, this narrative has little basis in Japan's own experience, as seen above. While the Soviet era

¹⁹ Kikuo. Kumazawa, "Nitrogen fertilization and nitrate pollution in groundwater in Japan: Present status and measures for sustainable agriculture," *Nutrient Cycling in Agroecosystems* 63(2002), 131.

²⁰ JICA, *JICA Newsletter* (1998), 11.

environmental management is nothing to extol, Japan's own administrative policy had similar shortcomings.

The *JICA Newsletter's* narrative of environmental protection pervades the articles of the 1990s with a striking level of oversights and historical insensitivity. In an article entitled "Green Man," for instance, relates the story of a former JOCV volunteer turned JICA employee set on protecting the rain forests of Papua New Guinea. The article paints Abe as a rugged eco-adventurer, noting that "In fact, Abe really is a Green Man. He says that he was infected by malaria twice and sometimes ate snake during his three years and three months as a JOCV member...But now Abe is on a mission to save the Papua New Guinea tropical forests through logging impact surveys."²¹ Here, we should note that Japan has an economic stake in the outcome of these surveys. According to the Japanese NGO Japan Tropical Action Network (JATAN), Japan is by far the world's largest importer of timber from tropical forests through purchasing 25% of the world's tropical timber, 8% of which comes from Papua New Guinea.²² Despite Japan's overwhelming economic stake in the outcome of the impact survey than any other country in the world, the *JICA Newsletter* implies that Abe helps regulate a practice in a quote worth quoting at length.

Abe's work is proceeding smoothly, and his counterparts must still deal with a New Guinea's unique concept of ownership. According to Masayoshi Ono, a JICA...working as an advisor for Papua New Guinea's National Planning Office, ownership of approximately 97% of the country's land is shared by tribes or tribe members. Therefore, whatever you do in Papua New Guinea, says the Japanese advisor, you are requested to pay compensation to local tribes or villages. The forest research project has duly affected. In order to conduct logging impact surveys, says Abe, we have been looking for commercial forest areas and have negotiated with surrounding villagers to borrow land for our experimental work. Experimental sites where logging is now taking place must be set aside in order to study the changes that logging practices have on the eco-system. It takes more than a year to reach an agreement with the locals on the use of their forests for a

²¹JICA, *JICA Newsletter* September(1997)., 8.

²² <http://www.jatan.org/eng/tropicaltimber.html>. Compare this figure of 25% with a country such as the US, which accounts for 7% of tropical timber imports.

project, says Abe. The study of silvicultural treatment in the forests made it necessary for Abe to spend several weeks in the rain forests to set up two 100-hectare demonstration areas. During this period, he and his counterparts lived in wooden lodges and sometimes ate small wild animals indigenous to the area. Abe is becoming even greener with the success of the project in Papua New Guinea.²³

Within this highly selective narrative, three aspects are particularly troubling. First, the struggle between the tribal interests and the Japanese needs clarification. Though the fact that the tribes and villages are requesting compensation is portrayed as a stumbling block, the impact study will in fact take timber from their lands for sale on the international market. In other words Abe and his crew cannot study impact without actually cutting down trees and selling them. Moreover, the article characterizes the fact that the locals want money for their trees puzzling. The locals' reservations about the project are portrayed at the very least as impediments; Abe innocently notes that in spite of his wish to borrow land from the locals in order to conduct experimental work, the villagers take more than a year to negotiate the deal. Any reasonable community, however, would object to such a proposition for several reasons. As above, the fact that the silvicultural treatment literally means cutting down fully grown trees and planting saplings in their place remains in the background. Further, the two 100-hectare plots (roughly 250 acres) would not be a small loss of forested area for a village using the area for hunting and gathering. Finally, the villagers themselves more than likely understand that the success of this experiment will mean an explosion of logging in their area followed by the destruction of their way of life.

Secondly, this *JICA Newsletter* article employs themes of adventure and green to sidestep the issues of the actual people affected by these Projects. In the narrative strategy, Abe is forwarded a hero whereas the people of Papua New Guinea are made as marginal as possible. An example of the former takes the form of two large photos of Abe. In the first, he strides confidently over a large raft of logs with hands on his hips. Wearing sunglasses, he advances

²³ JICA., *JICA Newsletter*, September 1997, 8.

across the logs while gazing directly towards the camera. In contrast, the Papua New Guinean man hunches over in a static posture, hands gripping his knees. The picture suggests a hierarchy of knowledge and power. On the facing page, Abe stands deep in the rain forests at the head of a group of Papua New Guinean men, who either crouch or take soft postures. Oddly, Abe holds a rifle in one hand while nearly all of the other men hold only survey equipment or nothing at all. Given Japan's colonial history in Asia, this image illustrates a particularly unreflective editorial choice. Further, the meaning of the last line proclaiming that Abe is becoming even greener is equally vague, particularly when confronting the reality that he has paved the way for further deforestation of Papua New Guinea. Thirdly, the paragraph elides the fact that cutting down the rainforests has both great environmental and human impact. In terms of the environment, Mayaux et al. note in their comprehensive study of the rainforest during the 1990s that "In 1990 there were some 1150 million ha of tropical rain forest with the area of the humid tropics deforested annually estimated at 5.8 million ha (approximately twice the size of Belgium)...Southeast Asia is the region where forests are under the highest pressure with an annual change rate of -0.8 to -0.9%."²⁴ With nearly 1% of Southeast Asian rainforests disappearing each year during the 1990s, Papua New Guinea faces stark environment factors such the loss of biodiversity, soil erosion, and floods. Moreover, Papua New Guinean academics have documented the human cost from Japanese logging operations in their country. In Cain Lomai Pwesei's MA thesis for the department of anthropology at the University of Papua New Guinea, he notes a variety of social impacts associated with logging. In his 1997 ethnographic fieldwork in villages on the west coast of the Manus province, he notes two important trends. One centers on the non-adherence of logging companies to any government standards, which are

²⁴Philippe Mayaux, "Tropical forest cover change in the 1990s and options for future monitoring," *Phil. Trans. R. Soc. B* (2005), 373.

far more lax than other national standards. Further, the logging industry devastates village life by destroying local hunting grounds, silting river water sources, attenuating the local male work force for farming and cultural observances, dramatically increasing the prevalence of prostitution and single-mothers, and making villagers dependent on a cash economy.²⁵ Though Japanese logging had tremendous environmental and human impacts in Papua New Guinea, these details remain submerged within the romantic storyline of the *JICA Newsletter* editors.

Though the *JICA Newsletter* certainly contains a multitude of grassroots development discourses, those of organizational history and environmental aid illustrate the publications overarching concern with promoting Japan's benevolent image while reinterpreting self-serving aspects of the organization. Through both pictures and text, the *JICA Newsletter's* ways of world-making unanimously point towards pursuits largely self-serving. While the above analysis clarifies these desires, the question of motivation remains elusive. In truth, several possibilities exist. First, the *JICA Newsletter* could promote these discourses as an arm of neo-colonial propaganda, an economic version of Japanese imperialism. Similarly, the aim of these discourses could lie in supporting a mistrust of foreigners through bolstering the belief in Japanese superiority. While the closing discussion will briefly consider these possibilities alongside the more recent and much more sensitive Japanese publication *JICA Volunteers*, the rise of Japan's international aid within the context of broader historical trends does not support these arguments. Instead, Japan's international aid discourses stem from a combination of economic self-interests, political pressure from the US government, and desire for greater recognition throughout the world.

²⁵ Cain Lo mai Pwesei, "Environmental and Social Impact Assessment of Logging Operations in the West Coast of Manus Area, Manus Province, Papua New Guinea" (University of Papua New Guinea, 2000).

Greener Hungary

Hungarian environmental administrator participates in training course in Japan

In FY 1997, JICA has been running fifteen training courses in a variety of fields exclusively for administrators and experts from the countries of Eastern Europe. All of the courses are held in Japan.



A Hungarian expert tries her hand at Japanese calligraphy.

Figure 4



After being told to spend several weeks deep in the rain forests for the project.

Figure 5



Figure 6

III.

Though my interviews with Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers were always pleasant and engaging, the most delightful evening I spent with Japanese volunteers was in a small Mongolian town south of the capital city Ulaanbaatar. As most of the Japanese volunteers had gone on a work trip earlier in the week, I was only able to interview two JOCV volunteers and a single Peace Corps volunteer. As I had plans to meet the Peace Corps volunteer later in the evening for drinks, I invited the Japanese volunteers to join us, and the most interesting evening ensued. Mongolian language became the *lingua franca* for the evening, with an occasional translation from English to Japanese on my part. Though I did not record the meeting, two exchanges are indelible in my mind. The first came during introductions: the Peace Corps volunteer had worked at the site for several months, the American had no idea that the Japanese volunteer worked in his school. This evening was the first time these fellow international volunteers came together to talk about their experience. Second, during the conversations, we shared a quite similar experience across cultures on issues such as adapting to the Mongolian workplace, learning Mongolian language, and learning to cook and eat Mongolian foods. The night was filled with far fewer differences than similarities in the American and Japanese grassroots development volunteer experiences.

Japanese volunteers perform many of the same duties as Peace Corps volunteers, even teaching English in some cases. However, for those not proficient in English, learning Mongolian well enough to actually teach Mongolian content classes, a goal attempted by only one Peace Corps volunteer I interviewed, becomes an often unattainable goal. Though the Japanese and Mongolian languages have some family resemblances in grammar structures, the former being considered an Outer Altaic and the latter an Inner Altaic language groups, I did not detect a

marked difference in American and Japanese volunteers' language proficiencies. Similarly, the differences between the two agencies approaches to volunteering were not great or many. The largest difference includes training styles. In Mongolia, the JOCV trains the volunteers for two months in Japan, then an additional month in Mongolia whereas the Peace Corps conducts all training in Mongolia. In addition, the JOCV Mongolia does not use host family placements during their training, though the organization does so in other countries.²⁶

The reasons for Japanese volunteers cited for joining the JOCV were quite similar to Peace Corps volunteers. Most cited a mix of interest in foreign travel with work experience or the desire to help others as their primary motivations. One JOCV education volunteer noted that "After I graduated from university, I thought I would give teaching abroad a try before starting work as a teacher in Japan. That's why I joined the JOCV."²⁷ A medical volunteer stated that "Ever since I was little, I wanted to go abroad. When I became a nurse, I saw things...for example, refugee camps, where I could help."²⁸ A sports volunteer said that "In my case, I wanted to work in baseball management in Japan in the future...I've already seen baseball in a developed country. Now, I wanted to [experience] baseball in a developing country like Mongolia."²⁹ As these quotes indicate, JOCV volunteers had some inkling of helping Mongolians, but their own personal visions of themselves and their own aspirations served as primary motivating forces for service. This conclusion is not a judgment of the volunteers, but instead serves as a launching point for an investigation into the volunteers' perceptions of development. Despite cultural differences and some organizational difference, the only discernible difference

²⁶ Interview with JOCV Volunteer, October 28th, 2011.

²⁷ Interview with JOCV Volunteer, November 15th, 2011.

²⁸ Interview with JOCV Volunteer, November 4th, 2011.

²⁹ Interview with JOCV Volunteer, October 29th, 2011.

between the JOCV and Peace Corps interviews was that the former were in Japanese and the latter were in English.

The Japanese and American volunteers had quite similarly mixed ideas of grassroots or “cooperative development,” both in theory and practice. Several volunteers noted that they believed international development entailed the distribution of goods. One remarked that “Before I became a volunteer, I thought development meant handing things out to poor people.”³⁰ Another volunteer noted that “Together with America, it’s the duty of developed countries to help people of developing countries.”³¹ When I pressed this volunteer by noting that sometimes US companies have benefitted from international development, the volunteer replied that “There’s something comparable in Japanese development...therefore it’s important that development is not simply connected to giving things, but that we work together with people.”³² JOCV volunteers echoed this idea, citing a number of cases in which Mongolians had an expectation that Japan would continue to supply free goods to Mongolia. In this vein, a Japanese sports volunteer stated that “In my case, I don’t feel like giving is necessarily always good...some of the children I work with use the equipment violently...they break the equipment. And I think it’s because they expect those things from Japan. So they don’t worry about taking care [of the equipment.]”³³ Like Peace Corps volunteers, JOCV volunteers had mixed experiences in their efforts to develop cooperative relationships with their counterparts. One sports volunteer said that his relationships with Mongolian coaches were mired in national politics, saying that “I used to work with five coaches, but after the national elections, they said that I was illegal somehow, so now only one coach will

³⁰ ³⁰ Interview with JOCV Volunteer, November 15th, 2011.

³¹ ³¹ Interview with JOCV Volunteer, October 20th, 2011.

³² Ibid.

³³ ³³ Interview with JOCV Volunteer, November 3rd, 2011.

work with me for a few hours a week.”³⁴ This same volunteer, however, claimed that he worked in a facilitating role, not as a primary coach. An education volunteer insisted that “every day I work together with a science teacher...sometimes I teach, sometimes I do evaluation.”³⁵ When we spoke Mongolian together, this volunteer did not seem proficient enough to explain a science class, so when I asked her, she noted that her Mongolian counterpart translates much of the lesson. Like many of the Peace Corps volunteers I interviewed, this JOCV volunteer considered a translation of her class as team-teaching.

IV.

As evident in the JICA/JOCV literature and interviews above, the limiting factors of cooperative development have remarkable similarity with those of the Peace Corps. In the organizational literature, the discourses eschew the complexity of Japan’s economic and political interests in the developing world. However, assigning a neo-colonial label to the *JICA Newsletter’s* discourses would exaggerate the influence of radically conservative elements influencing the Japanese government. Granted, some of Japan’s pre-WWII imperial discourses resonate with those of JICA development strategies. In works such as Aizawa Seishisai’s seminal 1825 nationalist thesis, Japan’s power lies not simply in military might, but transmitting a the Japanese national ethos to barbarian nations outside of Japan. In his thesis on Long-range Policy, for instance, Aizawa remarks that “By taking the offensive, I do not necessarily mean killing enemy troops, vanquishing enemies’ armies...Our government and edification must be so perfect that we can transform the barbarian ways to those of civilization.”³⁶ But JOCV discourses in Post WWII Japan on a large scale would exaggerate their importance in the contemporary context.

³⁴ Interview with JOCV Volunteer, November 8th, 2011.

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi and Yasushi Aizawa, *Anti-foreignism and Western learning in early-modern Japan : The new theses of 1825*, Harvard East Asian monographs (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies Distributed by the Harvard University Press, 1986)., 250.

Though the Japanese nationalism was supposedly increasing in the 1980s, the decade prior the launch of this newsletter, much data contradicts this notion. Polls conducted by the Japanese Prime minister's office in 1988, for instance, found that only 5.5 percent of the Japanese would sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of society's interests, a rate far lower than other nations. Given the data suggesting a relatively low level of nationalism let alone imperial tendencies in Japan, this explanation is an anachronism.³⁷

Of far greater likelihood, combinations of geo-political and economic pressures coalesce to inform the *JICA Newsletter's* portrayal of Japanese Aid. In terms of politics, post WWII Japan faced great pressures from the US to take certain avenues of foreign aid, particularly in the wake of Japan's flourishing national economy in the 1980s. In his comparative study of Japanese and US aid conducted in the late 1980s, Robert Orr, Jr. concludes that "While both countries have humanitarian concerns, the U.S. considers the strategic angle first and economic security second. Japan's orientation up to now has been the reverse."³⁸ Though Orr underscores US pressure for Japan to lessen conditionality on ODA loans and project funding, several factors reveal the economic incentives for supporting Japan's own private sector through governmental loans. In a footnote in an article Orr co-wrote with former American Ambassador William Brooks to Japan in 1985, a striking figure illustrates the ways foreign aid actually supports Japanese domestic business interests. In this note, Orr and Brooks write that "The term yen loans (*en shakkan*) or yen credits is used to describe official loans on concessionary terms to developing countries...In practice, about 50% of procurement contracts from untied loans go to Japanese firms."³⁹

Though Japan indeed provides low interest loans intended for developing countries' development,

³⁷ William Chapman, *Inventing Japan : the making of a postwar civilization*, 1st ed. (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991), 252.

³⁸ Robert M. Orr, Jr., "The Aid Factor in U.S.-Japan Relations," *Asian Survey* 28, no. 7 (1988), 714.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 755.

half of the money actually funds Japanese businesses in order to provide manufactured goods and services for these countries in 1985. Understood in this light, the narratives of Japanese development of Thai telecommunications and Papua New Guinean timber are a significant windfall for Japanese corporate interests in the 1990s.

Though the economic incentives for Japanese businesses could certainly be the one and only reason for the *JICA Newsletter's* romantic organizational histories and heroic portrayal of JICA environmental projects, the argument that the Japanese people have a particular sensitivity to national Others could provide another layer of explanation. Though arguments of cultural norms are themselves wrought with peril as the concept of culture itself is often like a mirage, the prevalence of this explanation along with an actual Japanese term for this trait (*gaiatsu*) lends some reason to consider the argument. According to anthropologist Anthony McVeigh, "...the successes or failures of national goals and reforms are not just measured in relation to Japan's own ideals; they are also compared to foreign standards (thus the use of *gaiatsu* or foreign pressure by domestic interest groups to justify changes or new governments...)." ⁴⁰ Four years after the US launched the Peace Corps Volunteers program in 1961, for instance, Japan formed the Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers. These concerns for economic advancement and political prestige cloud the realities underlying development discourses in *JICA Newsletters*, limiting their use as representations of cooperative development. Likewise, the volunteer discourses illustrate volunteers' quite varied understandings of cooperation and development. For some volunteers, cooperative development meant facilitating skills of their coworkers. For others, the relationship meant using a Mongolia to translate and transmit their knowledge or resources to Mongolians.

⁴⁰ Brian J. McVeigh, *Nationalisms of Japan : managing and mystifying identity*, Asia/Pacific/perspectives (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 70.

One conclusion can be gleaned from the analysis above is that the JOCV does not offer the Peace Corps an alternative approach to grassroots or cooperative development. Though the spheres of culture and history among others separate the organizations, both have a chiefly unexamined understanding of the links between organizational hierarchies and governmental imperatives and the relationships between volunteers and their host country counterparts. Despite these similar challenges, opportunities for greater horizontal cooperation exist not only between the organizations and their host country nationals, but also JOCV and Peace Corps volunteers and staff. In my own research experience, simply bringing together Peace Corps and JOCV prompted discussion between volunteers, a process that inevitably precedes any organizational change.



Protesters greet Peace Corps volunteers in the Philippines in the early 1960s, viewing the organization as an imperial arm of the US government. In the far left, the sign refers to GANEFO, or Games of the New Emerging Forces, a type of alternative to the International Olympic Committee, which was viewed as another form of global political domination.¹

¹ Photograph courtesy of the National Archives, College Park, Maryland

CHAPTER 7

The Collective Search for the Truth:

Levers for Reshaping Grassroots Relationships

“Development as the collective search for the truth does not allocate power at the hands of some. It gives power back to the collectivity of human beings. It determines, moreover, that survival and freedom are both threatened with the exclusion of any individual and collectivity from this search.”

--Martha Jalali Rabbani, 2011²

On a frigid night on one of my field research trips to the southwest Gobi, a group of Peace Corps volunteers invited me to observe their drop-in English language class.³ When I arrived, six volunteers sat at stations around the room, each conducting a separate lesson for groups of four to seven students surrounding them. Some of the volunteers drilled elementary English vocabulary such as job occupations while others conducted short, but lively conversations. In some ways, this volunteer-led English club fully embraced a grassroots model. Volunteers adroitly offered a desired service free of charge to community members in a light, entertaining atmosphere. Under their own volition, students and professionals joined this club free of charge with no obligations. Other than the English language, I found no evidence of overt privileging of US culture or any messaging of any kind in the lessons or materials. On the other hand, the volunteers themselves clearly organized and led the club. The volunteers clearly occupied the leadership roles in the organization of this activity. Granted, the Mongolian students hold the power of whether or not to come. But the leadership stemmed from the volunteers. Questions of sustainability aside, this English club occupies some middle ground

² Martha Jalali Rabbani, *The development and antidevelopment debate : critical reflections on the philosophical foundations* (Farnham [U.K.]; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 160.

³ Class Observation of Peace Corps Volunteers, October 15th, 2011.

between a grassroots endeavor and an imposition of American hierarchical relationships and ideas of progress.

This grassroots veranda, the area between imposing US interests and hierarchy at a local level and the empowerment and facilitation of local actors to express their own interests, has been the subject of my research. However, at no time have I assumed a linear, flipping of the current paradigm from top to bottom. As rightly argued by Anthony Payne, “We cannot in all honesty substitute for such a ‘bottom-up’ approach a simplistic ‘top-down’ set of expectations about what the ‘First World’ or the ‘Third World,’ or the ‘North’ or the ‘South,’ or even less the ‘West’ and the ‘Rest,’ are or should be doing...”⁴ My research has illustrated a complex set of relationships within the organization and between various organizational actors and host-countries. Further, part of the challenge in recognizing grassroots development in the Peace Corps rests in the ways organizational rhetoric obfuscates the multiple internal hierarchies and interests in the organization as a part of the US government. By bracketing and examining the discourses surrounding the terms “grassroots volunteer,” “grassroots development,” and “grassroots education,” two contradictions became apparent. First, the Peace Corps organizational rhetoric of “grassroots” has almost no self-conscious understanding of the ways power operated unequally between Peace Corps volunteers and host-country nationals. By eliding the myriad self-serving realities from colonialism to American political and economic interests, these discourses mask the amount of training and self-consciousness volunteers must possess in order to enter a relationship of equality with their counterparts.

A great temptation from such a study would center on painting the organization as the culprit, as the entity responsible for reifying hierarchies of power between volunteers, staff, and

⁴ Anthony Payne, *The global politics of unequal development* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 246.

host country nationals. Indeed, much of the analysis points in this direction. Further, in many of my interviews Peace Corps Mongolia Volunteers vented a string of anxieties about their perceived lack of power or frustration from a lack of voice in the process of determining the goals and processes of grassroots development. In one interview, a volunteer looked at me slyly, dryly remarking “I finally figured out what you’re doing. You’re the Peace Corps counselor who lets volunteers let off steam about all their problems.”⁵ While that was certainly not my intention, the tension between the organizational aspects of the Peace Corps and the realities of grassroots development was apparent in almost every interview to varying degrees. In part, this conflict stemmed from a perceived lack of understanding of the volunteer experience on the part of Peace Corps staff. Granted, the volunteers tempered these critiques with ample amounts of praise. Volunteers voiced appreciation for the staff, the mission, and their experiences. In responding to the question “Is there any one aspect you would change about the Peace Corps,” one volunteer stated, “You know, I feel so independent in Peace Corps decided change anything it would be about me. Yeah, training could be better or whatever, but it's all up to me after that.”⁶ In many volunteers’ perspectives, they bore the bulk of the responsibility for the grassroots development objectives set forth by the organization. Others felt that Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers complain about mostly insignificant matters. In this vein, one volunteer noted that “People complain about the same stuff over and over...it's never major things that are risks for safety or life but about things like time management and counterparts. If you just chill out and go with the flow, the problems will be solved. You got a redefine your definition of success in what you can accept and in what you can make a good impact in.”⁷ These responses shift the realization of goals to the individual volunteers. In many ways, the volunteers are undoubtedly

⁵ Interview with Peace Corps Volunteer, October 15th, 2011.

⁶ Interview with Peace Corps Volunteer, November 3rd, 2011.

⁷ Interview with Peace Corps Volunteer, October 16th, 2011.

the single most important aspect of fostering sustainable grassroots development. Without maturity, gumption, and a certain level of professional ability, no three-month training with some additional in-service training will amount to grassroots capacity building for Mongolians.

But the Peace Corps has an undeniably important role in guiding volunteers towards this end. Aside from training, the organization has a support role for host country nationals through their continuous support of volunteers. The powers inevitably influencing the organization require a self-conscious humility dependent upon a relationship inviting volunteer input in order to align rhetoric with the interests of Mongolian community members. Among the critiques of Peace Corps Mongolia volunteers, Peace Corps staff and volunteer interactions were quite salient. One volunteer felt an experiential division separated volunteers and staff, stating that “It’s really difficult being in UB and taking into account what our life is like and what we need. I think there’s often miscommunication between the Peace Corps staff and volunteers and between the staff themselves... We’re out here in the thick of it. And they should put more weight in our suggestions.”⁸ Here, the volunteer notes that Peace Corps Mongolia staff base their rules not upon a lived understanding of life in the countryside and provincial towns where the bulk of volunteers serve. And because the organization works as a traditional hierarchy in most respects, volunteer voices, however numerous, have a tumultuous road in correcting misconceptions. Further, volunteers felt that their voices went unrecognized. One volunteer noted that “They don’t ever admit they’re wrong... I would make Peace Corps Mongolia smaller. I think Peace Corps Mongolia wants to be as far flung and as many volunteers as possible. There are of so many HCNs that aren’t using their volunteers. And if we could be more efficient and check into the issues beforehand. It’s like two years of your life. It’s kind of a big deal.”⁹ Though the

⁸ Interview with Peace Corps Volunteer, September 22nd, 2011.

⁹ Interview with Peace Corps Volunteer, December 3rd, 2011.

Peace Corps Mongolia staff members do in fact interview the Host Country Nationals (HCNs) before placing volunteers with them, this volunteer and others expressed doubts about this process. As seen here, volunteers particularly felt that the number of volunteers placed did not reflect an actual number that Mongolians could absorb into useful grassroots development positions.

Along with their perception of a staff volunteer hierarchy, volunteers saw Washington, DC staff as projecting their own misperceptions onto the volunteers' realm of experience. One volunteer argued that "What I would do is not let Washington call the shots in any of the programming. I'm sure that there are some success stories from those guys helping people, but the time and money they spent putting into programming could have been a lot more effective. They could make us all TEFL and give us some extra ideas."¹⁰ Having thought about the particular situation of Mongolia, this particular volunteer theorized that Mongolia could support few non-TEFL type volunteers, a view informed by the volunteer's own experience of trying in vain to work in a non-English teaching capacity. Like other volunteers in this study, this volunteer expressed frustration at a perceived lack of connection between expectations from the top of the organization and those working as volunteers in grassroots development initiatives.

Organizational rhetoric can account for part of the hierarchical relationships. These discourses shape future perceptions while stemming from a foundation organizational culture. Because of this multi-temporal relationship, progressive researchers in the field of international development studies have selectively supported post-development scholars such as Arturo Escobar in positing "development" itself as a fictive discourse. As seen in the examination of the intersection of "grassroots" and the key Peace Corps concepts, "volunteer," "development," and "programming," many ideas connected to development are soaked in Western arrogance and

¹⁰ Interview with Peace Corps Volunteer, October 4th, 2011.

continue to steer the organization. That having been stated, few critics would agree that development as a discourse is the central challenge for developing countries such as Mongolia. Critics of Escobar's work and post-development note that the positioning of development not as a natural process of knowledge that gradually uncovered problems and dealt with them, but a historical construct creating epistemologies of dependency upon which Euro-Americans must act. As noted by Trevor Parfitt,

This indicates that discourse actually constitutes the problem of the Southern states, is actually a creation of the development discourse. Thus, poverty considered as a problem of the Southern states, is actually a creation of the development discourse. Having first generated the problem, the discourse then proceeds to construct an analysis of the problem, which then results in the specification and implementation of the solution. The problem analysis and the strategies for its solution all bear the normative imprint of the discourse in question.¹¹

As evident here, Escobar's logic suffers from a certain type of relativism. If the problem is purely a constructed idea, then a material reality cannot be known outside the confines of discourse. Therefore, making a truth claim for one discourse over another would be impossible. Because the development discourse must respond to a changing material universe, as Escobar states on several occasions in *Encountering Development*, then a dynamic relationship must exist between the discourse and realities within various developing contexts. Therefore, the notion that the development discourse has been totally unresponsive to the social needs of Southern states does not seem possible. In addition to the problems of relativism, Parfitt rightly highlights Escobar's elision of a *bottom-up* counter-discourse to the history of the *top-down* development discourse. In selectively choosing development organizations and projects to exemplify the entire discourse, Escobar essentializes the history of the development discourse, eliding the facts

¹¹ Trevor W. Parfitt, *The end of development? : modernity, post-modernity and development*, Third World in global politics (London Sterling, Va.: Pluto Press, 2002), 28.

that major strides in life expectancy, providing access to clean water, and the eradication of diseases such as polio have been part of the discourse.¹²

Clearly, a lack of sensitivity and self-reflective understanding in organizational discourses does not help the Peace Corps' grassroots development volunteers reach a level of awareness. But assessing the organization on these terms alone has further challenges. The weaknesses of discourse analysis "...in development studies just as in literature criticism and cultural studies—is that it may skirt around the actual issues of power. It may divert attention from relations 'on the ground.'"¹³ Given these weaknesses, semi-structured interviews assessed the volunteers' perspectives on issues of power and grassroots development. From these interviews, I found that three months of training, however rigorous, was not adequate for volunteers completely unaware of the debates surrounding development. Many of the participants in my surveys had been at their sites for more than a year, yet still could not articulate the role of a grassroots development volunteer, particularly in terms of power hierarchies. The way that Peace Corps rhetoric coincides with the quality of volunteer intake therefore merits consideration. The next section briefly outlines the Peace Corps major shifts in recruitment strategies for attracting volunteers with professional interests in the field of international development.

II.

Though the Peace Corps has continually placed US volunteers in the developing context since 1961, finding qualified citizens to fill this role has been an increasing challenge for the organization. Not only must these men and women possess the desire to work for two years

¹² Craig Johnson, *Arresting development : the power of knowledge for social change* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009).

¹³ Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Development theory : deconstructions/reconstructions* (Los Angeles; London: SAGE, 2010).

without pay in unfamiliar if not uncomfortable living conditions, volunteers need actual skills in education, medicine, business, and agriculture. Finding American men and women with the former was not a challenge in the excitement of 1960s. Though the organization succeeded in placing a fairly sizeable cohort of 2,940 volunteers who finished their two years of service in the first year of the organization, by 1966 the number of volunteers rapidly grew to an impressive 15,556 men and women. Just ten years later, however, the number of volunteers completing two years of service declined to just 5,958 volunteers.¹⁴

Although a variety of historical factors such as popular youth discontent with the US government's war in Vietnam most likely influenced this decline, part of the of the related problem was the Peace Corps' organization rhetoric in the 1960s, particularly those campaigns of the 1960s aimed at higher education graduates. In these overly idealistic recruiting campaigns, a certain upper middle class white volunteer was sought to represent "the best" of America. The Peace Corps, it was thought, could mold these "generalists" into highly skilled "development workers." Unfortunately, this exclusivity based on race and class made the program less attractive to those potential volunteers with professional development skill sets. As a former Peace Corps volunteer and critic noted, "It was not at all unusual to find fill rates of 50 percent or less in programs that required specialized agricultural degrees or master's degrees in business administration...Now the organization found itself in the position of not being able to meet the promises its rhetoric implied."¹⁵ As evident here, the central programming problem with the Peace Corps' overconfidence, aside from the initial racial exclusivity, was the inability to deliver on trained personnel for "development."

Though the Peace Corps rhetoric imagined US volunteers performing skills training in the

¹⁴ For volunteer enrollment by year, see Appendix II

¹⁵ P. David Searles and Gift in honor of the 50th Anniversary of the Peace Corps (Library of Congress), *The Peace Corps experience : challenge and change, 1969-1976* (Lexington, Ky.: University Press of Kentucky, 1997)., 180.

developing world, their volunteer induction campaigns targeted volunteer types over skill sets during the 1960s. In 1966, the Peace Corps launched a recruiting campaign to attract college educated volunteers, particularly women. In an oversized pamphlet entitled “An Answer to the Liberal Arts Graduate Who Asks: What Can I Do in the Peace Corps,” for example, the organization pitches a romantic narrative through images and text to attract white college educated women into the Peace Corps. Starting with the cover photograph, the editors of the pamphlet emphasize the imagined narrative of American white women disciplining the Third World through their innate clean-cut goodness. In cover photo, a beaming white female volunteer in a neatly pressed white shirt stands surrounded by five smiling African children. The caption interprets the photo, stating “Volunteer Margo Be Vier teaches English her college major at a women s teacher training college in Benin City, the capital of Nigeria s Mid-West Region.”¹⁶ The connotation here is clear; the photo answers the question through presenting the image of a young female English baccalaureate. If this was the only photo in the pamphlet, the further world-making technologies of the editors would remain unclear. A survey of the remaining photos, however, reveals a significant pattern. On page three, we find another female baccalaureate actively instructing a table of African youths. The caption reads “Fine arts major Laura Gould teaches an art class at Livingstonia School in Malawi...”¹⁷ And the next photo, a blonde college-aged woman in a bathing suit next to two young Latino boys, with a caption reading “Music major Barbara Cook supervises recreation for Panama City slum children at a summer camp near La Chorrera, Panama.” Though two out of seven photographs are white male college graduates, who are framed in construction and livestock scenes, five of the photographs are white women in classroom, child-care, sewing, or leisure activities. Given this editorial

¹⁶ Corps, “An answer to the liberal arts graduate who asks: What can I do in the Peace Corps?.”, 4

¹⁷ Ibid., 4.

strategy, the pamphlet naturalizes the fantasy of wholesome white women instructing black and brown youths in a way that sanctions this path as a natural extension of a liberal arts “generalist” training. Though accompanied by romantic textual narratives, the photos themselves promote a non-discursive understanding of Americans volunteering abroad, submerging important narratives such as the colonial history in Malawi and American economic interests in Panama. The accompanying textual narratives support the visual narratives while adding a further argument that the Peace Corps experience compliments a generalist degree. In the first text block of the pamphlet, the text notes that three quarters of all Peace Corps volunteers are generalists, which according to an unnamed “Peace Corps official,” is a great boon in that “Today, youth has the highest option and the greatest desire to experiment. It flips over new ideas, it seeks new adventures, and usually find it.”¹⁸ From the start, the editors pitch the Peace Corps as an adventure, particularly for the so-called “generalist.”

The editors personalize this historical context through the use of a brief memoir by a returned volunteer named Louis Rappaport. In his recollection of service in Seirra Leone, Rappaport recalls his initial skepticism that he could help in any way, noting that he “took classes subjects like Scandinavian literature, history of historians, modern Slavic literature, and philosophy of literature...In Sierra Leone, I was given a road project...my technical words amma, c ment, spana dropped them expertly and waited for cheers and applause from my workers.”¹⁹ The surface message is clear: no matter how bookish and impractical, Peace Corps training will make volunteers “useful.” At the same time, the narrative speaks volumes about the lack of critical thinking in volunteer project assignment. Most centrally, the fact that the Peace Corps would train a highly literate individual to perform roadwork in Africa is if not dangerous for

¹⁸ Ibid., 2

¹⁹ Ibid., 4

motorists, then at the very least a waste of time. Given the colonial history of Sierra Leone as a British colony until 1961 (five years before the date of this publication) the phrase “applause from my workers” illustrates a particularly insensitive depiction of Rapport’s relationship with the workers. Apparently, he was not only building roads with his “generalist” background, but also managing the local people. Through these textual and visual cues, this Peace Corps pamphlet paints volunteer service as an two-year *romantically* emplotted adventure for college educated white men and women while showing no consciousness of the many races and cultures present in America or perceptions or even agency of peoples living in the developing world.²⁰

In 1969, the Peace Corps recruiting changed courses through the publication of another oversized pamphlet entitled “Training,” a work that seeks to woo Peace Corps Volunteers with a sense of camaraderie and lowered expectations about employing technical skills in the developing world. The pamphlet also illustrates some reconsideration of the Peace Corps editorial staff on including people of color, but tends to weight male volunteers over women. On the front cover, for example, a large group of volunteers sit in a circle, apparently engaged in discussion. Of the sixteen people, fifteen are white men, two of which are gesticulating as if debating, while one smiling woman is sequestered in a passive role in the corner.²¹ The composition of the photo draws the viewer’s gaze from the debating man on the left of the frame around the circle to the man listening on the right, ending with an American flag in the corner.

Though the photo illustrates a certain understanding of American democratic values, at the same time, non-white and non-male perspectives are saliently excluded. However, compared with the 1966 publication analyzed above, the visual editorial choices within the actual pamphlet

²⁰ Romantic emplotment here, as noted earlier, refers to Hayden White’s theory that all histories stem from pre-figured typologies such as romantic, tragic, ironic, and comedic. The romantic type organizes facts through a constant perspective of a never ending heroic quest. See White, *Tropics of discourse : essays in cultural criticism*.

²¹ Peace Corps, “Training: Language Skills and Service: The Education of a Volunteer,” (1969)., cover.

invite a much broader interpretation of volunteers. In the section “Communication: Undoing the Notion of the Tongue-Tied American,” three photos underscore a power equality in terms of gender, race, and even national background. In the left most photo, for example, an African-American man sits beside two women listen to language tapes. In another photo, a standing Micronesian man drills two white men on their pronunciation; the low camera angle emphasizes the Micronesian man s relative power.²²

Like these visual representations, the textual narratives contain mixed levels of self-awareness towards issues of race, gender, and nationality. In the introductory section “A Process of Learning to Learn the Peace Corps Way,” the anonymous author notes the initial challenges in Peace Corps theoretical approaches to volunteer training “described in embarrassing terms by an official who helped steer training through those difficult times...”²³ Though the tone is certainly apologetic, the pamphlet editors cite the overly academic aspects as the central challenge of the initial training. Throughout the publication, the notion of the scholastic experience of development, particularly the theoretical aspects of international development, painted as bookish and boring. In the final article, for example, the editors solicited a perspective on “training” from one of the volunteers. The informally presented narrative emphasizes the camaraderie the Peace Corps training through hand drawn figures of dancing trainees while designating development theory lectures as boring through a picture of a student sleeping on a desk. The discourses within these two pamphlets illustrate three broad trends. First, the Peace Corps recruiting rhetoric broadens the ideal volunteer from white college educated students to a more racially diverse image. At the same time, however, the second discourse is one that favors volunteer enthusiasm and adventure over a professional approach to international development. Finally, the latter

²² Peace Corps, 1969, 8.

²³ Peace Corps, 1969, 2

pamphlet illustrates a growing consciousness towards agency of peoples living in the developing context. Together, these discourses underscore a yet undetermined understanding of the image and role of Peace Corps volunteers, a fact that undoubtedly contributed to the precipitous fall in volunteer enrollment in the 1970s. The next section will examine contemporary programs linking the US Peace Corps to higher education institutions; programs that highlight a self-conscious change in consciousness towards attracting technically qualified volunteers through formal links with higher education institutions.

III.

The Peace Corps currently has two programs dedicated to attracting qualified applicants through a variety of tuition exemption and other educational incentives. Recently renamed after Peace Corps director Paul D. Coverdell (1989-1991), the Coverdell Fellows Program creates an incentive for more serious, skilled volunteers through partnering with graduate education programs. The program's architect and former Peace Corps Volunteer, Dr. Beryl Levinger, saw returned volunteers as excellent candidates to fill qualified teacher shortages in the New York school district in the early 1980s.²⁴ By 1985, Teachers College Columbia University launched a pilot program to partner returned volunteers with high school and middle schools within the New York City Department of Education in exchange for tuition remission on a Masters of Education.

Today, the Peace Corps has partnered with more than fifty graduate institutions, each offering a variety of incentives ranging from tuition remission to health insurance waivers. Starting from September of 1998, for instance, the New School of New York City has offered five generous fellowships for tuition reductions of fifty percent for RPCVs interested in pursuing an

²⁴ Peace Corps, *How the Program Started*, <http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.whyvol.eduben.fellows> (Accessed June 6, 2011).

MA or PhD at the Milano School for Management/Urban Policy.²⁵ Compared with other Peace Corps recruiting methods, the current Coverdell Fellows Program recruitment on the Peace Corps Website contains a far less romantic narrative of the Peace Corps experience. In an eight minute Coverdell Fellows Program website video, for instance, the racial and gender representations, while not perfect, solicit a broad range of volunteer backgrounds. Although the first minute of the video presents a montage of six white volunteers who have returned to the US and embarked on community service, even the two scene in which white returned volunteers work with African Americans is not portrayed in fantastical way, in which the volunteers are somehow saving a non-white community. Moreover, the later in-depth narratives of Coverdell Fellows Program volunteers include an Asian-American woman who went on to work at the US State Department and an African American woman working at an International Education center.²⁶ Further, in the scenes which the feature returned volunteers Peace Corps experiences, heroic volunteer “adventure hardships” are absent. The most likely account for this marked absence of the neutral tone towards the organization centers on the fact that those returned volunteers interested in this link to higher education degrees did not join the Peace Corps with the thought of later applying to this program. The value-added aspect of Coverdell Fellows Program centers not on attracting volunteers first hand, but most likely increasing the organizations presence on university campuses and attracting highly qualified recruits by word of mouth.

For those baccalaureate students contemplating graduate school and the Peace Corps, another program called “Masters International” links pre-Peace Corps graduate coursework with a field service learning component. Created two years after the Coverdell Fellows Program, the

²⁵ Peace Corps, *Educational Benefits*, <http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.whyvol.eduben.fellows> (Accessed June 6, 2011).

²⁶ Peace Corps, *Paul D. Coverdell Program*, <http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=learn.whyvol.eduben.fellows> (Accessed June 6, 2011).

Masters International (MI) program first offered potential Peace Corps volunteers the program in 1987. As many MA and PhD programs require fieldwork as part of a degree, the Peace Corps pays for this component in exchange for service. Like the Coverdell Fellows Program, the Masters International program has a video embedded in the homepage of the website. Unlike the former, however, the MI program has a somewhat more romantic understanding of the volunteer experience. In the first shot of the video, for instance, an aerial shot of a mist covered mountain peeking through the clouds and hovering above an emerald ocean, a picture reminiscent of Shangri-la. From this point on, the rhetoric of the video focuses much less on adventure and more on practical information on ways to apply to the program. Though the initial montage is of all white men and women, often teaching non-white peoples, the only in-depth look at the program comes from a Latina woman. Her project is reasonable, and she and her coworker are portrayed in a respectful, egalitarian way as they check on organic fertilizers developed by her project.

IV.

As the above analysis demonstrates, the Peace Corps has made self-conscious strides in coaxing generalist baccalaureates to join through images of fun and adventure in the 1960s. The Peace Corps simply could not train volunteers to perform at the level of the organization's rhetoric. Further, the "ideal" volunteer type was no longer the well-off white college graduate. By the 1980s, the organization started showcasing the multicultural reality of the Corps. With the formation of the Master's International and Paul D. Coverdell Fellowship programs, technically qualified applicants had even greater opportunity to serve. Despite these changes, even the current Peace Corps director Aaron Williams admits the need for the agency to develop its "recruiting strategy and compete more effectively with other institutions that recruit young

adults.”²⁷ Perhaps with the record \$439,600,000 agency budget of 2011, the Peace Corps staff can offer even greater incentives for attracting diverse, highly qualified volunteers.²⁸

While the Peace Corps has made strides in developing programs attractive to more qualified grassroots development workers, the organization still has the task of defining the three questions this study bracketed: 1.) Whose image and practice equates to an exemplary “grassroots volunteer” and how will the organization train and support volunteers to inhabit this definition during their service? 2.) What is a “grassroots development,” and in what ways can the organization privilege host country voices in understanding this idea. 3.) Finally, in what ways does the Peace Corps education programming add or detract from the empowerment of community actors? In continually considering and acting upon these questions in conversation with volunteers, the organization could approach a more liberatory version of their current grassroots development program. Further, as seen in chapter six, the organization’s vision could extend towards other government volunteer organizations such as the Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers. Though the JOCV has similar (if not almost the same) difficulties in defining the three questions above, comparative dialogue on these issues would undoubtedly push both organizations towards a more self-reflective stance on grassroots development.

This process of building a better “grassroots development” will undoubtedly take time, consideration, hard work, and a clear understanding of the ways relationships in this process add or detract from the freedoms of Peace Corps host-countries. As stated by Amartya Sen, “If freedom is what development advances, then there is a major argument for concentrating on that overarching objective, rather than on some particular means, or some specially chosen list of instruments. Viewing development in terms of expanding substantive freedoms directs attention

²⁷ Karen Olson, "Peace Corps Director Speaks about his Past, Future," *Tufts Daily News* October 13 2010., 1.

²⁸ Peace Corps, "Peace Corps Congressional Budget of 2012 " (2011)., 3.

the ends that make development important, rather than merely to some of the means that, inter alia, play a prominent role in the process.”²⁹ In terms of “overarching objectives,” this study highlighted some areas for Peace Corps organizational leaders to consider. First, the communication and hierarchies from Washington, DC, in-country staff, and volunteers need to model relations and communication on in volunteer work sites whenever possible. This strategy underscores the great importance of discussion and equality in the processes of grassroots development. Moreover, for less experienced volunteers, the Peace Corps’ top-down hierarchy is the development model these volunteers learn and transport to their work sites. Second, the organization must strive to better understand their place in relation to post-colonial and neo-liberal paradigms which currently shape economic development narratives in the developing world. As the US and other wealthy countries rely on the developing world for cheap manufacturing and mineral extraction while recommending the dismantling of social services, the Peace Corps straddles both worlds, requiring introspection on the best ways to support developing communities without necessarily bolstering economic agendas of the US and other wealthy nations. Third, clarity of the grassroots development mission stems from a rhetoric conscious of these debates and questions. Therefore, the organizational leaders must have a self-reflective sense of the locus of power assumed in discourses surrounding their mission. Finally, the Peace Corps is far from alone in the world as a governmental grassroots development agency. Though the Peace Corps and the JOCV are connected at upper echelons of these organizations, evidence from this study suggests they cooperate in less formal ways in their countries of service. Because all of these organizations must inevitably struggle with the same questions, adopting best practices from one another only makes sense.

²⁹ Amartya Sen, *Development as freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 3.

Appendix 1:

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

During my six month field study in Outer Mongolia, I asked Peace Corps and Japanese Overseas Cooperation Volunteers the same semi-structured interview questions. According to their answers, I would ask individualized follow-up questions.

1. Would you tell me about your personal experiences that led you to work as a Peace Corps Volunteer?

青年海外協力隊のボランティアになる事をするために、何の経験が大切ですか。

[*seinen kaigai koryoukutai no boranteia ni naru koto ni suru tame ni, nan no keiken ga taisetsu desuka.*]

2. Please describe your relationships with Mongolians in your service?

モンゴル人の仲について説明して下さい。

[*mongorujin no naka ni tsuite setsumei shite kudasai.*]

3. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, what does “development” mean to you?

青年海外協力隊のボランティアとして、「開発」と言うのが何の意味ですか。

[*seinen kaigai koryoukutai no boranteia toshite, “kaihatsu” to iuno ga nan no imi desuka.*]

4. Did Peace Corps provide adequate Mongolian language and work training? (Please explain your answer.)

青年海外協力隊のモンゴル語と仕事の教習が十分でしたか。(返事を説明してください。)

[*seinen kaigai koryoukutai no mongorugo to shigoto no kyouiku ga jubun deshitaka. (Henji wo setsumei shite kudasai.)*]

5. How would you improve the Peace Corps?

青年海外協力隊はよくなるために、何をすればいいと思いますか。

[*seinen kaigai koryoukutai wa yoku naru tame ni, nani wo sureba ii to omoimasuka.*]

6. Can you tell me a little bit about your understanding of recent Mongolian history?

モンゴルの現在の歴史についてちょっと説明してください。

[*mongoru no saikin no rekishi nit suite chotto setsumei shite kudasai.*]

Appendix 2:

Peace Corps Volunteer Numbers at the End of the Fiscal Year

1962: 2,940	1978: 7,082	1994: 6,742
1963: 6,646	1979: 6,328	1995: 7,218
1964: 10,078	1980: 5,994	1996: 6,910
1965: 13,248	1981: 5,445	1997: 6,660
1966: 15,556	1982: 5,380	1998: 6,719
1967: 14,968	1983: 5,483	1999: 6,989
1968: 13,823	1984: 5,699	2000: 7,164
1969: 12,131	1985: 6,264	2001: 6,643
1970: 9,513	1986: 5,913	2002: 6,643
1971: 7,066	1987: 5,219	2003: 7,553
1972: 6,894	1988: 5,821	2004: 7,733
1973: 7,341	1989: 6,248	2005: 7,810
1974: 8,044	1990: 5,581	2006: 7,628
1975: 7,015	1991: 5,866	2007: 7,896
1976: 5,958	1992: 5,831	2008: 7,876
1977: 5,752	1993: 6,467	2009: 7,671

Source: Stanley Meisler, *When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and Its First Fifty Years* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), Appendix, Table 1.

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