# Good Intentions: Exploring Short-Term Missions in Port-Au-Prince, Haiti

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**Hannah Mackynzie Archer**

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## Abstract

1.6 million Americans participate in short-term missions (STMs) yearly; and yet faith-based organizations are often spared criticism due to their religious affiliation. However, the lack of cultural sensitivity and generalized assumption of "doing-good" that STMs portray, reinforces a revolving door cycle of dependency that cripples the sustainability of the countries they aim to assist. My research focuses on improving how faith-based humanitarian aid is conducted to decrease long-term dependency on foreign aid, and address the following: Images taken on STMs exploit poverty and promote a vulnerable misrepresentation of Haitian culture that has created a predetermined narrative of how faith-based aid, such as short-term mission, should be conducted, short-term mission projects prevent local job creation and feed into a cycle of imported resources that hinder economic growth, and the increase in short-term-mission trips influence the number of orphanages while promoting a false orphan identity and ignores family preservation alternatives. I provide an alternative method I define as cultural collaboration trips that could better help address humanitarian needs that focuses on pragmatic, long-term solutions rather short-term relief over a long period of time. My goal of this research is to begin the discourse of what I define accountable empathy, where nuances of historical, political, and economic factors are identified and reflected upon within humanitarian projects, and local involvement and assessment is key.

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# Introduction

The day was cooler than it had been all week at the malnutrition center in Haiti, but in the mountains near Kenscoff, most days gave you enough of a breeze that you could breathe without feeling like you were suffocating in the hot air. I sat outside holding "Gabrielle[1]" in my arms after the majority of the day for her was spent inside being treated for dehydration, leaving her fussy and exhausted. By the time I finally got her resting it was nearly 3 p.m. in the afternoon, and time for the other children in the center to take a nap. A knock came on the iron gate that surrounded the center. Riley, the founder of Hope Ministries Malnutrition Center, opened it to welcome in a short-term-mission group. Hope Ministries Malnutrition center provides life-saving, malnutrition care for children aged six and under, while promoting family preservation through job creation for adults. Entering in a single file line, the short-term mission group of mostly teenaged girls, followed by the trip chaperones, brought in their suitcases to pile into a corner where one of the Haitian workers was asked to take their bags to the guest house. I sat in the courtyard with the still sleeping Gabrielle, watching the group get situated, anticipating the frenzy I knew would come next with a mixture of frustration and sympathy for the Haitian nannies whose faces reflected my thoughts. Almost immediately after the last bag was piled, the young girls in the group ran over to the play pen area, where the staff and I were watching the babies sleep, and began picking up the children to take photos with them, commenting to each other "how sad" or "sickly" some of the children looked. One of the girls came up to me holding out her arms expectantly, and asked if she could see Gabrielle. Without realizing, I recoiled from her outreached arms defensively pulling Gabrielle as close to me as I could get her, replying to

[1] [1]All names of people and organizations have been changed to protect identities.

the young girl that Gabrielle had been sick all day and was not up for being passed around from person to person. With shock, she and the other members of the group looked at me with confusion, but complied when I explained that the children were not used to so many people at once, and that it would be more productive to help the nannies perform their daily chores with the children rather than interrupting the routine altogether. As the group was taken for a tour around the facility, half with children in their arms they had pulled from their cribs, I could not help but feel anger towards this group, who I knew was unaware of the damage they were causing with subtle actions such as picking up sleeping children to take photos with them. How could they have known that it took almost two hours and an extra bottle of milk to put "Reginald" down to nap only thirty minutes before they arrived to wake him up again, or that Gabrielle had just gotten done with a four hour rehydration treatment that required her to lay in the same spot with a needle in her hand and cords taped all around her, or how hard the nannies work to keep to a schedule they helped create in order to run a more efficient treatment center and that this disruption put them back more than an hour off schedule.

They did not know, but it is with this story I stress the importance of simply learning about where and who you are working with: to do more than assume but actually *know* that your presence there has an impact regardless of how big or little it is. To know that the center did not allow photos to be taken without permission, to know you should ask if there are specific rules for holding the children, or to know that by simply holding a starving child who is fighting for their life while you take a photo with them does not address the root of the problems that can be the cause of child malnutrition inside countries like Haiti.

I start with this story to highlight the lack of cultural sensitivity and the generalized assumption of "doing-good" that short-term mission trips (STM) often portray, and understand

that there are a lot of wrong ways to go about doing the right thing, especially when it comes to providing humanitarian aid. Short-term missions often times falsely elucidate those they are seeking to help as "victims," contributing to the vulnerable narrative of Haiti that neglects the historical, political, economic, and social ramifications that have left Haiti open for donor-aid business (Ulysse 2015: XIV).

## Research Objective

1.6 million Americans participate in short-term missions (STMs) yearly; and yet faith-based organizations are often spared criticism due to their religious affiliation. STMs are seen as spiritual pilgrimages that are individually conducted, and therefore making it harder to generalize and critique methods (Howell 2010: 21). Furthermore, because short-term missions are individually driven motives, it can be difficult to challenge a person's spiritual beliefs on what they see is the right way to carry out acts of faith, especially when those acts of faith do provide temporary relief. However, the lack of cultural sensitivity and generalized assumption of "doing-good" that STMs portray, reinforces a revolving door cycle of dependency that cripples the sustainability of the countries they aim to assist. In recent years, there has been an increase in the demand for reinventing missionary work that focuses on long-term sustainability and more culturally sensitive projects that acknowledge one's self as an aid provider within the given context and what the position means in regards to power, economics, access to resources, and race. These critiques are coming from within the missionary and faith-based community, based off of years of their own experiences. For example, the organization Dormi Lari, prides itself on disassociation with the missionary community in Haiti, although Tonya the founder has stated she is faith-based driven. For her, she critiques the form of STM and missionary culture by listening to the Haitian community and employing Haitians at the highest level of decision

making within her projects. Within Dormi Lari, their mission is to work alongside of and for the Haitian Community, not imply hey know what projects work best. Five years now of working in Haiti, Dormi Lari has successfully reunited twenty plus street children and orphanages with their families, and have created long term financial plans to help families become independent of humanitarian aid. They are reinventing the way faith-based aid is given to children falsely labeled orphans. Other critiques I have hear, and initially what started my interest in exploring short-term missions, come from the missionary families who have hosted STM teams and have first-hand knowledge of the problems and frustrations felt by the Haitian community once these teams leave.

In the words of a friend of mine who is a white, evangelical missionary, who has worked for AFA in Haiti for twelve years now and have hosted a fair amount of short-term mission teams.

"It is frustrating at times hosting teams (STMs)…. When they mess up, we (the missionaries) are left when they leave…...it becomes harder to form connections when teams do something, we have to say sorry to our Haitians friends for a lot after some of the teams leave."

The sorry she is referring to is the broken promises, the accidental culturally or racially insensitive remark, the constant circus of white people traveling down with their stuffed animals, crafts and balloons, hoping to ease the pain of Haiti while never addressing the cause of it.

This research draws on in-person interviews collected over a three-year span (2015-2018) working with the organizations AAF, Dormi Lari Org, and Middle Ministries in Port-au-Prince, Petit Pignon, and Petionville, and participant observation with short-term missions that I participated in and observed as a guest from the years 2009 until 2018, over an eight-year period

with extensive field notes and journal entries taken during each trip to Haiti from 2009 to 2018. My research focused on improving how faith-based humanitarian aid is conducted to decrease long-term dependency on foreign aid, and addressed the following questions: Do STMs prevent local job creation? If so, how can faith-based organizations redefine their missions to focus on local job creation? How do images taken on STMs exploit poverty and promote a vulnerable misrepresentation of Haitian culture? Lastly, does the increase in short-term-mission trips influence the number of orphanages, and if so how can STMs be refocused on family preservation? My research presents the relationship between short-term missions and the production of exploitative images surrounding concepts of poverty, how those photos are used to create a predetermined narrative that justifies a need for faith-based humanitarian intervention in the form of mission of projects that prevent job security for Haitians, and when job insecurity cripples a family's livelihood they choose to put their children inside faith-based ran orphanages in hopes for a better opportunity. The circle of dependency begins with a photo and ends with a child begin labeled an orphan, dependent on the short-term missions that created the very obstacles to stability in the first place.

## Methods

Before starting research for my Master's Thesis, I had the privilege of traveling to Haiti since the year 2009. My first three mission trips (summers of 2009-2011) were with the church Grace Place as a high school student focusing on orphanages and building projects. On these short-term mission trips, I participated in vacation bible school, building projects, and child care activities that revolved around a faith-based agenda. Each trip, consisting of mostly seven to eight teenagers, was planned months in advanced with emphasis on "doing good" evoked by empathy and little attention given to cultural sensitivity. I kept extensive journal recordings

daily, and have used these journals to guide my research objectives, specifically in the sense of self-reflexivity within short-term missions, and community response to projects/agenda. In June of 2012, two years after the devastating earthquake that claimed the lives of over 100,000 Haitians, I began a month-long internship with the organization, Chadasha Foundation, a faith-based, non-profit who sponsored an orphanage in Port-Au-Prince and helped provide medical care for child heart-care patients. During my internship I participated and recorded the daily routine and life inside orphanages; documenting the complex nuances of a Haitian orphanage run by Americans. Along with work inside the orphanage, I spent two days a week teaching English to children living in one of Petionville's tent cities. This experience would be the start of my research into how short-term missions and faith-based organizations operate in a humanitarian aid dependent country, and furthermore how can this cycle of dependency be broken. In December of 2013, I took a three-week vacation to stay with friends and pilot missionaries living in Petionville. This trip opened the door for research with a faith-based organization, American Fellowship Aviation (AFA), and allowed me to gain local missionaries' insight on how short-term missions are conducted and can be improved. I have continued to stay with this family since 2013, and have had the privilege of documenting, interviewing and volunteering inside AFA and STM they host; providing me with the majority of my preliminary research. The Summer of 2017, I stayed for a period of two and half months (May-August), working inside an American ran, faith-based malnutrition clinic that until this past Jan of 2018, did not allow for STM to stay or work inside the clinic. By the second week, I had gained rapport to begin interviewing the Haitian staff with their consent, and was able to document crucial roles Haitians have in determining how humanitarian aid is provided to local communities. Upon interviewing organization founder and director of administration, Riley and Miranda, I began to explore

alternative approaches to humanitarian aid, and devised research questions that helped underline the nuances between the prevention of long-term self-sustainability and STM. Between the years 2015-2018 I have formally and informally interviewed sixteen participants, and recorded the responses of both missionaries participating on short-term missions and of Haitian's working within these organizations' response to faith-based humanitarian aid. All names of organizations and people within this research have been changed to protect their identities.

This thesis will work to address where STM fall short on providing humanitarian aid and connect historical components to the contemporary STM narrative that prohibits local participation in Haiti's progress towards self-sustainability without foreign aid. I am using my personal experiences methodologically, along with data collected in collaboration with three Haitian social workers from Dormi Lari, and ten years of personal experience within short-term missions and the Haitian community to blend together an ethnographic, thick description account of how suffering is perceived within a western-dominated lens and how that perception shapes the alleviation of suffering. For one's suffering cannot be measured, nor can the alleviation of it. My goal is not to speak on the behalf of the suffering of Haitians, for I cannot, but rather show how my personal interactions within faith-based humanitarian aid that works with the Haitian community is not effective, and more so, speak directly to the white-evangelical community that provides faith-based aid. Haitians do not need to be told about their own daily suffering or hear other Haitian's accounts of suffering and how faith-based organizations provided temporary and minimal aid. The goal of my research is not to speak to the Haitian community on what they already know, but to the faith-based organizations on what they do not *see* but to engage in more self-critical awareness.

I use direct examples drawn from ten years of traveling to Haiti and interacting with short-term missions to provide a clear understanding of how short-term missions harm sustainability in Haiti due to their lack of self-critical awareness and the neglect for educating themselves on the historical, political, and economical nuances that shape contemporary Haiti. I use personal photos and records from social media to begin explaining how short-term missions are designed with a predetermined narrative based on photos, videos, and news accounts related to the countries they travel to, and how that shapes how faith-based aid is provided. I use personal experiences of participant observation, formal and informal interviews to describe how short-term missions shape their projects in a way that often times prohibits the Haitian community from accessing jobs. Drawing on the Haitian Social Welfare Department statements about orphanages from the years 2016 to 2018, personal accounts of participant observation, volunteering, and formally and informally interviewing participants within orphanages, and exploring the annual budget of faith-based donations to orphanages; I examine the relationship between orphanages and their dependency on short-term missions, and provide examples of the lack of accountability that makes orphanages dangerous to family preservation.

## Research Contributions

This research contributes to the growing number of anthropological critiques (Beckett 2017, Schuller 2012 and 2015, Schwartz 2008) on humanitarian aid and analyzes faith-based humanitarian aid that has often been spared criticism due to their religious and spiritual affiliations. Furthermore, this research highlights the racialized aspects within short-term mission culture that have not previously been examined from a historical, political, and economic perspective that reinforces a cycle of dependency on short-term mission teams for access to basic human rights like clean water, education, and access to job opportunities. The thesis will provide

an alternative method for how STM trips can be conducted, presenting the term "culture trips" that can target the underlying issues causing problems, like malnutrition, through cultural education and working alongside the community to increase self-sustainability and decrease dependency on aid groups like short-term missions.

## Organization of Thesis

To understand the complex nuances of short-term mission culture and the predetermined narrative that surrounds these faith-based pilgrimages, I begin this thesis with a review of previous literature to discuss the historical aspects of race, Christianity, and poverty that shaped the modern image of Haiti, as well as provide the ripe environment for donor aid to control the economy. Chapter one discusses the exploitation of Haitians' poverty through the use of photos, and how STM can contribute to a false, vulnerable image of Haiti. I engage with the literature of Catherine Lutz and Collins and their research into the mass commercialization of poverty in underdeveloped countries to explore how photos on the news, social media, and photos shared by churches about short-term missions can portray an illusion of cultural superiority and paternalism that help reinforce a need for short-term missions and faith-based aid in the western minds (Collins and Lutz 1993:11). Chapter two explores how STM may actually prevent job creation when they provide supplies and labor over hiring locals. I being chapter two with a story from my first trip to Haiti that demonstrates the lack of local involvement in the planning of short-term mission projects, and the lack of *need* for short-term missions to come to Haiti and perform jobs that Haitian locals can do themselves. Chapter three analyzes the relationship between orphanages and STM, that may promote orphanages over family preservation. In chapter three, I introduce several Haitian friends that I have had the privilege of getting to know and hearing their stories and experiences within orphanage system. I use these stories along with empirical

data collected through surveying to represent the façade of the orphan system within Haiti. Concluding my research, I will discuss alternative approaches to faith-based humanitarian aid based off of Dr. Paul Farmer's pragmatic, which I define as "culture trips", and how cultural and historical knowledge can produce a more effective method for conducting STM. My goal for this research is to encourage cultural sensitivity, racial hierarchies when serving on STMs, and self-awareness within the church community. Speaking from within the faith-based community, I am critiquing my own past mistakes in hopes of providing a platform where faith-based organization can listen to locals within target communities, encourage leadership roles for locals, and develop methods that seek to stop the revolving door of dependency that plagues nations like Haiti.

# Literature Review

## Haiti's Vulnerable Image, Short-Term Missions, and Humanitarian Aid

Although there are multifarious articles and literature that analyze NGOs globally, faith-based organizations and short-term missions as an extension of their methods, have only begun to dive into the deeper realms of faith driven humanitarians. As more literature on a multitude of religions' humanitarian practices emerge within the anthropological field, I urge anthropology as a study to inquire more into the topic of faith-based humanitarian aid, and how it contributes to a growing factor of economic, social, and cultural hierarchies globally. Drawing on the research of Beckett (2017) and Howell (2010), I explore the deeper meaning of faith and reason behind participating on short-term missions. Using Ulysses' framing of a need for a new narrative in underdeveloped countries (2015), Sontag's capturing the vulnerability of suffering with photography 2003, and Collins and Lutz's analysis of cultural hierarchies reinforced through photos of misrepresented poverty, I weave together how short-term missions can unintentionally misrepresent the roots problems of poverty and the people they are providing humanitarian aid too. Next, I rely upon the works of Schuller defining donors within humanitarian aid in Haiti (2012,2015), Trouillot's perspective into historical nuances that contributed the failure of Haiti's economic stability (1994), Greenburg's exploration into the concept of paternalistic care as a white man's burden historically (2008), and Germaine's account of colonial missionary history (2011) to analyze how historical political and economic nuances have transformed Haiti into a model country for dependency upon faith-based humanitarian aid that prevents long-term sustainability. Lastly, I review the literature of Mutua (2001) to help examine race and racialized methods of short-term missions that perpetuates underdeveloped nations with predominately

people of color as incompetent and incapable of providing economic and social stability. My hope is to tie these research studies together to provide a glimpse into faults within short-term missions, and contribute to educating how to combat culturally insensitive faith-based humanitarian projects.

## The "Hands and Feet" of Christ: Serving Without Suffering

The most common answer when a person is asked why they choose to partake in mission trips is usually because they felt "called to serve" and "being the hands and feet of Christ." This was the answer I originally used to give when I myself participated on short-term missions. But it is the act of *serving* and who is *being served* that has constructed the idea of serving on a mission trip and what it actually means to "serve." In Christianity, the Bible states in multiple books and verses that as a follower of God one should demonstrate acts of charity, generosity, and serve those who cannot help themselves (Hebrews 6:10, Romans 12:1). The act of serving on mission trips becomes one of spiritual fulfillment that is sought after by followers of Christianity, and is framed within the context of contemporary forms of humanitarianism. With the basis of a need to serve, comes the need for people to be served. Christianity, historically and contemporarily, has not been excluded from being shaped by racial ideologies that derive from the beginning of the Slave Trade, nor has it begun to address the racialized aspects of why and when mission trips first were started and how very little they have changed since the era of slavery. Mission trips are predominantly composed of white evangelicals from former colonizing/slave holding nations who travel to formerly colonized or enslaved nations predominately composed of people of color, to provide aid to a population whose poverty and instability can be linked back to the repercussions of colonization and slavery by the very same nations who are deploying these groups of mission teams. Short-term missions during

colonialism helped to pacify and convert indigenous groups of people being colonized, and although the inspiration behind conducting or participating in a short-term mission has evolved into a form of humanitarian aid. The methods and approach are still very much so rooted in ignoring the underlying history of how these nations and populations came to be immersed in poverty and lack the resources to stabilize themselves without foreign aid (Howell 2010: 17). Neglecting this past knowledge of how short-term missions played a role in colonialism and how they reinforce dependency has led to the misconceptions that there is a need for missions in the first place, and how they should be conducted on the ground in ways that promote charitable giving rather than empowering the target populations for long-term sustainable growth. Charity has crippled Haitians' ability to make claims to human rights and with that, agency over how humanitarian aid is provided. Faith-based missions are long term objectives that provide temporary relief over a long period of time. Further, reinforcing dependency on foreign intervention. Food aid and other forms of humanitarian aid in Haiti have historically produced patterns of dependency on imports and NGOs/ faith-based organizations that have implemented a form of "indebtedness and expectations of gratitude" within how humanitarian aid is conducted and how Haitians should receive that aid (Beckett 2017: 40). Images of poverty, that will be discussed in chapter two, flood our newsfeeds and media outlets, asking for donations of money or time; churches post signs outside or pictures up on the bulletins of depressed looking children asking for your charity; friends coming back from mission trips posting photos and retelling the same narratives of "doing God's work" and how "gratifying it was to serve" capture the attention of people seeking ways to contribute to the idea of "doing good." It is this idea of doing good for others that often leads people to participate on short-term missions, the images that evoke an emotional response to help those in the photo, it is the stories told about how going on a short-

term mission trip changed the lives of the participants that seduces others to join a mission trip. All of these elements play into the larger framework of why someone would participate in short-term missions, and reinforces the predetermined narrative that says there is a need for short-term missions, and this is the way to do it. Short-term missions are understood as a spiritual fulfillment. However, continuing charity without a plan for sustainability creates a one-way path that leaves Haitians without the ability to provide for themselves, forcing them to place their children within orphanages, feeding into the dependency cycle kept alive by support from short-term missions and other forms of donor aid (Beckett 2017: 41).

As I started this school year, fall semester of 2018, I was asked by several of my students if I would be interested in speaking to their churches about my research with short-term missions and how to change them to be more culturally appropriate so that they would focus on long term sustainability that would later on not need mission trips for support. Not to my surprise, but to my students, all three pastors of the church responded that they knew what was best for a mission trip and how to properly conduct one. This narrative of assuming how to provide aid and why it is better than alternative long-term solutions is an extremely dangerous narrative for the progress of sustainability and moving towards decreasing the amount of dependency nations have on short-term mission support and humanitarian aid altogether. However, this seems to be the dominant narrative that is told within churches and is reinforced with each trip taken as participants come back telling their own stories about the success of their trip without realizing their stories have been told a hundred times already by others who fit their experiences on these trips into the predetermined narrative of doing good.

## Haiti: The Need for a New Narrative

Gina Athena Ulysse (2015), A Haitian-American anthropologist, writes about the discourse that surrounds the image of Haiti. The narratives that surround Haiti, especially post-earthquake 2010, portray Haiti and Haitians in an objectified, symbolic, and victimized state; where they are no longer looked at as active agents in their own life choices, and their victimization is framed by foreign humanitarian aid (Ulysse 2015: xiv). In this narrative, Haiti becomes romanticized as a poverty-stricken country that needs to be saved by foreign humanitarian intervention. Yet this narrative also neglects the history and impact of those same foreign aid powers in creating the politically, socially, and economically unstable country that Haiti is known as today (Ulysse 2015: 4-5). Haiti and Haitians have become dehumanized through this portrayal and their own identity cast aside to be replaced with foreign, *blan* (Haitian Creole for "white"), stereotypes that are reinforced by media coverage and humanitarian aid accounts (Ulysse 2015:26). Instead, Ulysse urges that Haiti no longer be "synonymous with poverty, backwardness," and racial discrimination that reinforces Haiti as a "burden" (Ulysse 2015: 27, 30). Haiti can have a new narrative that starts by erasing the previous labels Haiti has been given, and allow for Haitians to speak objectively for themselves, but in order to do so we must analyze who defines Haiti now, in the objective sense. Ulysse states the dependency of Haiti on NGOs, missionaries, and other humanitarian aid providers can be traced through historical exploitation and contemporary dependency, and that these nuances must be unraveled in order for the image of Haiti to change from vulnerable to hopeful (Ulysse 2015: 23). One of the historical and contemporary methods of exploitation has been through the use of photography to encourage donations and participations in STMs.

## The Power of a Photo

A photo of another person's suffering helps make that person's vulnerability into a reality, a reality that can be manipulated, redistributed, misinterpreted and misused (Sontag 2003: 7). A photo in a way becomes a "truth teller," but who is telling the truth is controlled by the photographer, not the photographed (Sontag 2003:7-8). Photos taken by missionaries, short-term mission teams, and other humanitarian aid entities have created a basis of knowledge around ideas about poverty that, historically, promote western, white nations as saviors to the poor, and continues today to reinforce a racialized framework about who is impoverished and who has the ability to provide relief.

Photos used by missionary groups and STMs are specifically chosen and subjects within the frame are typically staged (Lutz and Collins 1991: 137) that promote a certain perspective that these organizations want donors to see: poverty, the need for help, and evangelical missionaries as the heroes. Lutz and Collins Describe seven types of gazes that can be found within photographs that should be analyzed as to who these perspectives weave together to create social, racial, and economic hierarchies between photographers and those they photograph: the photographers' gaze, the institutional gaze they defined within a magazine framework, the readers/donors' gaze, the non-western subject's gaze, explicit looking gazes that are often involving white foreigners with locals in the frame, a gaze returned by a mirror or another camera within the frame, and lastly the academic gaze (1991: 134). Similar to Sontag, Lutz and Collins criticize the exploitational use of photography within underdeveloped countries. These gazes, as Lutz and Collins argue, are dynamic to how viewers and even photographers see photos and the people represented within them. Furthermore, how these gazes intersecting within a photo are a part of a meaningful, broader scope of nuances that can breakdown cultural barriers

or create them. For STMs, using cameras as a way to capture their memories is also produce a certain representation of the community they are working within (Lutz and Collins 1991: 135) and ultimately use that representation to gain future support or participation. Short-term missions work predominately with donor/reader gaze in order to best compel people's emotions and persuade them to donate, the photographer's gaze since the photos taken on STMs are done so by the participants rather than the community and most often subjects of these photos, and lastly the explicit gazes that are posed photos and stages scenes filled with community members surrounding the minority of white missionaries. These photos are strategically done even if not consciously, for photos taken are always done so with intent. The intent of a "good photo" and what has ultimately been defined as a "good photo" is one that "makes sense in terms of prevailing ideas about the other, including ideas about both accessibility and difference" (Lutz 1991: 141). Short-term missions are intentionally and unintentionally constructing ideas about race, poverty, differences and searching for similarities based on empathy when they themselves are unable to fully relate.

This production of knowledge about poverty and other nuances contorts the people within impoverished conditions into objects, dehumanizing them as we become more desensitized to their suffering (Sontag 2003: 10, 20). Photos and photography are tools of power; photographers having the ability to capture sensitive topics, vulnerable moments, and alter how they want viewers to see their photo, giving them the power of information about what and who they photograph (Sontag 2003: 22). Pictures taken on STMs can mislead viewers and often depict a scene that is highly racially staged (Lutz and Collins 1991: 36,38), where a small group of white church members are surrounded by darker-skinned children or local community members during

projects, and further perpetuates a system that dehumanizes former colonized countries for needing aid while uplifting Western nations for being able to provide it.

The more shocking the photos are, the more cause for consumption and a rise to action that is provoked by the emotions these photos initiate (Sontag 2003: 23). The people behind the lens have all the authority to create an image, in what Lutz and Collins call the "photographer and the institutional gazes (1991: 34) the photographer plays on viewers emotions, and more so creates an image in the perception of the photographer and readers, not the subjects being photographed, that prevents the truth of the moment, place, and people from being heard (Sontag 2003:25). Photos taken absent-mindedly on short-term missions or by other humanitarian aid volunteers, of half-naked children, starved women and their families, the trash that litters the streets, and shanty tin structures people have made their homes, are taken back to the Western world for redistribution and the consumption of a predetermined narrative of doing good that mission trips try to exemplify. The predetermined narrative of how to help, and being from a nation that is seen capable of providing it, is reinforced by the photos of poverty taken on these trips that transforms shared collective memory (Sontag 2003: 86) about mission trips into a reasonable alternative for sustainable long-term relief aid that discontinues the need for these trips in the first place. As technology increases, and photos become more wide spread, understanding poverty and relief aid through photos is made into a sacrilegious phenomenon to invoke compassion from an audience of viewers ignorant to the realities of poverty and how easily aid relief can create further poverty. It is easier to witness suffering from a distance, through the lens of a camera or a photograph taken, but it is important to acknowledge the impact the photo can have in developing how people perceive suffering, and that taking photos of someone suffering from poverty does not address the underlining problems that cause poverty, it

only documents it (Sontag 2003: 117). For Participants on STMs and donors back home, pictures taken on these trips can further distance participants from the local communities (Lutz and Collins 1991: 138,141) and by exotifying the subjects within the frame, these photos "atomize and impoverish experiences" (Lutz and Collins 1991: 138) had on these trips. Furthermore, the photos taken while participating in providing humanitarian aid impact who donates, and how they choose to spend their time, money, and resources towards humanitarian aid projects.

## Defining Donors

Mark Schuller, an anthropologist who has conducted work in Haiti for over a decade, studies the impact of NGOs and humanitarian aid in Haiti. Specifically, he looks at how donor policies on which Haiti has become dependent affect the long-term self-sustainability of the people working for and seeking aid from NGOs and humanitarian groups. Haiti's development has become privatized. Water sanitation, education, and healthcare systems are typically provided through donor supported NGOs or donor supported missionaries that exclude the majority of the population from having access to them (Schuller 2012:31). The increase of privately-run organizations has led to the increase in the state's dependency on these organizations, weakening the state's power and strengthening the donors through privatization policies (Schuller 2012: 23). Although Schuller's work does not specifically discuss the impact short-term mission teams have on Haiti, relationships between short-term missions and self-sustainability for Haitians can be explored using Schuller's research into how much power NGOs and humanitarian aid providers have in countries like Haiti. Schuller discusses how humanitarian aid is carried out within a white, western context of what it means to provide aid and how, and that this perspective binds the image of Haiti in a vacuum of post-colonial, western stereotypes that reinforce Haiti's dependency on international actors (Schuller 2012: 39). By

reinforcing dependency on foreign aid and discrediting the Haitian government's accountability to take care of its own people, Haiti's economic and political growth is hindered, and power is taken from Haitians and handed over to NGOs, missionaries, and other foreign humanitarian aid workers who work alongside Haiti's one percent wealthy population (Schuller 2012: 182 and 185). This flow of donor money, which Schuller describes as "trickle down imperialism," opens the door to form a middle class in Haitian culture that is made up of white, western, NGO workers and missionaries who often times disregard cultural sensitivity in order to meet their own interests (Schuller 2012: 185). More importantly, Schuller discusses how western national interests shape donor policies that affect the long-term impact NGOs and humanitarian aid providers have on local communities (Schuller 2012: 156). For example, Schuller provides an account from 2004 for faith-based organization funds working within Haiti that estimated 100 million USD towards missionary who taught healthcare and sex education (Schuller 2012:151). However, the faith-based organizations received funding because they approached sex education with an abstinence-only method; completely disregarding the lack of access Haitians have to contraception and sexually transmitted disease prevention methods and how Haitians perceive sexual encounters, resulting in lack of participation from the community (Schuller 2012: 151-152). Drawing from Schuller's example, my research navigates the cultural ignorance of many faith-based organizations when conducting short-term missions abroad, and how the misconceived narrative of Haiti that Ulysse examines, plays a role in shaping current faith-based humanitarian aid missions. In order to fully analyze the impact of humanitarian aid in countries like Haiti, the historical context that lays out the foundation as to how and why foreign aid was given needs to be addressed, and the links that tie America's economic interests to Haiti's lack of development acknowledged.

## The Color of Humanitarian Aid

The definition of developed and developing nations was constructed within a Western, capitalist framework that was based on the socially constructed hierarchy of races, religions, and cultures; where Western interests were promoted through acts of colonialism (Trouillot 1994: 147). Christianity and missionaries became a tool for colonialism that enabled the myth of racial superiority for whites, and promoted a Western dominated perception about "socially evaluating" people and cultures (Trouillot 1994: 147-148). Within this framework, a dichotomy between those who have power to provide aid, and those who receive aid are shaped in a racially defined vacuum that ignores the historical background that created these misconceptions in the first place (Trouillot 1994: 151). However, in Haiti, race is not only defined within a Western perspective, but also goes beyond phenotypic differences to include social class and religion (Trouillot 1994: 149 and 150). When contemporary humanitarian aid providers in Haiti design methods for development and relief aid, they ignorantly structure their projects and methods around their own Eurocentric understanding of race, culture, religions, and social frameworks; that ignores Haiti's historical development under a racially discriminatory umbrella of colonialism, thus reinforcing the myths of blackness as weakness and the incapability of development each time a short-term mission is sent to provide forms of humanitarian aid (Trouillot 1994: 153 and 155). By focusing on how historically short-term missions have been conducted and defined, future faith-based humanitarian aid providers can begin to redesign how they implement the act of "doing good."

## "The White Man's Burden"

Humanitarianism historically has been centered around socially constructed ideas on race and a perception of non-western nations as the "white man's burden" (Greenburg 2018: 122). The erasure of historical violence carried out on non-western nations by the West during colonization and slavery has developed a form of humanitarianism predominately made up of white people from a former colonizing nation "aiding" people of color from former colonized nation (Greenburg 2018: 130). The continuation of the *blan* coming to Haiti to provide resources, medical care, food aid, and building the Jesus trifecta[2] of a school, church, and orphanage is an evolved form of colonization that ignores crucial nuances of history that have silenced Haitians as active agents in their life and invalidates any notion that Haitians can and will take care of themselves if afforded access to the right resources, resources that are controlled by humanitarian aid (Greenburg 2013: 97). This erroneous viewpoint about race that is projected onto underdeveloped nations like Haiti, contributes to the influx of historically and culturally ignorant forms of humanitarian aid, like short-term missions, and provides a platform for this type of aid to thrive. Although short-term missions, as a form of humanitarian aid, are generally meant to "share in the suffering" of the target community, predetermined narratives unconsciously rooted in Western understandings about race, create a barrier between the aid givers and the aid receivers so that those providing the aid truly cannot share in the suffering when they view themselves as the only form of salvation to those suffering (Greenburg 2013: 101).

[2] Slang term used to describe faith-based mission projects that are common within Haiti.

## "Doing Good"-Short-Term Missions Defined

Anthropologist Brian Howell is a pioneer in the field that explores short-term missionary culture through an anthropological lens. Speaking from a secular viewpoint inside the faith-based community, Howell defines aspects of short-term missionary culture, and critiques the narrow frame in which short-term missions are conducted. Short-term missions are what Howell synonymously refers to as "pilgrimages" that have intense, ritualistic aspects that forces one to leave the comfort of their own cultural and social setting in order to embark on a spiritual journey where volunteerism leads participants closer to God (Howell 2012: 56). Howell states that short-term missions are "theological enterprises" where faith is understood to be cross-cultural, and the mission per se is predetermined by a set narrative within which short-term missions promote themselves (Howell 2012: 59). The critique Howell presents is that the predetermined idea of what a short-term mission is prohibits the ability of the team members to grow within the cultural context of their own experience on the ground. Howell examines how this predetermined narrative is "Americanized" and constructed according to the Western definition of a short-term mission, how it is best carried out, and how it often times is culturally ignorant of the target community (Howell 2012: 140). Howell estimates that 1.6 million Americans per year participate in short-term missions, yet lack basic cultural knowledge about where they are about to spend their next one to two weeks. In effect, Howell argues they already have created a storyline in their minds based on previous accounts of short-term missionary culture, about how the trip will be and the "good" they are going to do; reinforcing a false sense of the mission trips' effectiveness (Howell 2012: 27). This sensation of doing good is felt in a deeper way while participating in short-term missions wherein the predetermined justification that God is a spiritually cross-cultural entity that is transcendent to environment, wealth, race,

and all the other components of life that could shape a person's ability to provide for themselves, neglects to focus on what causes the context of mass poverty in countries like Haiti. Neglecting to understand the cultural, racial, social, and economical differences between the short-term mission team and the people they are "helping," in fact demonstrates how religious conviction is not transcendent of these differences (Howell 2012: 143). Thus, a short-term mission team can construct the wrong perception about what poverty is, what causes it, how to alleviate it, and that witnessing it is a "profound experience that transcends culture" because they are blinded by a predetermined, ethnocentric, western idea about what poverty outside of the western nation framework is (Howell 2012: 159). Howell urges short-term mission participants to "see" rather than to "assume," meaning that participants observe where they are with cultural appreciation and without a predetermined understating of what is taking place on this trip (Howell 2012: 192). The act of "seeing" can prove to be more effective when members of a short-term mission look at the culture abstractly, and focus on the roots of systematic poverty that causes the many problems short-term missions try to tackle individually in order to grasp the broader picture that is the whole illness rather than just treating the symptoms. In order for the way people think about short-term missions to evolve from a colonialist white savior framework, faith-based missions must address the historical components of practicing missions as a tool for colonialism.

## "You Can't Reap Where You Don't Sow:" Repercussions of the Colonial Missionary

Missionaries have been working within Haiti for two hundred years, condemning African diasporic religions like Vodou, and promoting western, Eurocentric values that exploited the country of Haiti through capitalistic ventures disguised as humanitarian aid (Germain 2011: 248). Historically and contemporarily, missionaries and short-term missions have worked with

an agenda that is complemented by the governments' foreign policy interests that promote the privatization of most basic needs such as water, education, and healthcare; legitimizing and reinforcing dependency on short-term missions and missionaries whose framework is based on a government that does not uphold the needs of their people as top priority (Germain 2011: 249). With that being stated, missionaries and short-term missions capitalize on political oppression, economic inequality, and vulnerability of the people they are "helping" by "trading off" basic human rights (water, food, healthcare) in exchange for believing in a ethnocentric "God," without ever taking responsibility for the fact that many of the foreign policies from their western countries are the cause of political oppression, economic inequality, and vulnerability in places like Haiti (Germain 2011: 250). Orphanages, health care clinics, churches, and schools that are privatized by faith-based groups and supported through short-term missions, "became a breeding ground for creating new and faithful children of God," but never address the historical nuances or the contemporary economic and political battleground countries like Haiti become in order to protect western nations' interests (Germain 2011: 253). Similar to Schuller's "trickle down imperialism," short-term missions can be used as a tool for capitalism and expanding the global gap between rich and poor by providing access and resources outside of the state's jurisdiction; stripping power from underdeveloped nation's government and creating a revolving door of humanitarian aid dependency that provides what the government cannot (Germain 2011: 258). This revolving door that depends on white, western "do-gooders" to provide access to the most crucial essentials like clean water and food has set the stage for white interests to be elevated above the dignity of the people they claim to be helping.

## The White Ego Agenda: Exploring the "Savage, Victims, Savior" Complex

Makau Mutua writes about the racial implications upon which humanitarianism is founded. Mutua explores the concept of self- reflexivity among the proponents of human rights, and the importance of understanding how one's position of power and objectivity is defined by one's ethnocentric, white-western ideology about what it means to give humanitarian aid and to whom (Mutua 2001: 202). Often times states are labeled as either "good" or "bad" in ways that fits into a predetermined narrative from which short-term missions draw their own cultural traits and practices (Mutua 2001: 203). This narrative of a state being initially "bad" determines what short-term team members perceive about who, where, and why they are participating in the act of "doing good" within a "bad" cultural setting (Mutua 2001: 203). Mutua explains how the human rights project embodies a metaphor of Savage-Victim-Savior, in which "savage" is often associated with formerly colonized countries that are still seen as incapable of self-sustainability and create "victims" within the "bad state" that requires "saviors" from former colonizing nations to come and provide humanitarian aid (Mutua 2001: 204). Most importantly, Mutua points out the lack of accountability these white "saviors" have in historically creating the conditions into which these "bad states" like Haiti have been forced (Mutua 2001: 204-205). This puts countries like Haiti in a vacuum of Eurocentric stereotypes that reiterates and justifies sending more humanitarian aid, thus hindering the self-sustainability of the whole country, while stripping more global and internal power from the government, and ignoring the power relations between those providing humanitarian aid (typically white and from Western nations) and those seeking aid (typically people of color in poverty-stricken conditions) (Mutua 2001: 207). Within this context of savage-victim-savior, white egos are projected as sole providers for aid and

support, ultimately upholding ethnocentric hierarchies within races, religions, and the social classes.

For example, as Africana studies scholar Felix Germain states, religious hierarchy dictates who can obtain access to resources, by trading in African diasporic religions like Vodou, for a white, Christian God that can help better one's chances of getting basic needs met (2011: 253). Furthermore, by promoting a Eurocentric viewpoint to humanitarian aid, the white savior complex is disguised under the veil of "defending" human rights by providing only one alternative to suffering; a white savior aid approach from the same countries whose policies and interests hinder any growth towards an economically, politically and socially stable country (Mutua 2001: 208). Under this Eurocentric humanitarian aid design, faith- based organizations that use short-term missions as a tool for providing humanitarian aid essentially hijack faith/spirituality and promote religious hierarchy over the "other" that helps structure the predetermined characteristics of short-term missions that Howell (2012) examines and Mutua warns as reinforcing "savage, victim" stereotypes (Mutua 2001: 235). In order to move forward from humanitarian aid under the "savage, victims, savior" complex, aid providers must become more self-reflexive, understand their power is objective, and begin to redefine who narrates what it means to be vulnerable and dependent upon aid and how aid itself is conducted relatively within each cultural setting.

# Chapter One

# The Image of Poverty and Capturing the Suffering of Others

## One Hundred Likes for an Orphan

It was close to midnight as Tonya, a missionary and founder of Dormi Lari, and I sat outside on the second level deck chatting about the day's events, when she got a call from a friend who asked us to look into a self-proclaimed orphanage working in Haiti that had uploaded photos onto their Facebook page of children in their underwear or half-clothed, sleeping on mats, and other pictures depicting these children in their care as "needy." With over one hundred likes, people were commenting on the posts asking how to donate, how to help, and praising this organization for posting "informative" photos (Figure 1.1) that showed the shocking reality of impoverished children. The website of the orphanage, All God's Children's Home, was far worse, with photos of children from toddler to teen stripped naked, glaring at the camera, and under each photo was a blurb with the name and age of the child, requesting a sponsor for the upcoming school year. These vulnerable images of the children were posted as a ploy to provoke an impulsive response to the depravity each child was portrayed to face in their daily lives, and draw an empathetic audience to bring in donations for the cause of "rescuing these children." The following posts, made days after the orphanage received donations, were of a car stacked high with mattresses with the caption "more beds needed, more lives being changed."




*Figure 1.1 Media image used to get donations.*

The reality was that these children had been separated from their parents, as I will discuss further in chapter three, by this orphanage who promised a "better life for their children" because as the posts from the orphanage declared the parents themselves had no financial stability or steady income. These children were not only false orphans, but were being exploited by this organization under the pretense of being an orphan as they depict in the photos on their website.

In this chapter, I stress the importance of this story for showing how a photo can become a weapon, even unintentionally, and how photos are so powerful they can strip away agency from those within them and empower the narrative only given by the photographer; the narrative of an orphan. The representation of impoverished children as orphans is part of a larger narrative and set of images that misrepresent the context of the country and people. I begin by exploring the power a photograph can have and define how photos control power dynamics while providing humanitarian aid, and the impact of vulnerability on the culture within the photos. To explore the production and effects of poverty exploited through photography, I provide examples from a mission trip I participated in the summer of 2011 that represent the phenomenon of

exploitative photographs being produced unconsciously by short-term mission participants. Lastly, I discuss the importance of taking an appropriate, consent-given photos that can be used to preserve a personal memory without dehumanizing the subjects of the photos. I would like to say that this chapter may be the most foundational starting point for forming short-term missions, due to the pictures being produced in underdeveloped countries that create the false images and perception of poverty. It is with the photos that short-term missions and other forms of humanitarian aid are developed as the response, and it is here that the image of a child with parents can be transformed into an orphan.

## Poverty Photography

Photographs have the power to convey feeling, capture an emotion, a moment, a place in time, and tell a story a hundred different ways to a hundred viewers that can "reinforce or challenge shared understandings of cultural differences" (Lutz and Collins 1993:2-3). Photos are powerful, and are often taken absent mindedly. When scrolling through my digital media and social media albums over the last nine years, I look at the pictures I have taken of Haiti, and one in particular disturbs me the most. It was a photo I took when I was seventeen, on June 27th, 2011 while on a mission trip to Port-Au-Prince. We had been sight-seeing the ruins left after the quake and visiting spots where massive destruction was still evident. Committing poverty tourism as we visited sites of destruction like the presidential Palace, we mindlessly snapped photos on our cameras or phones of all the rubble and worse, the people amongst it. We stopped at the largest and one of the oldest churches in Port-au-Prince where many nuns and priests had lost their lives in the earthquake. Walking around, our group of six teenagers who had never been confronted with such a large scale of loss and visible wreckage, ignorantly snapped photos of the suffering, not asking permission, not understanding the impact photos could have. As we went

back to our truck to visit the next site a man came up to our truck holding an extremely malnourished child with only a shirt too small for him on in his arms begging us for money and holding up his child as evidence of their dire situation. Almost immediately without thought, I snapped a photo (Figure 1.2) of this group, with a man holding his starving child (pictured), then handing him a few dollars along with the rest of the group as if it was compensation for taking advantage of his vulnerability. I did not realize at the time I was contributing to the mass production of exploitative photos that already flooded the news, media and other forms of social networks that shaped the perception of poverty and underdeveloped countries for most western nations and people within them.



*Figure 1.2 Image of child I had taken my second mission trip as described in the story above.*

**Poverty through the Lens of a Camera**

Exploitative photos of poverty can be defined as photos typically taken without permission that portray the vulnerability of poverty without considering how that photo may misrepresent the person, place, or cultural context in which it was taken; reinforcing a cycle of how the world views people and cultures living in impoverished conditions. Photos, as Collins and Lutz's define, become evidence of suffering and urge people provoked by empathy to respond with action (Collins and Lutz 1993: 26-27). For faith-based organizations, that action is short-term missions as a response so that they may *see* first-hand the suffering that captivated them to journey to Haiti in the first place (Collins and Lutz 1993: 27). Haitian culture is very open, and people live their lives very publicly due to lack of privacy available. It is not uncommon for a whole street to be taken up with vendors selling food or clothing, cooking *frites* (fried snacks), bathing, or simply socializing. For people first engaging a new culture on STM trips, this street scene can be fascinating enough to want to capture forever. The problem is not in the act itself, but the approach in doing so. I assumed that because of where I was, Haiti, and the fact I was volunteering on a mission trip, that it was perfectly normal for me to take photos of the children, the ruined buildings, and the daily of life of people forced to expose their privacy to people like me because of my ignorance to poverty, and the representation of poverty used by photos like mine. Although it may have been acceptable to take a picture, if I had asked the man and explained why I felt compelled to do so, I did not take time to actually ask whether these men or these people with him wanted their photos taken, nor could I even tell you the name of the child he was holding. Writing this, I reflect on this memory now with new knowledge and understanding that a photo has a power the power, my photo, to exploit another person's suffering while attempting to capture a moment. I research this aspect of exploitative

photography to show the disconnect between STM group members and those they are trying to help. Indicating the lack of cultural understanding many people on a STM trip have; as well as, holding my self-accountable for previous actions that I have learned from and hopefully able to use to better convey this understanding to the present short-term missionaries and faith-based community. In Collins and Lutz's work they describe photos as having the ability to objectify those within them (Collins and Lutz 1993: 274), and that objectification in the case of faith-based projects can augment short-term missions' argument as to why they provide humanitarian aid that is based on empathetic response to the suffering being objectified in the photo.

When scrolling on social media, you may come across a friend's album from their recent mission trip to an underdeveloped country, that is filled with half smiling faces of children, photos of the "weirdly exotic things" like nature and food, and photos taken while conducting faith-based projects, like children playing with the toys the team brought. More so, it may be filled with the pictures that are meant to capture the culture, the candid photos of people carrying on their daily life where children run around naked, and women bathe in the streets with buckets, and half clothed beggars lay on the ground with outstretched hands. Some of us have seen those photo albums or have been shown the pictures from someone's phone after their recent return, and our perception about a place is or can be predefined, and how we think about or behave within specific cultures and groups of people. Churches frequently use these types of photos from previous mission trips, along with staged group photos of their projects and various interactions of the team with local children, to encourage other church members to join or donate for their mission. Powerpoints are made to show pictures from the trip as some new age gospel music plays in the background, and the final slide showing ways to support or ask how to be involved on the next trip. The problem with how these photos being used is not merely the

exploitation of someone else's suffering, it is when someone interested in participating on these short-term missions sees these pictures and begins to develop a false, predetermined narrative of what the people and culture will be like, and reinforces the wrong idea of there being a need for STMs in the first place (Lutz and Collins 1993: 28). Similar to Collin and Lutz's standing about reading National Geographic and the response readers have to exotify and categorize cultural superiority, photos from short-term trips have become a type of propaganda for white evangelicals to build the "Jesus trifecta" of a school, orphanage, and church; documenting the mission in order to gain donor support for future missions. People participating on these short-term missions are viewed in their photos as saviors to these communities, and often revealed as the true "feet and hands of Christ" for their work, but ignore the actual people suffering in the photos, their stories, their lives, and learn if they would even want to be in a photo on your church power-point. The best of intentions to provide humanitarian care can be meaningless when once you are home the photos you took of people's suffering is being used as propaganda and people's vulnerability as profit (Lutz and Collins 1993: 29). However, tactful, respectful, and culturally appropriate approaches to photo taking can be done, and should be discussed within the faith-based community where the majority of these within poverty are produced.

## Poverty Photography in the News

Images of poverty flood the news stations daily, capturing viewers' attention with the suffering of others and reports of the latest atrocities; embodying the tangible realities of those they report about with photographs and video streaming. The perception of Haiti depicted in the news is often of poverty, disaster, human rights violations, and difficulties Haitians face to provide for themselves and families. The news is often taken as literal as possible because it is supposed to represent the true events of a moment as they occur. However, the coverage of the

aftermath of events, such as Hurricane Matthew that destroyed many agricultural sectors of Haiti, needs to be addressed in the way in which they present groups of people in these situations as helpless, objectified, victims that are not capable of reconstructing their country after disasters occur. This simply is false, it is the way in which we provide aid that enables a cycle of dependency on aid itself and rejects long term projects that advance the ability of local communities to self-sustain. But when the news documents these disasters in a way that shows a helpless situation, people tend to respond and do so through blindly donating or serving on a short-term mission that are not focused on sustainable goals that could prevent future destruction in these areas. After Hurricane Matthew hit the northern and coastal regions of Haiti, destroying a vast majority of agriculture and livestock, news channels began to show pictures of the damage on repeat and discussed the natural disaster in a way that suggested the damage done during the storm was unpreventable due to the lack of resources most Haitians did not have access to. One reporter for the News Weather Channel, meteorologist Jennifer Delgado, made an erroneously false claim that children were so hungry and malnourished after the hurricane that they were subjected to eating trees to survive (Figure1.3); even showing a NASA satellite map of Haiti and the border of the Dominican Republic to represent the immense deforestation of Haiti caused by several factors, including as she claimed children eating trees. This false claim sparked outrage, and eventually she apologized for her comments, but the damage of statement had already been done.

The image of Haiti is constantly misrepresented as a burden for developed nations to carry, that the people there are so desolate and engulfed in poverty that the only way to help them is to do so ourselves. This image portrayed in the news not only negates Haitians' ability to be empowered, but also strips them into objectified, dehumanized, beings that do not have




*Figure 1.3 News cast image of meteorologist claiming Haitian children eat trees causing mass deforestation.*

agency. This is not only immoral, but also implies "social communication" about countries depicted as impoverished through the lens of the camera that creates a sense of paternalistic intention to aid those within the photos, yet neglect "historical and contextual shifts" that led to the impoverishment of that country (Collins and Lutz 1993: 216). During fieldwork this past summer of 2018, I witnessed a country-wide protest in Haiti as a reaction to the increase of gas prices by fifty-one percent in just a day, that caused the airport in the capitol of Port-au-Prince to be shut down, stranding several mission groups in the airport at the time the protests began. Immediately, news reporters in the US began to cover the "riots," as they were called on the first day of being reported, showing pop-up pictures on the screen of tires burning and people creating road barriers with rocks and wood. Captioned story lines (Figure 1.4) on the bottom of these photos began to report of the mission trip teams that were "stranded within the airport" as the protests started, and comments from the pastors that food supplies and clean drinking water were running low were shown in clips with pictures of the teams that were stuck. One comment on a Tennessee local news channel of WLTX19 reported that over 100 people serving on mission trips were stuck in Haiti during this three-day protest, and that there were warnings from the US

embassy that all Americans were advised to stay inside due to the dangers of the protests. Tweets, social media posts, and other news outlets began to trickle in with comments of fear and support for the mission teams stranded in the airport and the rest of Haiti; stating to stay inside and stay safe. The images being reported on the news suggested a highly dangerous situation, showing masked men setting fire to gas stations and tire smoke bellowing out from a line of tires that been set ablaze. The reality was much less fearful as I spoke with protesters who assured us that their anger was directed at their government. I couldn't help but find myself frustrated with the perception of these protests being broadcasted globally on the news, something that would likely be happening in response to our own governments increasing gas prices by fifty-one percent. For Haiti though the narrative was a simple headline, riots broke out in what is already deemed an unstable country, and all who are white could be in danger, so much so that the fear crippled two mission teams from leaving the airport for two days to find a better location to stay during the protest. It is this fear that misleads people to react to Haitians as being inherently violent and a misrepresentation of Haitian culture that portrays Haiti and Haitians as violent even savage like people, who during a rightfully upsetting event of gas prices increasing to the point of damaging people's livelihood, have their agency to the right to peacefully protest taken from them and replaced with a narrative of barbarism that deems Haiti a country of need in the first place. It would have likely been no trouble for the teams to exit the airport, but it was their predetermined narrative of Haiti that is written by photos and stories on the news, that produces a cloud of suspicion and fear over Haitians and reinforces socially constructed ideas of race that inaccurately presumes blacks as inherently more savage and violent.

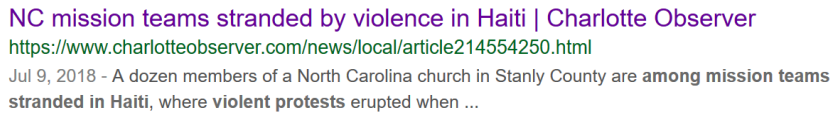


*Figure 1.4 One of many news headings about the protest occurring in Haiti the Summer of 2018 after fuel prices increased 51%*

## The Picture-Perfect Moment…Appropriately

Images are meaningful representations of culture and are important vehicles in conveying cultural similarities and differences (Lutz and Collins 1993: 4). Photos are meant to preserve a memory about a place, people, and time, and are understandably a part of short-term mission culture, beyond the need to document the trip for future church support, but to also capture a significant moment in the participants' lives with each photo they take. In the summer of 2017, during my research for this thesis, I volunteered and conducted research inside of a malnutrition center where all of the patients were under the age of six. The founder and director of the center, Riley, had come to Haiti with a mission to prevent the need for orphanages through nutritional care, and focus on rehabilitation for children and prevention of malnutrition that leave Haitian parents desperate enough for their child's well-being to give them to an orphanage. Within the center, laminated signs that read "No Photos" in three languages (Kreyol, English, and French) hung on almost every wall. The rule was simple: you are allowed to take photos of the children whose parents or guardian signed a consent form; if the child was old enough to understand you were to ask permission; and above all none of the photos with a child's face were to be put on social media. During an interview with Riley, I asked what made her so adamant about how photos were taken, she replied:

"Think about it, when children and families come here they're sick, they don't feel good, and when you're sick and don't feel good the last thing you want is for someone to come in and take a photo of you at your worst….If that happened in the States I bet people would be getting upset a lot more…..it's about giving people dignity when they come here seeking our help….they shouldn't be made embarrassed by their situation."

Dignity: something a lot of people do not realize a photo can provide or take away. When white people flood into underdeveloped nations in the name of doing good, the photos produced during those trips are what Collins and Lutz's define as commercialized (1993: 10). The people in them objectified, and "authentic" culture is replaced with the lens of a white person's camera; not showing the good that trip was meant for, but the poverty that strikes such a difference between those participating on a STM and the people they are trying to aid (Lutz and Collins 1993: 10,45). During my research with the malnutrition center a short-term mission team visited on the end of their trip to stay the night and help with a few repairs around the center before they left. In the introduction to this thesis I described the frenzy they created as they entered, rushing to the babies we had just put down for naps, picking them up to pass them around, and all the while their phones were out taking photos the whole time. One child, who will remain anonymous, has been at the center for two years after being left by a neighbor who rescued him from starvation and abuse. The child's photo of when he first arrived is one of the staple pictures of the center's success, being in the worst condition any staff member there had ever seen. On the tour of the facility the whole group of women picked up the child to take photos with him in front of his first in-patient picture, a picture where he is in a cloth diaper, his ribs are showing badly enough that they look pointed and his face unrecognizable due to the sunken eyes that created a skeletal effect on his face, as if he were no longer alive. The photo

itself is used as inspiration in the center, showing the ability of the center's care to bring a child back from the brink of death, but to Riley it is a personal achievement that is hung among other in-patient and out-patient photos that represent where the children started and how well they were when they left, a form of memory preservation to these children and their mission at the center, and one that was created by the Haitian nannies to encourage new families beginning treatment. The group of women surrounding the child, picking him up and pointing to his photo asking "was that you" in astonishment, does not provide any form of dignity to the child or the center. To hold him up and actually *smile* in front of a wall filled with pictures (Figure 1.5) of half clothed children in different stages of malnutrition, strips any form of dignity away from that child (and the others pictured on the wall) as he is transformed into an object meant to represent the overarching goal of short-term missions and faith based humanitarian aid; denying the child power over the representation of himself and the power to refuse being an aesthetic in their creation of poverty. The wall itself was created by the Haitian women who work tirelessly day and night with these children, and the difference I believe is that the photos on the wall are meant to inspire privately rather than publicly. The women put up these photos as a reminder of their own achievements and the strength of the children who survived malnutrition. The act of taking a photo smiling in front of this wall, being anyone other than a Haitian nanny or child survivor, can take away the meaning behind the photo wall, and be used to further exploit the children within the center for personal gratification.




*Figure 1.5 Photo of success wall that reads "Victory with Jesus"*

## Conclusion

Haitians are not shy to news reporters or journalists constantly in their face with cameras and questions, or a group of white people with their phones out recording every bit of street life they can, but it needs to be addressed as to how these photos can have a lasting effect on the image of the culture and the people. STM groups must learn to stop and ask what does that photo mean to the people in it? Are they embarrassed, ashamed, angry, or maybe even excited? Does this photo represent them in a vulnerable context or does it empower them? Educate or exploit? How may these images reinforce social hierarchies that have been created under racialized ideology that falsely proclaims a need for short-term missions? These are important factors to consider when one photo can speak a thousand words, and the people within your photo can be made to feel powerless at your expense to "preserve a memory." In the next chapter, I discuss the reaction to these photos of poverty in the form of short-term mission projects and how these projects are used as examples of success for churches but hinder economic growth and sustainability for Haitians.

# Chapter Two
# Showing Both Sides of Your Hand

"Mac" Johnny said, taking my hand in his and holding it palm down "that's the problem ya know…. You can't only show me one side of your hand" flipping mine over he continues "you gotta show me both sides of your hand sista and don't be afraid to ask… that's respect" – Notes from the Field, Summer 2018

## Colonization in the Form of Humanitarianism

There is a Haitian proverb that is used to represent how humanitarian aid is provided: *Se sot ki bay, enbisil ki pa pran* "the stupid one gives, only the imbecile doesn't take" (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001: 208). I began this chapter with an excerpt from a conversation I had with a Haitian friend of mine as I tried to pay for something at Johnny's bar to explain how most Haitians view their relationships with *blan.* Such as with short-term missions, Haitians are only seeing one side of the hand, the giving side, and as Johnny explained "that's not respect" because it doesn't allow for Haitians to have agency over what is being given and how they are to respond once they receive that aid. Haiti's development has been constrained by historical and contemporary interferences by foreign governments who exploit Haiti's resources for their own nation's interests, such as the United States' occupation of Haiti from 1915 to 1934 (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001: 231). Haiti's sovereignty is a façade, where the government is often pitted against international donors who support Haiti's infrastructure with their aid money, and the Haitian government loses credibility when the promises they made towards development are halted by lack of funds, ultimately delegitimizing the power of the Haitian government to work

for their own country's interests (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001: 212). Haiti has been labeled an "apparent state," (Glick Schiller and Foron 2001: 210) to define how little power and authority the government actually has in making changes that help Haiti break free from the cycle of dependency that is upheld through projects like STMs. The United States, historically, has stripped power from the Haitian government in order to protect its own investments in the country's resources (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001: 219). For example, the US government began the USAID program in the 1950's as a way to protect America's economic interests abroad by funneling money into "developing countries" like Haiti to help promote "democracy" and development (Schiller, Fouron 2001: 219-220). However, this USAID ruined local markets when 40% of the imports coming into Haiti were controlled by the US government, and priced lower than local commodities, thus weakening the internal economic structure that many Haitians relied on to survive (Schiller, Fouron 2001: 220-221). USAID became a strategy by the US government to gain control over Haiti's industrial and agricultural economy, helping reinforce the myth that Haiti's corrupt government was to blame for the inability to develop (Schiller, Fouron 2001: 228). The constraint placed upon Haiti by US policies weakened Haiti as a sovereign state and only increased a false need for humanitarian intervention like faith-based organizations and short-term missions. As teams come down to Haiti to carry out jobs or play with children labeled an orphan, NGO's faith-based or not, start to replace the state and become the authority of power over the community. The Haitian apparent state is contingent upon U.S policies that hinder Haiti's stability and growth, but open the door for hand-outs and charity that maintain Haiti's state of incompleteness that reinforces the need for aid in the first place. This cycle creates a nefarious myth about Haiti's strengths and abilities.

The myth of Haiti's inability to provide development and stability for its own people can be traced back not only through historical foreign policy, but also policies created around socially constructed ideas on race that are prevalent in the mission statements of evangelical short-term mission trips contributing to lack of cultural sensitivity and promoting a white savior complex.

This chapter analyzes the historical social construction of race and how that ideology shapes the way humanitarian aid is provided, how examples from short-term missions' correlate with the increasing dependency on foreign aid that countries like Haiti are forced into, and examine how faith-based humanitarian aid decreases local agency in their own relief work.

## The Aftermath

Haiti in the few months post-earthquake was chaotic and the humanitarian relief aid poorly organized. NGOs, missionaries, and various forms of disaster relief workers flooded Haiti the following weeks after the quake; not working together, not working with the Haitians, and working around the Haitian government to provide unaccountable funds. The short-term mission team I was on arrived five months post-quake, known as *Goudougoudou*, referring the sound the earth made when it shook. Our mission for that trip was to help an orphanage tending to children with the HIV virus build toilets and provide VBS (vacation bible school) for our host families' youth group. It was the morning of June 21st, 2010 when our group made up of five high schoolers and two adult males including our pastor, first arrived at the orphanage in Port-Au-Prince. I was seventeen, and eager to be back in Haiti after my first trip a year before and help in any way I could after the earthquake. The whole team's energy revolved around "helping Haiti," a phrase that is overused and improperly conducted by short-term teams such as ourselves. We

were greeted by an American man that was staying in Haiti who had a child he and his wife were adopting inside the orphanage, and who planned to help our male team members (Figure 2.2) build outside toilets to replace them having to dig random holes in the ground and fill with clay pots in order to use the restroom. The females, four of us, were charged with painting the sides of toilet walls (Figure 2.1) that had been made to provide a bit of privacy. We painted with only three colors, but by the end of the day we had made a mural of beginner level pictures made up of birds, trees, bits of Kreyol words we knew like *Mwen renmen ou* (I love you), and our handprints. Even writing this I am looking back on that moment and how proud we were, laughing at how ridiculous we must have looked to the community; a group of young *blan* (whites) there to save the day by building a flimsy wooden structure and paint it with the words "I love you." Nearly 1.4 billion dollars of donations were raised for relief efforts to send to Haiti by January 2011, bringing more teams like ours down, to "build back a better Haiti," inspired by our faith to do acts of good (Katz 2013: 207). Even before we arrived, we had already assumed that our intentions were good, that our projects to build and paint were meant to aid the people, and would. Although it was helpful that we built a toilet, and one they desperately needed, *our help* was not needed. Furthermore, the help we provided, not only prevented jobs for local Haitians, it reinforced a misconception that Haitians are unable to take care of themselves, that after a mass disaster the only ones able to provide Haitians with resources and basic needs are the *blan* (Beckett 2017: 101).



*Figure 2.1 Working on the outdoor toilets in 2010*



*Figure 2.2 Working on bunkbeds*
*Short-term mission trip 2011*

## Lending A Helping Hand That Hurts

The act of performing jobs or carrying out various projects for the community is a common trait of short-term missionary culture. Within a short timeframe of one or two weeks, teams predominantly consisting of white evangelicals of different ages, come to underdeveloped countries like Haiti with a goal to help the community through building projects, VBS camps, volunteering inside orphanages, food aid projects, for example; acting on their belief of doing good by religious standards. The narrative of short-term missions relies not only in the pilgrimage to the country, but in acts of service as well, that are based on the notions of poverty constructed within a Westernized racial lens to which embarking on a mission trip are blind. Because of this, humanitarianism has become racialized, especially within Haiti.

The word *blan* derives from the French word *blanc,* or white. Within Haiti, to be *blan* is not only a depiction of skin color, but refers to being a foreigner with access to resources, wealth, and opportunity (Katz 2013: 56). For the most part, short-term missions *do* provide some relative relief aid, and for those that aren't coming to Haiti for profiteering, are meeting basic needs for a short time (Katz 2013: 56-57). It is not the act of doing good that Haitians dislike about short-term missions, it's the lack of inclusion of Haitians in the planning, prepping, execution, and evaluation of these projects that has long been a disconnect for STMs working in underdeveloped countries. This disconnect derives from misinformed understandings of poverty and a racialized idea of who needs humanitarian aid and who is able to provide it (Howell 2013: 159). By ignoring the social position of one's self as a *blan* in Haiti, STMs often overlook their own agency in Haiti's history, politics, and economy, and how STMs lack the ability to see Haitians as active agents in their own sustainability, yet blame Haiti for its condition (Howell 2013: 192). By taking control over the reconstruction of Haiti and its resources post-quake,

NGOs and faith-based humanitarian aid deny Haitian agency in their own future, while ignoring the fact that most Haitians could perform the same jobs as the teams coming down. For people participating on short-term missions the act of performing physical labor or enduring hardship while on mission trips is a part of the narrative, as well as, a part of spiritual affirmation. The theological enterprise of mission trips has become to build the Jesus trifecta of a church, school, and orphanage, so that those participating on a STM can feel as though they have made an impact on Haiti, on the people, and within their own personal faith. However, these forms of short relief, like building projects, are more beneficial to those on the trip than those they seek to help. For example, my last trip to Haiti in the summer of 2018, I met a STM group from Canada whose leader, Don, had been on multiple trips to Haiti since the 1990s and had worked as a board member for the largest, million-dollar orphanage organization in Haiti, God's Littlest Angels. While visiting he took a trip out to an orphanage he had painted a giant mural on the side of the wall on his previous trip down. To his disappointment he found that his painting had been covered by another team that had visited shortly after their own team had come, and then several times by other teams after that. "It hurt a little to see what I had done had been painted over like that, like I wanted to leave something here, and was proud of that picture I had painted," Don said to me. His words echo the narrative so many on STMs have, to build or work on a project, to *leave something behind*, reaffirmed the service of doing good that defines STMs. In this sense STMs are not fulfilling humanitarian needs nor even spiritual needs of those participating on STMs, but the ego of one's self to feel capable of providing something for someone, feeling the superiority in the act of simply being able to when others are not. It is this side of humanitarian aid that Haitians see, the truth behind the acts of good, and then living with the repercussions of those acts. After telling me his story about the painting, Don discussed how

this made him feel that his previous mission was almost inadequate, not realizing as he said these words that STMs are defined by acts for others, meeting the communities needs while ignoring your own; yet as he spoke he spoke about *his* needs, *his* spiritual affirmation not being met, as most often is when reflecting on STMs, missing the irony that Haitians neither need nor want an orphanage to be painted over and over again by a different team coming in weekly. These forms of faith-based aid are not helpful, nor are they actual acts of service when they are not necessary, and when they are, prevent local job growth by doing the projects rather than hiring local community members to do so. Cognitive dissonance plagues faith-based organizations and trips like STMs, where teams who repetitively come down can see the minimal impact, they are having on the focus areas, yet continue to implement the same form of aid that lacks accountability for these failed projects like an orphanage being painted over five times in a year by several teams. It is the issue of accountability, of asking what happens *after* a team leaves, and if the project is sustainable once that team has left? It is important to ask was it a project that was *needed* and could it have been done by the local community if they had access to funds and resources?

This past summer, 2018, while visiting in Kenscoff, Haiti, Tonya and I stopped at a local missionary run restaurant and souvenir shop, Mission Baptist; where gifts are handmade by locals to provide them with job security and is known as one of the oldest missionary run organizations in Haiti still open. Mission Baptist is a very popular stop for short-term mission teams to visit while on their trip. We were seated beside a short-term mission group of roughly fifteen, consisting of mostly teenagers and a few of their chaperones who struck up a conversation with us about the work they were doing there. The team leader said he had been coming to Haiti for almost twenty years and had helped build the school they were repairing. He

pointed to a blue building that could be seen from the indoor dining patio of Mission Baptist that overlooked the mountainside of Kenscoff… Apparently coming every few years to maintain the building and upkeep, bringing new groups down from his church to "experience what God is doing here;" a common phrase used by STMs and missionaries when discussing the projects they have carried out or the funds they have collected in order to do a new project. I asked him why they never hired anyone local to do the maintenance, and he began to recite the usual excuses provided by many NGO's and STMs why Haitians are incapable of taking care of their own problems; lack of money, lack of resources, lack of knowledge on how to carry out a project. Or the most common response offered, "because I was a part of building it I want to be a part of maintaining it to see how far 'God' has come". These misconceptions are a part of the larger framework of ideas that label Haitians and others in impoverished conditions as negligent, incapable, or even too lazy to do things as simple as building maintenance themselves. They also provide a foundation to disregard holding STM and other faith-based humanitarianism accountable for lack of organization in planning and failing to work along with the community to empower them for short-term dependency and long-term independent sustainability. The ingenuity of Haitian culture alone can disprove these false ideas, but it's narratives like this team leader's and Don's story that shed light on the immense disconnect short-term missions have with Haitians and other populations globally. Haitians are more than capable of handiwork. It is the lack of money or tools that prevents them from being able to. When teams come down to work and carry out these jobs, they deny Haitians agency while still holding them accountable, and STMs are given the credit for fixing a symptom of the problem while ignoring the whole cause of it; further rejecting responsibility for reinforcing a cycle that forces Haitians into reliance upon STM to perform jobs that could be done by locals. In this cycle, charity strips

away dignity and doing “God’s work” becomes blurred by self-gratification that leaves the communities more vulnerable when teams leave then before they arrived. This vulnerability leaves the Haitian community economically deficient and can force Haitian parents to place their children inside of Western, evangelical ran orphanages that once again objectify Haitians and deny them agency. The next section discusses the lack of agency Haitian parents have when deciding whether to place their children within and orphanage system due to financial instability.

# Chapter Three
# The False Orphan

## Searching for Antwon

Antwon (Figure 3.1) was born in the General Hospital in Port-au-Prince, Haiti August 19th, 1995. He knows that once he was born his mother came back to the hospital to leave him inside an orphanage there, where he stayed until the age of two. He knows he was transferred to La Maision Le'C where the organization received UNICEF AIDS funding for bringing in children like Antwon and forging medical documents to say these children were HIV positive. He now knows it was there that he was given the name Augustine, something he didn't know until the day of our visit. In Maision Le'C he lived until he aged out 18. That day, as we rode *motos* (motorcycles) to visit this orphanage, I asked Antwon if he was excited to hopefully find out more about his parents, and who he was. When we walked through the doors, the floors were mopped clean and glowing white against the sun shining in. Antwon took me around to introduce me to his old friends that had not yet aged out of the orphanage, even showing me a secret candy stash he knew of where he grabbed a pack of cookies. His heart was hopeful. When we met with the nurse, we discovered that most of the documents we had were the same as what they had as well. Furthermore, they were the ones who created the documents; giving Antwon his name, and a fake medical record of being HIV positive (they didn't admit to faking that part for funding). As we listened, I watched Antwon's face as he understood what was being said... something that *most children who age out of an orphanage hears*... "we gave you the best education and skills, we gave you documents to be recognized by the state, and took you in as a family." The reality is

that once the children (some 30,000 in Haiti alone) age out of the orphanage system... they have no family that is the only tie to a community that provides support in all aspects of life. Most of the children age out to the streets with all the education the world could provide, and why? Because they have no identity, no family, no *lakay* (home). As we left and walked up the dust filled road back to the *motos* I asked Antwon "*ou anfom?"* He replied, shaking his head *"no anfom"* I'm not ok. This is the reality of orphanages...when foreign missionaries donate and send teams down to Haiti ...the 22-year-old man searching for himself, stolen by the orphanage institution.

----Notes from my fieldwork, June 28th, 2018



*Figure 3.1 Antwon walking into the orphanage he grew up in and where the story above takes place*

I start this chapter with Antwon's story to highlight the reality that many children placed in Haiti's orphanage system face. By supporting and creating other orphanage institutions, one is only funneling more children into a system that does not provide stability, economic security, family ties, and hope for a better future beyond those walls of an orphanage. This chapter examines the relationship between short-term missions and orphanages, and how this notion of an impoverished child with parents is the new definition of an orphan that is defined by their parent's inability to access basic resources and needs. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss examples of why and how orphanages are started that replicate touristic-style industries, and the reality of what children within these orphanages are subjected to, including being exploited within these images of poverty for donations. I conclude with examining organizations that are focused on preventing orphanages from being created and concentrate on family preservation through alternative humanitarian approaches that provide job security. It is my hope that one day orphanages will no longer exist in a context that has been racialized and represented through means of wealth, but will turn into centers for family preservation by empowering these same mothers and fathers who previously could have fallen victim to the same orphanage system.

**Orphanage Tourism**

When I arrived in Haiti for the second time in 2010, I was exposed to the world of orphanage tourism (Figure 3.2), although I did not realize that at the time, our short-term mission team was supporting it. We had brought down candy, balloons, different craft items, and supplies for the orphanage we were building toilets for, and other orphanages we would visit on that trip. We were ignorant to the reality of what an orphanage represented to the community, and did not bother to ask where these children that filled them had come from, if they had families, and if reunification had even been pursued. Orphanages in Haiti have become a manipulation of charity

created within the racialized ideology that people within underdeveloped countries cannot or will not provide for their children better than a *blan*, who has access to resources; in addition to reinforcing the paradigm of orphanage charity (Schwartz 2010: 3). In 2016, the Benet Social Department (known as the acronym IBERS in Haitian Creole) along with UNICEF and the LUMOS organization conducted research to investigate the number of children living inside orphanages that had parents or family members alive, redefining them as non-orphaned children. The reports estimated that 80 percent of children within Haitian orphanages had at least one parent alive or family members that could take them in (Lumos 2017: 3). The perception of what an orphanage is and can provide for a child, to Haitian parents is manipulated by white missionaries, and I have witnessed how this idea of a better life for a child can make the final decision for a parent who is already struggling with additional children. But this is only a symptom of the problem and orphanages are not the solution.

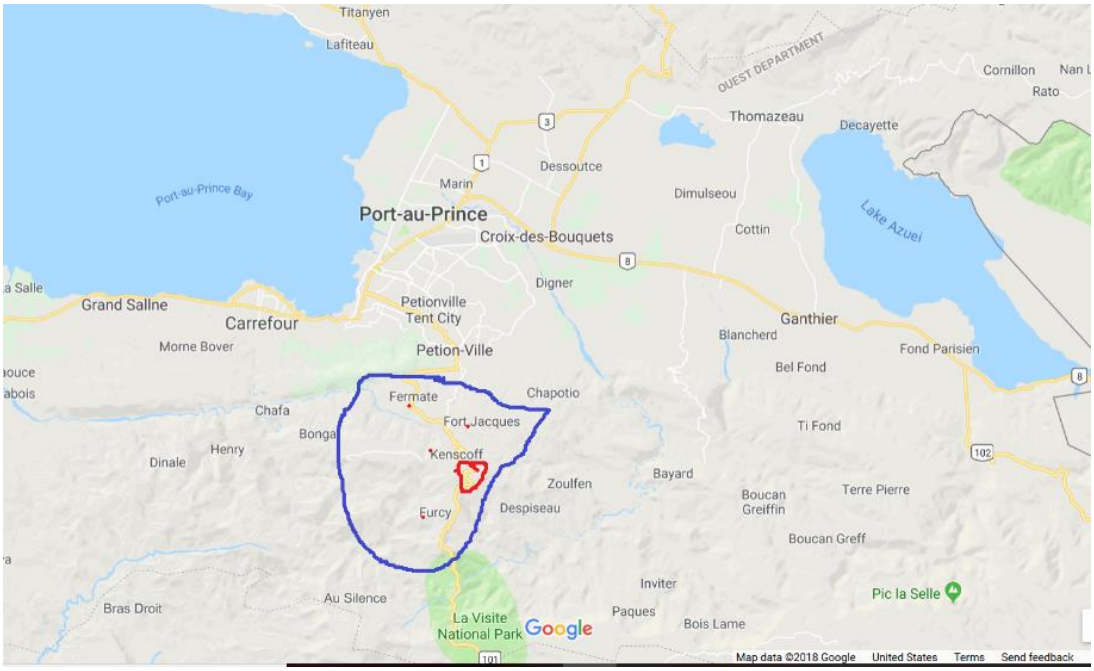


*Figure 3.2 Map showing the 10-mile radius I traversed around to survey how many orphanages were within that area.*

## The Orphan Defined

A formalized definition of an orphan is a child "bereft without kin," but very rarely is that the case for orphans in Haiti (Bornstein 2012: 92). It is estimated that approximately 30,000 children are living within 760 "residential institutions or orphanages, and less than 15 percent of these orphanages are legally registered with the Social Welfare Department to have an organization within Haiti (Lumos Report 2017: 12). The numbers are estimated due to an increase in child trafficking where children may be falsely presented as an orphan to be placed in an orphanage to help increase funding or taken out of an orphanage to prevent investigations. This has caused Haiti to be ranked at number 8 in the UNICEF and The Global Slavery Index as of 2016 (Lumos Report 2017: 13). Only 20 percent of the children IBERS investigated inside the 760 orphanages are considered "full orphans" that do not have any family ties or kinship in which to be placed with (Bornstein 2012: 92-93, LUMOS 2017: 7). The definition of an orphan within Christian faith-based organizations is a western construct that ignores social and communal obligations to children who have lost kinship ties. In Haiti, the government research along with LUMOS and UNICEF does not account for the *lakou* or "neighborhood" cultural responsibilities that one has to a child with no parents, and does not estimate or count those children that may be living with family friends, nor does the research focus on how this may be an alternative to orphanages being created and redefining the term all together. Most orphans globally are made orphans by poverty, not by the death of their family or abandonment (Bornstein 2012: 98). Yet, it is the emotions evoked by the photos we see of sad looking children beside a paragraph asking for donations to help provide them a better life, sometimes even proclaiming to save it, that we ignore the facts behind what constitutes a full orphan and why children who are not true orphans have been placed in the category of vulnerably helpless,

in need of the type of humanitarian care given inside an orphanage. This persistent myth about orphans and how to care for them has led to billions of dollars of private donations being poured into these organizations, with little to none of the money being accounted for, and to programs that supported orphan creation rather family preservation. In 2015 alone, the estimate of donations internationally reached $70 million US that was to go towards only one-third of the orphanages in Haiti, and over $10 million dollars annually from the United States alone (Lumos Report 2017:20, 33-34). Funding one child in Haiti can cost from $10,000 US to a little over $1,000 US annually, but research from UNICEF and IBERS has shown the orphanages that are dependent the most on private international donations are typically the poorest funded and have the least accountability within the organization to account for the conditions the children are living in (LUMOS 2017: 31). The definition of an orphan has been vernacularized to fit faith-based project goals, blurring reality with a definition. The orphanages encompass not just children without families, but the vulnerable children whose parents are alive but are economically refrained from providing care for the children. In this framework, the reality of how we should provide humanitarian care is shaped by the misunderstanding of the orphanage system and the "politics of pity" that invoke people to donate to an orphanage full of children falsely defined as orphans.

## "Lives are being Changed"

On my last trip to Haiti this past summer 2018, the founder of the organization Dormi Lari, contacted by a friend who had concerns over an orphanage in Haiti that was posting photos and stories of taking children from their parents to place into their orphanage, One Children's Home, located in a secluded part of the rural mountains inland. Immediately, we scrolled on social media through their news feed, reading stories with pictures of crying children being

hugged by their parents as they are put in a truck bed to be taken away, all claiming that these children's "lives are being changed for His (God's) glory." What is more disturbing is their website that features unsmiling, deeply staring children with only their underwear on and who are clearly not comfortable in this setting, trying to show the worst part of poverty possible to receive donations for their orphanage. We had a meeting with IBERS in the next few days, where we brought this organization to their attention and the familiar questions were asked, how exactly did these children come to be in their care? Why are the parents choosing to place them in it? I cannot speak for Haitians as to what motivates or finalizes their decision to place a child in an orphanage other than financial duress, but I can speak for the *blan,* from my own personal experiences and interviews conducted, who separate children away from their parents, who I have witnessed exploit children in an objectified manner for money donations, who at many times is only trying to do good in the name of faith but see the creation of orphanages as a representation of their faith and not a part of a larger exploitative system that reflects racial discrimination, promotes the use of inappropriate photos, and depicts Haitians as incapable of parenting. In this discourse about orphanages, faith-based humanitarianism uses religion as a vehicle for authority over the right to a child. Often, they make statements to the community that "lives are being changed" are changing for the better without recognizing that ripping a family apart does not provide for the children once they age out or prevent actual orphans, instead it creates an institution that profits from the poverty and ignores addressing the issues that could potentially keep families united.

The image that white missionaries and short-term mission teams give to orphanages is safety, education, and access to daily food and clean water in an environment where children can play, grow, and have the possibility for better opportunity. The reality is less picture perfect than

the website home pages suggest. The Social Welfare Department of Haiti, IBERS, established a nanny rule for orphanages that states for every eight children within an orphanage there should be one nanny/guardian that provides one-on-one care and support for each child within that groups of eight (Lumos Report 2017). Out of six orphanages I was able to enter on the compound of during my 2018 summer fieldwork, only one had complied with the IBERS rule. The other five orphanages were similar to my previous experiences working with faith-based orphanages, children everywhere with the older kids tending to the younger, mattresses spread out over floors or bunk beds that hold three children to a cot, all clothes are second hand from teams that dug through their closets trying to finding their least favorite clothes to donate, food depots that held only bags of rice and beans with ants mixed in, children following you around every corner begging to be held or asking for a gift because they've been taught that the *blan* are like a Santa Claus that can give you presents in exchange for having a photo taken or being held by them.

Orphanages are also easy cover ups for access to children for sexual abuse and trafficking. According to U.S and World news reports July 2018, in the past year alone, three white male missionaries working in Haiti have been charged with sexual abuse and trafficking of under aged children, a topic I plan to explore further in my dissertation research[3]. These stories about abuses inside of orphanages are broadcasted globally, and yet there is cognitive disassociation to these types of allegations that prevent the ability to combat abuse, and denies that orphanages are an easy space for which these abuses can occur. Churches continue to send teams, build an orphanage and fill it with children who have been taken from their parents, and use these kids as profit to gain donations and monetary support that should be used in orphan

[3] https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/haiti/article183322751.html

prevention. In 2011, private donations made up 1.4 billion dollars that was supposed to go towards humanitarian programs and institutions, like orphanages, to help with the repercussions of the 2010 earthquake (Katz 2013: 3, 111). The majority of that money would never go towards the humanitarian programs and orphanages they claimed to be raising money for.

So how exactly is money allocated and dispersed within these institutions? The average donor sponsors children roughly around 20$USD a month through their church or other global institutions like Compassion International or World Vision (Schwartz 2010: 137). What is not mentioned on the websites or at fundraising events is that the 20$USD donated is typically spent towards an "overall budget" that may go towards water or food supply, but does not strictly go to the one child it is claiming to sponsor (Schwartz 2010: 137). Furthermore, when an orphanage is not meeting donation standards, children will be trafficked in from local families to post photos of, or worse, kidnapped and trafficked into the system in order for the orphanage to receive more funding or donor money.

While on fieldwork, again the summer of 2018, I met a mother we called Mama Adson and her son Adson. Adson was known as a *Domi Lari* or to "sleep on the street kid," who had been recruited by Dormi Lari org. to work on metal art and his mother worked making jewelry at the same organization so that both could have stable incomes. The first week of July saw huge *manifestasyon* (protests) against a recent increase in gas prices that brought out gangs during the chaos and created a dangerous environment for street kids like Adson. Although Adson lived at home with mother, when the streets became dangerous from police officers' firing into the crowd and tires being burnt to create blockades, Adson went to an orphanage (Figure 3.3) that he previously been trafficked in hoping for a safe place to spend the night until it was safe to travel home to his mother. Two days passed and Mama Adson grew anxious not knowing where her

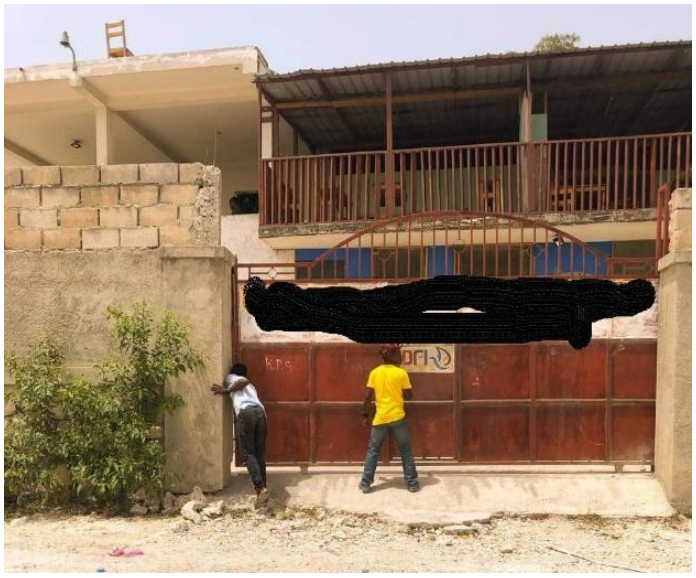

*Figure 3.3 Photo of orphanage from Adson's story*

son was, and on the fifth day had to be taken to the doctor to be treated for anxiety and exhaustion from lack of sleep. She searched all the local hospitals, jails, and finally the morgues with no indication of where Adson may have gone to.

Finally, a week later we checked the orphanage he had been trafficked into as child, and discovered he had been there since the beginning of the protests, but did not have a way to contact his mother and was not permitted to leave until his mother came to pick him up. The founder of Haiti Mama recounted the story to me about how she drove around all day with Adson's step-father searching for him, and when they found him at Centre D'Agape Children's orphanage (pseudonym), they discovered he had been told he could not call his mother but could not leave until she came to get him. The director of this orphanage, a white evangelical woman that has been running this orphanage for over a decade, stated that she did not have a contact number for Adson's mother to be able to call her and inform her of her son's whereabouts, nor did she feel it necessary to ask him what it might be. For her she possibly saw Adson as another

funding opportunity or worse a child she could better mother than his own, not a son to a mother who loved him dearly, not a human being with dignity that deserves the right to safety *and* the ability to leave at his own free will; she did not see Adson, only his situation, one she exploited in the name of her faith and humanitarianism.

This story, like so many others, are the reality of an orphanage system that was created as an industry rather than a ministry. Donors need to investigate where their money is going, learning how to give in ways that meet local needs, research the organizations you donate too, and holding those organizations accountable for their actions with donation money.

## From Orphan Creation to Family Preservation

With the increase of defined orphans and the creation of orphanages, the question becomes how to prevent the vulnerable child from being misidentified as an orphan and placed inside an institution. Unfortunately, the complex social, religious, economic, political, and historical nuances that have built the foundation for a racialized, faith driven humanitarian relief effort inside of orphanages is based on the impulsive need for compassion and empathy that has proven itself as a profitable industry of poverty tourism, and so the challenge of stopping the dependency cycle that creates false orphans is left up to the donors. When you receive a pamphlet in the mail with children all over it, unsmiling and asking you for donations, research them; look into their mission statements, their website and the amount of poverty images they produce to generate donations, examine where their money is coming from and how it is being used on the ground, the founders and staff members, review what people have said about them, and if possible find local community members who can voice their opinions or concerns about that organization. Seek out local grassroots organizations that may be combating orphan creation

with job sustainability, and research how to get involved. Educate yourself and others about the topics of true orphans and the realities of an orphanage institution. The current trend of humanitarianism in the form of orphan creation doesn't save lives, it only provides false self-gratification to those who donate their time and money to these organizations. True orphans have a place within the welfare department of government, and the child who has parents needs to be protected from being exploited as a false orphan. But when donations are endlessly flooding organizations without accountability, it is the children, true orphans or not, who suffer.

# Conclusion

## The Power Dynamics of Giving

For Short-term missions, time, money, and other resources have become symbolic commodities where charity given in the form of these commodities can mitigate a spiritual relationship between the giver and the recipient. Short-term missions bring all three: time, money, and resources to underdeveloped countries. Through these interactions with recipients mediated by their time, money and resources; relationships are formed within a hierarchal structure that places the giver in a position of power over the recipient. Short-term missions work within a framework of *need* that determines beneficiaries based on their basic needs not being met by the state (Bornstein 2012: 23). So, how exactly is this need produced? In the case of Haiti, the nation has been hindered economically and politically due to interactions with and interferences by outside actors like NGOs and the U.S government. Tariffs, trade agreements, and constant political instability has left Haiti dependent on international aid and intervention to provide basic care and needs that the Haitian government has been unable to provide. It is here, that I want to take the moment to define what I specifically mean by *care* in this context. I define care provided by short-term missions and other faith-based humanitarian aid as symbolic forms of capitalism in the form of time, money, and other commodifying resources related to basic needs. More so, these basic needs being met by the care of short-term missions are, as Bornstein describes, entitlements that should be met by the state to each of its citizens (Bornstein 2012: 26).Thus, short-term missions and other forms of faith-based care are essentially replacing the state in meeting these needs, and in doing so, recipients of this care are no longer able to demand that their needs be met with certain criteria. Rather they are obliged, as Godelier proclaims, to

comply with the form of relief given since the relief is no longer an entitlement from the state but a gift of time, money, or resources from an external, non-governmental entity (Godelier 1999: 2). As the short-term mission steps in to fill the roles of the state, power dynamics are shaped and a hierarchy is formed between the recipient and the donor.

For example, in the case of Haiti, I describe the exploitative use of photos by short-term missions to gain more donor support and direct attention to the *need* laid out by the short-term mission for their specific target group. Fundraising support for these missions has been modernized to capture attention to suffering through the uses of media (Godelier 1999: 5). The photos in this relationship between the donor and recipient represent *symbolic capital;* where the photos being produced are symbolic of one's suffering and therefore convey a message of need and immediate response that is met by donor support sending their time, money, or other resources. The symbolism of the photos evokes a capitalistic response from donors, and it is within this response that power over the recipient takes place. A recipient whose photo of their malnourished child was shown at a local church fundraiser becomes a beneficiary of charity rather than a citizen of a state with rights they can make claim to, and once the right to claim certain relief is taken, recipients are left without their own agency and ability to decide the types of relief aid that best benefits them long term (Bornstein 2012: 23).

In the case of providing relief through building projects, as discussed in chapter two, Haitians are fully capable of reroofing their own church, but in this framework are unable to say no to our short-term mission teams because they do not have the resources to reroof the church themselves. The relationship between us as donors reroofing a church and the recipient Haitians receiving a new roof is heavily structured in power dynamics. It alone is a privilege to be able to afford to go on a short-term mission and those participating in one are already at a power

advantage over the recipients they come to care for. By providing services such as building projects, without asking for local collaboration or sourcing materials from local areas, short-term missions can reinforce a structure of hierarchy between westernized nations and underdeveloped nations that can be seen within the interactions and relationship between donors and recipients.

Orphanages in Haiti are the most prominent example of power between donor support and the Haitian community. Donor support, such as short-term missions, constantly bring in supplies, money, and volunteer time to orphanages, and as they donate, relationships are created within a framework of power. More times than not, parents choose to put their children into orphanages because they are trapped in poverty, not because they do not want to care for the child (Bornstein 2012: 97). Within these institutions, care provided by the short-term missions becomes a symbol of power, by simply having the ability to do provide care. Care itself is not measurable, but is transformative and symbolic. By providing types of care via time or donations, the gift of care is reduced and objectified, therefore, the recipients are unable to clarify the types of care they prefer. If so, perhaps family preservation over orphanage creation would be more of a paradigm for short-term missions.

In these three examples, care becomes a commodity flows from donors, to short-term missions and faith-based organizations, to the recipients (Godelier 1999: 10). Similar to Godelier's perception about reproducing a show of suffering through media outlets, by using media and photos to produce a spectacle of suffering to be consumed, participants embark on short-term missions to provide care to recipients who may or not have facilitated responses of care in the first place (Godelier 1999: 5,11). Care provided in the form of building projects and orphanage creation reinforce a white savior complex, as well as, hierarchal roles between white, evangelicals and the recipient communities who are predominately people of color. Although

intentions to do good may be at the forefront of all short-term mission goals, long-term independence from short-term missions cannot and actual sustainable living cannot be achieved within the hierarchy relationship between a donor and recipient.

## The Empathy Effect

Empathy is an emotional response that provokes one to experience events and phenomenon through the lens of others (Bornstein 2012: 145). It is the emotion of empathy, coupled with their religious faith, that leads so many people to participate on short-term missions, and then emotion blinds them from seeing the harm they are doing by impulsively acting on empathy. Anthropologist Erica Bornstein developed the term "relational empathy" to help explain the desire people have to serve others, and the rapport that can be established when one does (Bornstein 2012: 146). I adopt this term to apply towards short-term missions to describe the feeling of empathy as more than just an individual sense, and that when empathy is applied in the context of faith-based humanitarian care, the emotion of empathy itself is not enough; it is also the ability to try to relate (or not) to the people receiving aid. In the first chapter, I discussed how images of poverty comprise a visual representation of *need* and *poverty* that is ultimately the starting point of people's empathy and inspires them to donate or participate on these short-term missions. Furthermore, through the use of personal examples, I explored how these photos reinforce inequalities and promote short-term missions as an appropriate response to suffering over providing resources that can empower Haitians to no longer need humanitarian aid.

In the second chapter, I demonstrated with examples how short-term missions try to empathize with the Haitian community by creating building projects that teams participate in, but

are unable to do so because the relational empathy that allows for collaboration with the Haitian community is rejected within the framework of faith-based work compelled by non-relational empathy. Haitians not only lack agency within this context but equality.

The third chapter discussed the orphanage institution and how short-term missions build and support the idea of a false orphan, compelled by the suffering of children and families living in poverty. Empathy built those orphanages and helps bring in donor support, but relational empathy is a platform that could prevent the creation of a false orphan and tackle root problems caused by poverty that cause Haitian parents to place children within these institutions. Empathy as a vehicle for care (Bornstein 2012: 146) and response has been transformed by humanitarian aid organizations and short-term missions into a social obligation that taints the actual purpose of responding with empathy. Empathy compels "people to address the suffering of others" (Bornstein 2012: 147), but short-term missions can distort the emotion of empathy that does not accurately address others suffering but rather the symptoms of their suffering. Furthermore, empathy not only compels an impulsive and often inaccurate response to a one's suffering, but does so within a framework of power relations; where those who are suffering receive empathy from those who are not actually able to empathize with them, and it is assumed that those we empathize with are in a situation they themselves would never want to be in (Bornstein 2012: 148). Suffering defines the victim, while empathy empowers the person responding to the victim's suffering, simply because they themselves have never or are not likely to experience the same sufferings. This power relation hinders the progression towards self-sustaining humanitarian aid being reinforced by the partaking of short-term missions who respond to humanitarian crisis with relational empathy. This promotes an unobligated form of empathy (Bornstein 2012: 149) and disregards the desperate need for accountable empathetic

humanitarian aid that focuses on changing the systemic problems that cause suffering in the first place.

This research is meant to challenge the way in which we empathize, and to move beyond the relational empathy towards an accountable empathy that recognizes the power dynamics embodied within humanitarian care. With accountable empathy, short-term missions have the ability to transform their missions to cater to their target communities' needs long term rather than work on minor projects, like the ones discussed in chapter one, that deprive locals from job opportunities. By considering the long-term effects their projects could have, and implementing missions geared towards holding their own teams accountable for efficiency, organization, and distribution of resources to work on these projects; short-term missions evolve from a one-sided power structure that benefits only participants on these short-term missions into empowering collaborations with local communities. Accountable empathy also has the ability to engage with the target populations in creating new narratives that discredits the false image with which impoverished countries are labeled, and fight the increasing exploitation in the form of dehumanizing images. Lastly, accountable empathy can help prevent blindly donating to organizations focused on developing orphanages over family preservation. So, the question becomes, is there a way in which short-term missions can be reorganized to be more culturally sensitive, critically self-aware, and empowering entities, while still appealing to the spiritual call of aiding others who are suffering.?

## The Mission Trip Redefined

Bornstein compares in her book *Disquieting Gifts,* the actual act of humanitarian aid to giving a gift; in the sense you provide, give or do something for someone without expecting

something in return (2012: 13). Bornstein goes further to explain the lack of agency these gift receivers have when the gift itself is thrust upon them, much like how short-term missions enter into host countries providing what they deem as the appropriate form of humanitarian care, then justify their actions by framing their work as a "gift" without expectations of one being returned (2012:23). However, the reality is less like a gift and more like self-gratifying poverty tours, when short-term teams often unknowingly prevent job creation, reproduce negative and out of context images of the culture and people, and support orphanage organizations that lack accountability and promote the idea of people living in poverty as incapable parents.

Instead of taking short-term mission trips I propose the idea of "cultural collaboration missions" that focus less on the act of charity and more on learning how to prevent the need for charity. Drawing on the research of Farmer and Gastineau (2002), and their definition of pragmatic solidarity, I urge short-term missions to use accountable empathy as the foundation for culture trips in order to build relationships with the local community. Farmer and Gastineau define pragmatic solidarity as building a relationship in order to unite behind a common cause of need (Farmer and Gastineau 2002: 656-657). For short-term missions and faith-based organizations, accountable empathy can be a form of pragmatism that engages the culture, social, and economic structures at a deeper level that is in solidarity with the local community. In the case of Haiti, pragmatic solidarity can be goal for Cultural Collaboration Trips; to focus on working alongside grass roots organizations, the Haitian Welfare Department and working within local markets to promote economic growth.

Farmer and Gastineau state that building relationships while in the field in the field as an anthropologist leads to a recognition of inequality (2002: 656). The same rule can apply, and should, for short-term missions to engage in relationship building with local communities in

order to recognize the social inequalities that play a tremendous role in creating structural violence and poverty (Farmer and Gastineau 2002: 656). Culture collaboration missions can be the revision for short-term missions that depend on collaboration with local communities in order to better solidify needs to ensure accountability and promote long-term sustainable options of faith-based aid.

Cultural collaboration missions could still be spiritual pilgrimages taken by church members, but rather than using religion as a reason for providing humanitarian aid, the historical, political, and economical factors should be addressed as the underlying causes of suffering and the reason for providing aid. Educating team members about historical and contemporary culture, the racialized history and how institutionalized racism shapes the perception of a country, learning the language, and including local members to guide, inform, and participate with short-term teams can help build empowering collaborations. Pragmatic solidarity within cultural collaboration missions is more than just engaging in historical, economic and racialized nuances that play a role in underdeveloped countries. It is addressing the entailments of institutional structures from both western and non-western nations, laws and foreign policies that have hindered some nations while progressing others, educating one's self on the injustices that have occurred because of these entailments, and lastly how building relationships with local communities to rally behind a common cause of injustices is more than just allying one's self with a cause. For example, the organization Dormi Lari works alongside Haitian social workers to empower their perspective and voice within planning community outreach projects. Dormi Lari has fully enrolled its organization with the Haitian Welfare Department (IBERS), and more so, works with IBERS to implement Haiti's government and people's vision for child care development and family preservation programs. Pragmatic solidarity seeks change not just a

quick fix. It has taken fie years for Dormi Lari to become successful business organization and have the ability to create a family of solidarity towards one goal within their organization, taking it beyond just a business.

Involving local members in the planning of these trips, and the evaluation of the success of the projects conducted on these trips can help ensure accountability and access future necessity of other short-term missions. Evaluation of success can be both quantitative and qualitative, allowing for local members to assess teams' projects start to finish, basing it on time, money, local collaboration and the projects long term self-sustainability without future team intervention, and need for maintenance for these projects.

Most importantly, cultural collaboration trips can bridge the gap between empathetic response and empowering forms of humanitarian care that address the power relations on the ground that are predominately racialized, and invent new ways in which donors can support grassroots organizations that have a better understanding of what their own community wants and needs.

When conducting or participating on short-term mission trip, many generally assume the work they are doing is done so with the best of intentions, and ultimately do have a positive impact on the target population. Using personal experiences and drawing upon previous academic literature about short-term missions and Haiti, I hope to challenge readers to question the predetermined narrative of doing good on short-term missions, and to begin to recognize the historical, economic, political, and racial implications that have impacted countries like Haiti to the point of instability.

Instead, I urge those who participate on short-term missions to question why you go in the first place, and if there are other forms of humanitarian aid that do not facilitate a cycle of dependency. Begin to research how long short-term missions have been working in those regions or countries and if the projects being completed are necessary, sustainable long-term without continuous intervention, and if locals have the ability to perform these jobs if they have access to the correct resources. It is with the process of shifting from charity to long-term sustainability that can provide agency and empowerment, and in this provide a more dignified form of faith-based humanitarian care that reflects the true intentions of doing good.

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# Vita

Hannah Mackynzie Archer was born in Kingsport, TN. In December of 2015, she completed her undergraduate studies, Cum Laude, at East Tennessee State University, earning a BA in Anthropology, International Affairs, and a minor in French. She continued her graduate studies in Anthropology at the University of Tennessee with a concentration in Africana Studies, Disasters, Displacements, and Human Rights. Mac accepted a graduate teaching assistantship from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, which has been an exciting challenge that has pushed Mac to grow as an anthropologist within the academic setting of her discipline. She was awarded the Disasters, Displacement, and Human Rights scholarship award in the Spring of 2018, as well as, the honorable McClure scholarship that funded her research for the summer of 2018 entirely. She has presented her research at the bi-annual Disasters, Displacement, and Human Rights conference and the Southern Anthropological society conference twice. She graduated December 2018 with honors of Cum Laude from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville with a Masters in Anthropology. Mac is pursing her doctorate in cultural Anthropology with a concentration in human rights and Africana studies from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.