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**Settling the neoliberal contradiction through corporate volunteering:
Governing employees in the era of cognitive capitalism**

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Settling the neoliberal contradiction through corporate volunteering: Governing employees in the era of cognitive capitalism

Abstract:

Corporations are increasingly interested in promoting corporate volunteering, and their efforts are aligned with supportive nonprofits and public policies. The article seeks to understand the reasons for this growing interest. It is based on insights from an ethnographic exploration of corporate volunteering activities in a transnational non-profit that involves highly-skilled corporate volunteers in its programs of entrepreneurship education. A multi-sited fieldwork was conducted in the organization's program offices and its corporate partners in the US, Belgium and Israel. The analysis demonstrates how corporate volunteering conjoins various elements – ideological, interactionist, symbolic and ethical – to maintain the creative engagement of highly skilled employees in cognitive capitalism. The article thus argues that the increasing interest in corporate volunteering emerges from a classwide rationality that extends beyond instrumental interests of particular corporations, as corporate volunteering constitutes a governmentality technique that molds employees' subjectivities and maintains their wider commitment to capitalism.

Keywords:

Corporate volunteering, Volunteering, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Cognitive capitalism, Multi-sited ethnography

Introduction

Companies don't want to write out checks anymore, just without anything. That time is over. [...] that's the new CSR¹ mentality, and I'm glad with that evolution. CSR is not only a matter for the manager and the CEO. They want to bring it down to all the people of the company. [...] And more and more people, on the work floor, want the company to be interested in CSR. [...] So many companies have those special days, CSR days, you know, that the whole company can go for one day, [...] and they go with 20 people to a [non-profit] organization, paint the whole building, you know, things like that, it happens really a lot.

These reflections on the changing character of the Corporate Social Responsibility strategies that companies adopt were articulated during an interview by Steven, a former business person who shifted his career and became the Belgian office director of a transnational non-profit that will be named here 'Young Spirit' (YS).² YS was founded in the United States at the end of the 1980s, by an American business person who switched to a teaching career. The non-profit was aimed to promote its founder's vision of teaching entrepreneurial principles to disadvantaged youth as a means to integrate them into the labor market and into society at large. During the 1990s, YS program offices were established in 19 US states, and since 1998 further expanded to 11 countries worldwide. YS expansion and routine operations are supported through financial sponsorship and corporate volunteers' engagement by several multinational corporations, including consultancy, high-tech and financial firms, as well as nationwide banks and local companies.

¹ The respondent used during the interview the acronym CSR rather than the full term 'Corporate Social Responsibility'.

² To maintain the respondents' anonymity, pseudonyms are used when referring to individuals, organizations or companies, and some identifying details are obscured.

YS operates through program offices that align with (semi-)public high schools in their regions of operation, and train local teachers to teach the curriculum developed by YS in consultation with corporate and educational partners. The curriculum includes entrepreneurship-related themes such as principles of market transactions, product development, business operation, financial planning, and the preparation and presentation of a business plan. Corporate volunteers in YS may serve as episodic guest speakers, as more committed coaches to the high school students taking part in the program, or as judges in business plan competitions that constitute the culmination of the educational program. As further implied by Steven, YS is well positioned to satisfy the “demand from the companies” for “new CSR” by building a sustained collaboration between YS staff, the CSR team of the company and the schools where the volunteering often takes place, and by offering volunteering activities that are related to the professional skills of the corporate volunteers.

The global expansion of YS and its network of corporate partners reflects a broader neoliberalization of public education: since the 1990s there is a globalizing rise in corporate intervention in education, not only by means of financial support (Ball 2012), but also ideologically in terms of the expansion of education for entrepreneurship (McCafferty 2010). YS expansion from the US to Belgium and Israel, the three sites included in this study, was facilitated by nationwide pressures related to these global trends: in Belgium, regional governments introduced policy measures to develop education for entrepreneurship in all levels of education;³ in Israel, the YS program was intensively implemented in a major non-profit school chain in which forging partnerships with business was defined as a strategic target for school directors by the chain’s national headquarters.

Furthermore, YS expansion exemplifies how corporate volunteering, between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s, became an increasingly popular channel for corporations to exhibit

³ For example, see the action plan introduced by the Flemish government which was valid in the time of the fieldwork (Vlaamse Overheid 2011), and re-mandated in 2015 until 2019.

‘social responsibility’. Through corporate volunteering schemes, either within or outside the working hours, companies encourage their employees to engage in activities that serve social causes external to the firms’ goals, yet are publicly associated with the firm. Companies often initiate group-based episodic volunteering activities that do not rely on employees’ professional skills: surveys indicate that company-wide service days are the most common arrangement among American and multinational corporations (CECP 2016). However, more structured and skill-based volunteering schemes like those offered by YS are increasing in number and scope, and appear to become an exemplary model of corporate volunteering, particularly among high-tech, financial and service companies (CECP 2014, 2016)

The growing popularity of volunteering in the corporate world, particularly of skill-based and structured volunteering programs, calls for an explanation. The decision to engage the employees in an activity outside the company requires investment of human resources, including working hours of volunteers and of CSR coordinators, which is often granted in addition to financial sponsorship. As indicated during an interview by a former CSR director in one of YS corporate partners, there should be a good reason for making this investment:

For the company, they have to take this decision to free their people, at least, I don’t know, umm.. one day per month, maybe, or one day per year! Sometimes it’s only that, eh? [...] It’s really a strategic decision from the company, and I think it is based on the understanding that this brings something back to the company.

They don’t do it for free, eh?

To gain a fuller understanding of what skill-based corporate volunteering ‘brings back to the company’, we conducted a multi-sited ethnographic study of YS corporate volunteering schemes. As will be elaborated in the following section, we aim to go beyond the instrumental explanations that prevail in the current literature on corporate volunteering, by advancing a

framework that locates the phenomenon as a governmentality technique within the broader context of cognitive capitalism. In the analysis that follows, we explore how does participation in YS corporate volunteering programs affects processes of subject formation among corporate employees, and how does these processes align with increasing corporate aspirations to govern employees' subjectivities. We hope that this account will illuminate underexplored aspects of the increasing corporate interest in volunteering.

Re-contextualizing corporate volunteering: Theoretical framework

Corporate volunteering at the intersection of CSR and volunteering

We situate the increasing popularity of corporate volunteering at the intersection of two widespread contemporary trends: the rising significance of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the increasing promotion of 'volunteering' as a preferred form of participation in public life. The roots of CSR could be traced back to the post-war American corporate sphere (Carroll 1999; Kaplan 2015). Although some American and British corporations have been engaged in practices that could be seen as CSR already in the late 19th and early 20th century, CSR in its 'modern' (Kaplan 2015) or 'explicit' (Matten and Moon 2008) form emerged in the US only in the post-war period, and became 'global' mainly during the 1990s (Kaplan and Kinderman 2017; cf. Carroll 1999; Vogel 2005).

In this context, evidence of corporate support in volunteering could be traced back to the United States of the early 20th century (Basil et al. 2009), while programs of corporate volunteering existed during the 1960s also in other countries, including the UK, Venezuela (Kaplan and Kinderman 2017) and Israel (Galia 2015). However, a major emergence of corporate volunteering as a proliferating field of corporate activity, state promotion and public interest can be traced only around the turn of the millennium: in the UK and the US, the number of companies that offer corporate volunteering schemes significantly grew from the

mid-1990s to the mid-2000s (Brudney and Gazley 2006; Low et al. 2007); in Europe, EU institutions have promoted corporate volunteering during the 2000s through favorable resolutions and communications (Fundacion Codespa and European Volunteer Centre 2014) and through co-funding an ‘employee volunteering award’ as part of the European Year of Volunteering 2011 (BITC 2011); and in Israel, the globalizing trend of CSR and corporate volunteering was ‘imported’ to the local context since the late 1990s by local offices of multinational corporations as well as intermediary non-profit organizations, funded by Jewish philanthropic institutions and corporate foundations (Barkay 2008; Aharoni 2016; Kay 2018). Ball (2008) has identified a particular interest of UK corporations in ‘strategic philanthropy’, which includes deployment of corporate volunteers, in the field of education and educational policy. Indeed, surveys among corporations engaged in CSR indicated that in 2013-2015, 72.7-69.8% of them (respectively) had education (K-12 and higher) as a main focus area of their CSR financial contributions (CECP 2016); mostly qualitative indications affirm that education is also a main field of corporate volunteering interventions (e.g. Allen, Galiano, and Hayes 2011; Wilson and Hicks 2010).

During the 1990s and early 2000s, ‘volunteering’ has also been promoted by a plethora of actors as a highly glorified route through which individuals can demonstrate their moral qualities. Governmental entities, corporations, donors, and non-profit organizations create a myriad of hybrid settings and assemblages through which volunteering is encouraged and glorified, but also managed and governed (Authors 2016). The glorifying discourse around ‘volunteering’ often portrays it as a gateway to employment (Hardill and Baines 2003), but this may also turn ‘volunteering’ into a punitive mechanism by intertwining it with the right to social benefits (Krinsky 2007; Fuller, Kershaw and Pulkingham 2008). Increasing ‘volunteerability’ (Meijs, Ten Hoorn and Brudney 2006) through these hybrid settings creates an irregular volunteer workforce that could be utilized for neoliberal labor market

restructuring (Krinsky and Simonet 2017). At the same time, it posits ‘volunteering’ as an increasingly popular technique of molding subjects’ ethical conduct and notions of citizenship in accordance with neoliberal ideology, which manufactures consent to a post-Fordist, post-Welfare regime (De Waele and Hustinx, 2018; Hyatt 2001; Muehlebach 2012; Rose 2000).

The instrumental approach to corporate volunteering and its critiques

The existing literature on corporate volunteering is prevailed by an instrumental approach,⁴ which largely neglects these broader trends and their socio-political implications in favor of focusing on making corporate volunteering more ‘effective’ (e.g., Pelozo, Hudson and Hassay 2009). This entails rationally improving the management of corporate volunteering to maximize the benefits of the various actors involved: companies, non-profits, corporate volunteers, and beneficiaries (e.g., Grant 2012, Samuel, Roza and Meijs 2016). To achieve this aim, the instrumental literature on corporate volunteering is embedded in a functionalist paradigm (Gentile, Lorenz and Wehner 2011) and is mainly focused on the antecedents and consequences of corporate volunteering (Rodell et al. 2016). The consequences-oriented literature was used to construct a ‘business case’ for corporate volunteering that highlighted and elaborated the potential benefits for companies from such engagement (e.g., Wilson and Hicks 2010). Corporate motivations to engage in volunteering could therefore be seen as ‘instrumental’ also in the sense of serving the short-term self-interests of the company (Aguilera et al. 2007). However, there is only partial and inconclusive empirical evidence to the validity of the business case for CSR in general (Vogel 2005) and corporate volunteering within it (Gentile, Lorenz and Wehner 2011). Most instrumental literature that argues for a business case for corporate volunteering is focused on the internal impact that serves the company’s self-interests (e.g., De Gilder, Schuyt and Breedijk 2005), but the empirical

⁴ A term proposed by Mosse and Lewis (2006) to describe a similar tendency in development studies.

exploration of corporate volunteering's impact on external trends such as consumer perceptions of the firm is preliminary (Plewa et al. 2015). As we will demonstrate in this article, going beyond the company-specific 'business case' could enhance our understanding of corporate interest in volunteering.

Critiques of CSR often implicitly create a critical mirroring of the 'business case' argument: as they agree that the corporate core aim is to generate profit (Bakan 2015), critics claim that CSR is merely intended to contribute to this aim, by managing resistant stakeholders, performing 'regulatory captures', reducing costs and improving public reputation and marketing strategies (Banerjee 2007). While such critiques often provide an essential analysis of institutional processes and discursive mechanisms (e.g., Shamir 2011), some scholars began to develop in-depth ethnographic accounts of mundane CSR dynamics, analyzing these corporate efforts as a strategy to undermine state regulation and mitigate public resentment in affected communities (e.g., Welker 2009, Coumans 2011). Some studies have proceeded beyond a critical mirroring of the instrumental literature to study in depth how the subjectivities, bodies and livelihood of employees and beneficiaries are shaped through CSR practices and how do these processes align with corporate interests. Such directions were taken by ethnographic studies of corporate-sponsored interventions in areas such as health and education of employees (e.g., Rajak 2011, ch. 4-5) and in the broader 'community' (e.g., Schwittay 2011, Rajak 2011, ch. 6-7). Corporate volunteering, as a CSR strategy that transforms employees into the active carriers of corporate exhibition of ethical conduct, is well-suited to further explore such dynamics, and may reveal additional or different types of corporate interests in such strategies.

A primary assumption of the instrumental literature on CSR in general, and corporate volunteering in particular, is that a cohesion of interests exists between the various actors involved, or the related assumption that these actors are always guided by a shared notion of

‘effectiveness’. A small number of ethnographic studies began to unravel the differential interests, power dynamics and conflictual dimensions in corporate volunteering that challenge the “‘win-win’ expectation underlying much CSR practice and ideology” (Fleming, Roberts and Garsten 2013, 340). Bory (2008) claimed that this ethos of cohesive interests which is fostered through corporate volunteering activities enabled management to increase its control over employees and undermine class-based grievances or other forms of dissidence. Barkay (2012) described how corporate volunteering programs in a more traditional industrial corporation intervene in employees’ leisure time and bodily practices and thus work to extend the scope of corporate control on its employees. Costas and Kärreman (2013) showed how the variety of CSR-related activities in a consulting firm, including episodic corporate volunteering (but without examining long-term and skill-based volunteering), served to achieve ‘aspirational control’ - a particular type of ‘management control’ that aims to govern the identities, aspirations and ethical views of employees and ties their career aspirations to organizational needs. While these studies analyzed corporate volunteering as a managerial tool and emphasized its controlling and governing effects, we propose to further explore how these effects align with contemporary transformations in the capitalist order.

Governing employees in the era of cognitive capitalism

The making and promotion of corporate volunteering is a process that occurs beyond traditional sectoral boundaries and national borders. In this process, diverse institutions, discourses and mechanisms are aligned to an assemblage in which various resources and techniques are mobilized to shape and govern individual conduct and subjectivity, creating a governmentality apparatus (cf. Foucault 2007). Such analysis extends Bory’s (2008) claim that corporate volunteering serves a wider corporate ‘classwide rationality’ (cf. Himmelstein 1997) that spans across the particular interests of singular corporations. Indeed, Baillie Smith

and Laurie (2011) and Jones (2008) showed how international corporate volunteering programs contribute to producing the highly-skilled, ‘cosmopolitan’ and neoliberally-oriented labor force which is sought after by transnational corporations and necessary for the endurance of the globalizing, neoliberal labor market.

As we will demonstrate in this article, at least amongst the larger corporations that are involved in YS activity, there is an increasing understanding that CSR and volunteering serve the need to legitimize the corporate world and its ways of operation. These efforts are not only directed towards external reputation management, but are increasingly aimed at forming a neoliberal governmentality technique that assists in reproducing the corporate labor force by molding employees’ conduct and subjectivity. This technique sustains employees’ engagement in their corporate jobs while nurturing their compliance with the broader project of capitalist accumulation and with the changing corporate requirements from the labor force, in ways that align with the corporate ‘classwide rationality’.

To analyze the ways in which the governmentality technique of corporate volunteering is integrated within late capitalist working environments, we follow Vercellone’s (2005) and Moulier-Boutang’s (2011) proposition that the contemporary configuration of capitalism is qualitatively different from the ‘industrial capitalism’ analyzed by Marx. This new formation of capital-labor relations constitutes what they term ‘cognitive capitalism’. It places at the core of capitalist accumulation the immaterial, knowledge-based labor, which is becoming the hegemonic model of production. Material, manual labor does not disappear, but it increasingly becomes global and dispersed while being planned, organized and subsumed through immaterial labor, and therefore subjected to it. Employees’ cognitive capacities and creative energies, which are increasingly referred to as ‘human capital’ (Moulier-Boutang 2011, Feher 2009), are becoming the main resources that are required for wealth accumulation in these new conditions, under which “the management of the immaterial (creative resources,

organizational and institutional resources, human resources of intellectual capital) requires a high degree of cooperation, of involvement' of the person and of the brain (and no longer simply the mechanical and schizophrenic body of machine-based capitalism)" (Moulier-Boutang 2011, 78). According to Moulier-Boutang (2011), what is often referred to as 'neoliberalism' is the new governmentality apparatus that was developed to control the new, cognitive formation of capitalist production; therefore, if we wish to understand why corporate interest in volunteering rises in times of neoliberal transformations, we should examine how corporate volunteering relates to transformations in labor and production processes that are at the core of neoliberalism's emergence.

Feher (2009, 24) claims that the free manual laborer of the industrial era is losing its hegemonic status with "the rise of human capital as a dominant subjective form [which] is a defining feature of neoliberalism". Human capital encompasses all aspects of human lives, without presupposing a distinction between spheres such as labor, reproductive labor or leisure, and construct subjects as entrepreneurs, rather than laborers or consumers, who are expected to utilize these various aspects to the process of value extraction (Feher 2009). Indeed, shaping and governing employees' subjectivities becomes an essential technique in sustaining the contemporary formation of capital accumulation. It signifies a shift from the industrialist "Taylorist control of work" to "mechanisms focused on the control of the very subjectivity of workers" that become a central feature of cognitive capitalism (Vercellone 2005). We seek to enhance the understanding of corporate volunteering as a governmentality technique and examine its relations to the particular features of cognitive capitalism. Our analysis explores how skilled corporate volunteering is accounted for by program coordinators, CSR managers and corporate volunteers, with the aim of identifying specific mechanisms through which it molds employees' subjectivities. We examine to what extent

does these mechanisms align with the dependency of cognitive capitalism on employees with a high degree of human capital who are willing to render it to corporate needs.

Methodology

The ethnographic study that served as a basis for this article followed corporate volunteering activities created through partnerships between Young Spirit and its various corporate partners. These partnerships were usually based on a varying combination of material and human resources that were donated to the organization, in the form of direct financial support, goods (e.g., ICT equipment), infrastructure (e.g., office space), pro-bono services, or voluntary-based engagement of employees. Oftentimes, these partnerships involved multinational corporations and coordinated through YS global headquarters, but were mostly realized on a local level, in various US states and in other countries worldwide in which both the corporation and YS have presence (or an interest to establish presence). In addition, YS program offices partnered with nationwide and local companies.

The volunteering schemes YS offered to and developed together with its corporate partners have all used the employees' professional skills to enhance the quality of the educational programs coordinated by the organization: when inviting volunteers to serve as guest speakers they were often asked to present to YS students some basic principles in business management and/or speak about their professional engagements; when coaching or judging business plans, volunteers had to implement their professional knowledge as consultants, financiers or project managers. We opted to focus our ethnographic exploration on such a volunteering scheme, which involves corporate volunteers on a long-term and skill-based basis, even if it means that the number of volunteers involved is smaller in comparison to more collective, hands-on schemes. Such skill-based volunteering schemes are deeply enrooted in the context of cognitive capitalism and mirror its significance: while cognitive

capitalism does not signify the disappearance of industrial labor but the constitution of knowledge-based labor as the hegemonic form of production, also long-term, skill-based volunteering programs such as YS do not necessarily represent what most corporate volunteers do, but such programs do represent a dominant model in the field of corporate volunteering that may influence the perceptions and engagements of other actors. Furthermore, selecting this relatively long-term volunteering scheme enabled us to explore in depth how employees' subjectivities are molded through corporate volunteering activities and possibly feeds into their everyday working lives, and examine the role of interactions between volunteers and beneficiaries in these processes.

Due to the transnational character of corporate volunteering, and considering the globalizing hegemony of cognitive capitalism, we opted for a multi-sited ethnographic study (Marcus 1995, cf. Rajak 2011) that could follow the activity of YS and its multinational corporate partners across national borders. The study was conducted in the US-based headquarters of YS and in two of YS international branches: in Belgium and in Israel. In each location, extensive participant observation was conducted for a period of roughly three to four months, which included participation in routine organizational settings and observations in activities that involve corporate volunteers. The fieldwork also included 74 in-depth interviews across the three locations. Additionally, a collection of CSR reports, educational content, media items and other documents was conducted.

The respondents selected for interviews, in accordance with the focus and scope of the study, were mostly corporate volunteers (N=28), YS board members from the corporate world (N=4), CSR officers in YS corporate partners (N=15), YS staff members (N=19) and teachers who taught the YS program (N=5). A substantial attention was given to the actions of these actors also during participant observations. The corporate volunteers and CSR officers interviewed for this study reflected the portfolio of YS corporate partners: many were

employed in multinational consultancy and auditing firms, as well as in nationwide and multinational financial services firms; some were affiliated with multinational high-tech companies, mainly with their sales and marketing departments, and some belonged to the executive or professional staff in large engineering and real estate companies.

Corporate volunteers were mostly split between young professionals in their late 20s or early 30s and those older than 40 and in a more advanced stage of their careers; CSR officers and YS staff members were more evenly spread across age groups. Most CSR officers and YS staff members interviewed were women; among the corporate volunteers interviewed, women constituted approximately 40%. Male corporate volunteers often held more prominent positions within their company in comparison with female volunteers, and those of them in a more advanced career stage were often allocated to more ‘prestigious’ volunteering positions such as board membership or judging in nationwide competitions. While among YS students there is an overrepresentation of youth from migrant families or ethnic minorities, this was not reflected among the Belgian and Israeli staff and volunteers, which primarily belonged to the dominant ethnic groups. Only in the US a substantial number of YS staff members and corporate volunteers belonged to racial minorities, but moving up in the organizational hierarchy led to a more white and masculine demographics.

Analyzing the interview transcripts, field notes and documents that were collected during the study produced insights regarding various aspects of corporate volunteering in YS. In this article, we focus on processes of subject formation through corporate volunteering, which were more easily traced through the interviews. While participant observations were crucial to create rapport with respondents and to contextualize the interviews, the themes explored in this article implied a stronger reliance on interview quotes rather than observatory data. During the analysis, we often synthesized common insights across sites, but we also indicated when there was a prominent difference in one of the research sites vis-à-vis the

others. It should also be noted that differences did not necessarily appear between sites, but also within sites and across national boundaries (for example, generational differences that were common across sites). A methodological limitation of our study was that it included mostly employees who participated in corporate volunteering, and their willingness to be interviewed usually indicated that their volunteering experience was overall positive. We tried to compensate this limitation by conducting formal interviews and informal conversations also with employees who were less intensively involved in YS programs. Yet, our analysis is mainly focused on how corporate volunteering shapes employees' subjectivities. Documenting possible resistance strategies or tactics, which employees may deploy vis-a-vis increasing encouragements to volunteer and other managerial aspirations, requires a holistic ethnographic study of contemporary working environments which was beyond the scope of our research.

Interviews held in Israel were conducted in Hebrew, and quotes were translated to English by the first author. Interviews in Belgium and the US were conducted mostly in English. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Light editing of the quotes (omitting hesitations and half words) has been conducted, while leaving the original style of speech and most grammatical mistakes unedited.

Dynamics of governmentality in corporate volunteering

The aspiration of corporations to govern and manage their employees' conduct can often be discerned in academic and para-academic management texts, which are in turn mobilized in various ways to support managerial conduct (Klikauer 2015). As indicated above, this aspiration is particularly urgent under cognitive capitalism which relies on the active cooperation of highly-skilled employees. As part of this aspiration, instrumental studies of corporate volunteering often explore the 'positive' effects that corporate volunteering creates

among the participating employees. Studies have indicated, for example, that volunteering contributed to job meaningfulness and as a result also to improved job performance (Rodell 2013). Policy reports and practical guidelines to managers have also emphasized how corporate volunteering improves employees' engagement at work (e.g., True impact 2013, Diamond 2015). This instrumental discourse was further diffused within the company from the CSR or Human Resources (HR) team to other managers, both upwards to the executive level and to the mid- and lower management. A former CSR director described how she leveraged on the authority and prestige of academic knowledge to convince superiors and colleagues to invest in corporate volunteering:

When I was responsible for the CSR department in the company, I read a lot of articles about the links between employee volunteering and employee satisfaction, employee motivation, employee retention, so you make really the *link* between all those HR topics actually, and employee volunteering. [...] At the beginning of every important meeting, I said: look at the latest article in the *Harvard Business Review*; [Imitating an amazed tone of meeting participants:] Uh, *Harvard Business Review*! Yes, what [can] they say? It's the bible [laughing]. If you have this type of support from the academics, in a company – so that's important for you. For us it was - of course, we need it to be able to convince – look! They say it [knocking on the table] in the *Harvard Business Review*! It's like this. Believe me! [laughing] Of course, you need this – you need this external help to make things move internally.

This professional-instrumental discourse does not remain at the executive level, but may also trickle down to the level of mid- and lower management, as demonstrated in this quote of a branch director in an Israeli bank that partnered with YS:

Unlike what people think, that the absence of employees from the work here may damage the branch profits or business results - I always say that the employees come back on the following day with so much energy to work, that they increase the branch's profit and performance. So, it's worth it for me to give these inputs one day, and work very hard with a partial manpower in the branch, only to get the outputs of the day after, and it's not only a day after – it is months after.

Volunteers' narratives provided evidence to the success of the managerial aspiration to mold employees' subjectivities through volunteering. The following subsections will integrate evidence from managers, coordinators and volunteers' narratives, in order to describe four of the main mechanisms and dynamics through which this aspiration was realized and to examine the extent to which employees complied with it.

Ideological cohesion

When YS coordinators and corporate volunteers discussed YS activity, they often described the beneficiaries using phrases such as “disadvantageous”, “low-income” (mainly in the US) “chance seeking” (in Belgium) or “at risk” (mainly in Israel) youth, who are “marginalized” or “excluded” from society. They mostly expressed hope that YS and its volunteers could provide the targeted youth with the “competences”, right “attitude”, and “opportunities” that could assist them to overcome their “background” and “contribute their part to society” through participation in the labor market. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005[1999]) indicated that

the increasing emphasis on ‘exclusion’ and ‘inclusion’ instead of class hierarchies and exploitation is part of a new justification regime that proliferates in late capitalist societies. In this regime, persons are valued according to their overall activity, whether remunerated or not. Indeed, scholars of cognitive capitalism also demonstrated how it reorganizes the relations between time, labor and remuneration (Morini 2007, cf. Feher 2009). Interestingly, corporate volunteering itself is part of the blurred ‘activity’ that assists in accumulating additional ‘human capital’. Furthermore, in line with the importance of networks and cooperation in cognitive capitalism (Morini 2007, Moulier-Boutang 2011), Boltanski and Chiapello (2005[1999]) show how claims for justice in the late capitalist era are expected to be fulfilled through improved ‘networking’ capacities and not through class-based grievances and redistribution. Actively increasing their ‘human capital’, and developing ‘entrepreneurial’ and ‘networking’ skills as part of it, was a main aim introduced to participants in workfare (‘welfare to work’) programs (Helman 2018), which discursively operated to individualize the problem of employment and to emphasize the individual’s responsibility to adjust to the labor market (Peck 2003, Helman 2018). Entrepreneurship, as a central feature of neoliberal governmentality (Bröckling 2016, Foucault 2008), is introduced by YS as a promising route through which the youth could be transformed into successful participants in the neoliberal order. The worldview and pedagogic approach of YS therefore smoothly aligns with the neoliberal ideology that is jointly promoted by the corporate world and the state.

There are explicit and implicit ideological dimensions in how the corporate volunteers we interviewed justify their particular engagement with an organization such as YS:

I think that education is the best way that somebody can help themselves. So, umm, if you come from a disadvantaged background, you can still educate yourself, get a good job, start earning a salary, and create the life that you want for yourself.

And I believe that education is the beginning of that. [...] So I figured where can I make an impact, maybe with like teenagers or young adults.

While this respondent, like many others, saw education in general as a main vehicle for social improvement, others specifically valued the entrepreneurship aspects of YS educational program and saw their role as “help[ing] people develop the skills they need to go to business themselves”. This respondent emphasized how YS activity conformed her ideological beliefs: “so that’s why I was attracted by YS... very much aligned with the way I think society should go, which is individual initiatives, small structures...”. The common ground to both positions was the perception of the volunteer’s role as sustaining the individual beneficiary efforts towards an improved future. This individualized progression was consensually perceived as the main route to eliminate social problems and contribute to the general public good, while obscuring the political-economic roots in which the problem of ‘disadvantageous youth’ emerges: corporate exploitation, structural unemployment and the erosion of state-supported welfare mechanisms. Entrepreneurship and loosely-regulated corporate power are presented as the remedy rather than a possible cause to the ‘social problems’ corporate volunteering is aimed to solve. A minority among the American and particularly the Israeli YS coordinators, especially those who had training or professional experience in the fields of education or social work, as well as a few volunteers, acknowledged the existence of more structural barriers that may impede the individualistic vision of success through education and entrepreneurship. However, they perceived themselves and their organizations as unable to challenge these structures, suggesting that their activity in YS is “what we can do” and reaffirming YS individualistic consensus by claiming that “even if you can help one student somehow, it’s still worthwhile” (cf. Shachar and Hustinx 2017).

Similar ideological constructions are identified by Throup (2013) as characterizing the field of corporate philanthropy, which he views as supplying cognitive, moral and emotional resources to engage subjects in cognitive capitalism. While Throup focuses on ideological-discursive representations that diffuse to contemporary working environments, our ethnographic engagement shows that the hegemony of this individualized, neoliberal ideology among employees is further consolidated through their active engagement in reiterating this ideology to youth during corporate volunteering activities.

The glorification of the businessman

In addition to its ideological entanglement with neoliberalism, entrepreneurship education also constitutes an arena through which the business person is becoming a highly valued figure. As part of their voluntary engagement with the organization, corporate employees and entrepreneurs are invited by YS to take leading roles in the design of YS educational curriculum and in its adaptations to local contexts. The curriculum thus reflects their worldviews and their professional competencies. Another prominent arena of business persons' participation are YS competitions, where students present the business plans they have been working on throughout YS educational program: the students and their projects are evaluated by judges who are entrepreneurs, executives and highly-skilled employees from the corporate world. As the level of the competition increases - from the classroom or the school level, to regional, nationwide and even international competitions - YS seeks to find volunteer judges who are located in a higher position in the corporate hierarchy or possess greater business reputation. The judges do not only examine the business qualities of the projects, but also the 'human capital' and ideological adherence of the students. The latter are assumed to be expressed also through their presentation skills, their responses to questions presented by the judges, and their exhibition of 'enthusiasm' and 'entrepreneurial spirit'.

Therefore, other corporate volunteers, such as the mentors who accompany students in the preparations to the competitions, or guest speakers who arrive to the classrooms, are expected to prepare the students for the competitions by transferring to them the professional, ideological and affective capacities that will be valued by the judges. The successful students are those who understand these are the competences they should acquire.

In this process, students learn to value corporate employees and entrepreneurs as those who possess laudable competencies and incarnate the aspired ‘entrepreneurial spirit’. In an Israeli YS class where several observations have been held, the school teacher often had to face interruptions and disrespectful behavior by students, which stopped when the corporate volunteer who served as the group’s mentor, a young consultant in a multinational firm, entered the classroom. In interviews with corporate volunteers, they frequently described their good feeling following the appreciation they receive from students, often relating it to their professional status and corporate affiliation:

Yeah, those youngsters they really appreciate it that there is like a [renowned multinational corporate brand] person listening to their business plan presentation and like really go into that, into for example the budget or the communication plan [...] I always try to give advice as well as, yeah constructive advice actually, like when I see that there is maybe something that could be better I say, ok hmm there maybe you should do this or that, or really congratulate them with their business plan presentation. You can really see that those youngsters they- for them it’s like an amazing experience I think, I mean, yeah it makes me also feel good somehow.

Students' favorable evaluation of the corporate volunteers' qualities in the field of entrepreneurship education lead the volunteers to a positive perception of themselves and their professional identity in a manner that is qualitatively different from episodic, hands-on volunteering activities:

It's also really fulfilling because I know when I grew up, when I had problems in school, if I needed guidance and help, I just went to my parents, and they could help me. And for lots of these kids that's not necessarily the case, [...] they need feedback from people outside who are more than 10 years in the business working world [...] to show them what else is out there, which is knowledge well beyond what many of their parents could provide. [...] So, I appreciated that whole basically more than Central Park picking up garbage or dividing clothes, all of which are rewarding causes, but when you actually get to engage with the young folks who are from a very different background, [it is] personally more fulfilling than just pulling the old clothes.

The field of entrepreneurship education is therefore structured in a way that makes corporate volunteers feel valuable because of their professional skills and status and increases feelings of satisfaction they associate with their position. These effects seem to serve the broader corporate interest in maintaining highly-skilled employees' attachment to their professional work and to their position in the corporate world, an interest that became central under cognitive capitalism.

Corporate volunteering as a new symbolic capital

Existing studies indicated that CSR first emerged as a response to external pressures, and then was expanded through a wave of ‘norm followers’ engaged in mimetic isomorphism of other companies, which operates simultaneously with normative isomorphism that is led by experts (Mühle 2010, based on DiMaggio and Powell 1983; for a similar argument regarding corporate philanthropy, see Galaskiewicz and Burt 1991). Other studies demonstrated that CSR developed through competitive rather than normative isomorphism (Parast and Adams, 2012). This was particularly evident among multinational corporations that were able to leverage on their privileged position in the corporate field, and could therefore shape their CSR practices in ways that aligned with their core business strategy and thus increased their market competitiveness (Bondy, Moon and Matten 2012). And indeed, volunteering as part of CSR could also be explained through processes of competitive institutional morphism, as one CSR manager who works with YS indicated in an interview: “You are in a situation in which all your competitors contribute to the community, give money, volunteer, involved – you have to be there. Ok? If you wanna stay relevant.” While Himmelstein’s (1997) claimed that a ‘classwide rationality’ emerges in the business milieu through an understanding of commonalities and occasional cooperation in the field of corporate philanthropy, our study shows that classwide interests are often attained through competition rather than cooperation. Creative and successful engagement in ‘socially responsible’ practices becomes a type of symbolic capital on which companies compete, while this competition also serves wider interests of the corporate sphere.

Furthermore, various evidence from our fieldwork demonstrated that corporate volunteering became a kind of essential ‘gadget’ in the corporate world not only for the organizations that composed it, but also for those individuals who promoted the creation of a volunteering program in their organization (or became identified with it) - individual executives, prominent directors and also younger employees. An Israeli HR director, who led

a volunteering project, described how the company's corporate volunteering programs became part of how its executives and directors represents themselves and their company in the business milieu:

When I sit in a business conference and next to me sits someone from a competing company, each one of us tells the other – how do you do it, what do you do. Actually, even among CEOs there are, you know, such discussions and dialogues.

Indeed, during the receptions that followed YS events and competitions, prominent employees and directors were often heard discussing and comparing the community engagement activities of their companies. Furthermore, our analysis of online content indicated that CSR initiatives are not only an almost compulsory component in corporate websites (multinational corporations often dedicated a unique website to their CSR activities and reports), but are also an increasingly common component in bios or LinkedIn profiles of corporate employees and executives that lead them and/or volunteer in them. Media items on corporate volunteering in YS, mostly initiated by the public relations office of YS or of its corporate partners, were often published in the softer columns of the business press, such as those describing the 'social' lives in the business community, and were aimed at improving the corporate - or its executives - reputation within the business community, and among colleagues and competitors.

Corporate volunteering therefore enables individual employees the accumulation of much needed social and symbolic capital in a social context that increasingly values engagements in acts of benevolence. Particularly, YS volunteering activities were designed to provide employees opportunities to gain professional skills, shine up to the company management and network with their directors and other executives, and thus to improve their promotion prospects, within the firm or towards future employment opportunities. An

American program coordinator in a YS local office indicated that she was mostly recruiting corporate volunteers and coordinating joint activities with the corporate sponsor through “midlevel” employees who are “trying to look good for a promotion, you know, like, they want to stand out and be a leader”. Some CSR directors (and in some cases also the corporate volunteers themselves) confirmed that participating in corporate volunteering could often assist an employee to enhance promotion chances. They further indicated that some corporate managers or HR officers encouraged employees to improve specific professional skills by participating in relevant skill-based volunteering activities: “with YS, we often have expert speakers go into a classroom, and that’s professional skill building. Public speaking, especially to room full of rowdy teenagers that’s, you know, that’s probably tougher than speaking to a room full of executives.”

These findings are in line with other studies of volunteering (Taylor 2004), youth service (Simonet 2005) and ‘voluntourism’ (Vrasti 2013, Jones 2011), which provided increasing evidence that resume-building or work-related skill development can be a considerable motivation of individuals to engage in such activities, particularly in contemporary labor markets that are increasingly precarious and selective. Corporations’ support in enhancing employees ‘human capital’ by providing volunteering opportunities does not only make these employees’ better equipped to the era of cognitive capitalism, but also corresponds with increasing expectation from companies to provide employees opportunities for enhancing competencies and creating connections that could be used beyond the limits of the unsecured, project-based employment that corporations currently offer (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005[1999]).

YS coordinators sometimes knew how to leverage on corporate professionals’ competition over the symbolic capital that volunteering offers, and encouraged competition in order to meet their need in volunteers. A vivid description was provided by a YS coordinator

on her attempt to recruit volunteers during a luncheon in the metropolitan headquarters of a large American financial corporation:

...it's like white dudes and they just didn't care and couldn't connect and I was like struggling with like, what do I do to make them want to come work with my kids, other than like my sheer excitement and enthusiasm. And I just totally pulled out of my ass, I made up that the [headquarters in another metropolitan area] had more volunteers signed up than [their office]. And then they were like - oh what? And suddenly their competitive finance side [came up], you know, and then they were like, literally at the table were like, how many people do you need? I was like - how many people? I need at least 10 volunteers. And they were like, oh we'll have that for you. And they didn't, they never followed up on that. But for at least a spark I saw what they were responding to and it was like competition.

The neo-institutionalist perspective often neglects the conflictual aspects that arise around the attempts to gain symbolic capital, which is achieved by individual employees also through corporate volunteering. Furthermore, through the competition over this symbolic capital, an increasing number of employees and companies become engaged in corporate volunteering and by that serving the 'classwide' interests of the business community. The increasing value of volunteering in the broader society as a main route for exhibiting ethical conduct, leads to the identification of the corporate volunteers by their surroundings as ethical or 'good' individuals, and thus boosts the self-identification of employees as ethical subjects that we will describe in the following subsection.

Nurturing ethical identity and coherence

As we began to describe above, most volunteers have indicated in various ways the ‘satisfaction’ they get from the volunteering activities, and the positive effects it has on them: “the personal satisfaction I get there [at YS activity] is the fuel that keeps me moving in other places”. While counting on such replies uncritically during the analysis could be considered as a type of ‘attitudinal fallacy’ (Jerolmack and Khan 2014), other parts of respondents’ narratives could not be easily dismissed as ‘cheap talk’. For example, some respondents have placed their volunteer engagement through the workplace as part of a broader biographical narrative:

I was a scout for 20 or 25 years, so I was quite involved at that time before I got married, before I got kids, and... once you get married, once you get kids, once you start your professional life, when you have a house [...] the days are becoming shorter and shorter, and in the end you don’t have any time left, for anything, for- for anything. And despite that you are willing to, or you would like to, you start also- when you get older, you start to ask yourself the question – ok, but what’s my contribution to the community, to the environment, am I just here to- to consume things, to live my own life, or isn’t it time that I also start giving a bit of myself... It’s a typical midlife crisis. [respondent and interviewer laughing a bit]

Furthermore, some volunteers specifically indicated how the affinity of the volunteering opportunities developed by YS to their routine professional engagements and the appreciation they receive through it, which we discussed above, feeds back to their everyday engagement

at work. See, for example, the reflection of an engineer who also led the firm's volunteering program at YS:

Sometimes we can get so bogged down in our day jobs that we forget... like, we complain about this or that or whatever, and it's a really interesting experience to [...] tell people about what you do. [...] People are like - oh yeah, I forgot this is why I love being a civil engineer, because I'm so bogged down in finance and project management and clients, you know, they like forget the bigger picture and what we're trying to do with that, what that project will mean, how it will enable people to move around or enjoy a public space or something like that, you know. So I think we can get bogged down in the details and when you share your experiences with children, I think it just frees everything up, I think it gives us a bit more energy.

By providing highly-skilled employees with opportunities to make their skills appear as useful to youth, corporations were able to increase their employees' enthusiasm at work and sense of affinity with their workplace, confirming the expectations of the instrumental literature in this regard.

However, the effects of corporate volunteering were not only in the affective aspect of 'personal satisfaction'. Vradi (2011) described how cognitive capitalism harnesses affective competencies for value extraction, adding that "affect works to invest capitalism with a moral goal that individuals can passionately attach themselves to". Our analysis supports this claim by showing that the affective aspects of corporate volunteering has an effect on employees' 'ethical identity' and contributed to their 'moral coherence' (cf. Baker and Roberts 2011). The moral effects of corporate volunteering can be traced in this account of the global CSR

director of a multinational auditing firm, in which she reminisces the events in the firm's US-based headquarters that led to the foundation of a centralized corporate volunteering strategy:

Enron had collapsed and its auditing firm, which had been one of the big accounting firms, also collapsed. Because it turned out that their audits of Enron were faulty. And so the topic of morality in an accounting firm and the social purpose of an accounting firm was hugely on everybody's minds. So I went to the chairman and said: I think we need to demonstrate that we think about our impact on society. He said: that's a really good idea, would you develop a plan?

The plan that this CSR director developed included the partnership with YS as one of the firm's core CSR initiatives, which developed to include significant financial donations and corporate volunteers' involvement, including board membership. This case demonstrates how "the moralizing stor[y] of Enron" (Vrasti 2011) prompted the emergence of corporate volunteering initiatives that were aimed to assist in "clos[ing] the legitimization deficit of contemporary 'creative capitalism'" (Thorup 2013, 556). As an evidence to the success of this strategy, the CSR director indicated that the firm's annual employee surveys show that employees who volunteer are "more likely to say they're proud to work at [the firm]" and "they're more likely to say they believe in our vision as an organization", demonstrating that volunteering increases the 'moral coherence' between the employees' personal views and the overall corporate activity. Indeed, also other CSR managers indicated that engaging in volunteering activities through the workplace rather than in private life enables to mitigate possible contradictions between business activities and the individual's aspired ethical identity:

There are a lot of people who leave the bank and go working for an NGO [...] a lot of people had questions [...] I think everybody had it at a certain point in time, and therefore I do think it's good that we are busy with [CSR] in the bank.

Identifying the employer as ethical was observed by several respondents in higher management positions as a significant consideration particularly among younger employees:

The generation we have today, Generation Y, the millennials, whatever you like to call them – [corporate volunteering] is important to them. As opposed to prior generations. Even when I go to university campuses, and when I talk to them [...] one of the things I talk to them about is the extent to which we volunteer. It's important to them [...] This generation wants to be a lot more engaged in these things. So uhm... it's good for our people because they want to and it helps attract good and young people if they know an organization is responsible.

Another group of employees who are particularly prone to ethical doubts are those recognized by managers as more 'concerned' or 'aware' of 'social issues'. These were often – as many CSR officers testify – those who volunteer the most. Through offering them volunteering opportunities, the management could foster their loyalty to the firm and pacify their potential dissidence or exit. This confirms that corporate volunteering is a particularly useful strategy in exercising aspirational control through CSR as described by Costas and Kärreman (2013). Often, drawing those potentially-dissident employees to a volunteering program assisted in assuring they become 'believers' in CSR rather than 'cynics' (Costas and Kärreman 2013), and this could maintain not only their organizational loyalty but also the engagement at the workplace that cognitive capitalism seeks. Furthermore, the specific type of volunteering that

YS provided, which included the teaching of basic capitalist principles to youth, helped employees to develop ethical justifications to their own professional work as contributing to a broader public good. This young consultant perceived entrepreneurship as crucial for social prosperity, which is advanced both through the consultancy services his company provides to entrepreneurs and his voluntary engagement in YS:

This is what we do: we have ideas, we think how to realize them, and how to maximize their value, whether it is to people or to our society. Umm, this is *in my view* what I do in this entrepreneurship program [i.e., YS].

In this way, employees identified themselves not only with their workplace but also with the broader project of capitalist accumulation – an adherence that is ‘ideological’ in the sense developed by Chiapello (2003): a stimulating discursive structure that keeps individuals engaged in their routinized actions, particularly at the workplace.

The coherence of managers and employees’ ethical identity can be challenged when there is an increasing criticism on corporate conduct, or capitalism more broadly, in public opinion as well as in their closer social circles. Such challenges arose, for example, after the Enron scandal, as indicated above. Some American and Belgian respondents identified such challenges following the 2008 financial crisis. One CSR director described her attempts to restore belief in the banking system, a belief that is simultaneously public and personal:

I went and I worked for a bank, of course I found that the mission of the bank is **superb!** Is to collect the money where it is, and to provide it to one who needs it. That’s the job of the bank. But after- after, ehh, the- they have done many many other things, like speculations and things like that which are not in the core mission of what it is at the beginning (-ehm, yeah). [laughing] It’s a big

debate, eh? (-yeah, yeah) A big debate. And so, yes, it was interesting to try to make this bank more responsible, try to convince people that there were **other** ways to **make** business, to do business.

In Israel, a major wave of public critique on corporate conduct and the business milieu, as well as on the government's alliance with them, erupted in the summer of 2011. Roughly 10% of Israeli citizens actively participated in protests calling for 'social justice' that have stormed the country. While the protest wave had failed to bring significant political transformations, it stimulated critical political discourses and practices among citizens (Grinberg 2013). An indication to this lasting impact was that several Israeli YS coordinators and volunteers have spontaneously referred to the protest wave during interviews, without being asked about it by the interviewer. Several respondents specifically indicated that they participated in these protests, unlike YS coordinators and volunteers in the US and Belgium who never mentioned participation in protests or other forms of contentious politics but mainly in charitable activities within and outside the workplace. While some Israeli business persons and CSR leaders attempted to dismiss the protest (Aharoni 2016), business persons involved in YS-Israel described their 'social involvement' as related to the protest wave, as this board member indicated:

I think that our [i.e. YS] timing is good. Why? I think that this issue of awareness to helping the other, and the need to help, really increased in Israel since the demand for social justice was brought up. [...] My awareness to the, umm, injustice, and- and inequality, umm, which is constantly deepened... increased over time. And I feel when I talk to people [referring to fellow businesspersons] that this is a topic in which the atmosphere is

very influential. [There is] a positive trend around this issue.

Again, it's not empirical but – that's the feeling.

This identification that 'social justice' became a consensual idea in the public opinion that the business elite had to negotiate with, corresponds to the conclusion of Welker (2009, 149) that "corporate managers and CSR experts construct their moral self-narratives in active dialogue with the beliefs and tactics of their most vociferous critics". While it was not clear what does 'social justice' exactly mean to prominent business persons, another conversation with a business person who served as a volunteer and later on as a board member in YS-Israel, revealed how through his resistance to the social protests' demands, he was trying to imbue the ideal of 'social justice' with a different meaning:

I didn't agree with what was going on here in the summer, two years ago, in the social protest. I didn't agree with its specificities, but I went to the biggest demonstration just like that, with my wife, the socialist [...] she wanted to go [...] and I went there because, also, [...] it's a kind of anthropological experience, to see, you know [...] but when I stood there and heard people chanting 'the welfare state is coming',⁵ when I hear such a thing it- it makes me crazy. And not because I'm a capitalist pig.⁶ I *think*, despite what others may think, that [the welfare state] is a model that cannot work. It is a system that will quickly collapse. [...] Economically speaking, it's impossible that a few will support the many, because it just wouldn't work. And furthermore, there need to be a distinction between those who

⁵ This was one of the most popular slogans that became identified with the protest movement.

⁶ The term 'piggish capitalism' became popular in the Israeli public discourse since the former chairperson of the Israeli Labor party, Shimon Peres, used it to attack the right-wing government economic policies (distinguishing it from the 'social' capitalism the Labor party preached for). See also: Kay 2018, 129.

really can't, and temporarily you need to find a solution for them, and those who develop a dependency. And this dependency is disastrous.

In a way, this sincere ideological account of resentment to universal welfare mechanisms and of adherence to the neoliberal emphasis on individual initiative and effort, was implicitly present in the narratives of many other respondents, through the belief in education and entrepreneurship that we highlighted above. In this way, the volunteering activity in YS enabled corporate employees, as well as their managers, a possibility to articulate a moral perspective that will assist them in mitigating the doubts regarding corporate activity and the neoliberal hegemony that increasingly arise in the public sphere, as well as in their social surroundings and even close family circles. The ability to articulate such a moral narrative through volunteering was nurtured by the efforts of YS staff and CSR managers to present individual 'success stories' of youth to the volunteers that will assist in ensuring their 'positive volunteering experience'; these efforts therefore helped to enhance volunteers' perception of their own professional work as positive and ethical. The result is the consolidation of moral coherence between the employees' beliefs, ideological environment, professional work and volunteering activity. Such coherence contributes significantly to nurturing a creative, enthusiastic and committed engagement of employees and managers at work, which is increasingly needed in sectors emblematic to cognitive capitalism such as accountancy, consultancy and finance, which were over-represented among YS corporate partners.

Concluding remarks: Settling the neoliberal contradiction

Experiences of personal and professional (dis)satisfaction, ethical deliberation and aspiration to coherence, interactions with intimate social circles – various elements described in the

sections above conjoin in the following narrative of a CSR manager in a large financial institution. The manager recounted her move from a financier position to work in the CSR department, a position that included leading her company's partnership with YS:

I think it was a bit a.. mid-life crisis [dryly chuckles], as they call it. I did this job- the other job for 20 years [... and the breaking point was when] I had to sell to my clients things I was sure they didn't need at all. [...] I felt not good with it, I had the clients for 10 years, and I had to go there and sell and sell and sell the bubbles [chuckles], and I said – no, I won't do this anymore. I changed, and I... first I wanted to stop working, I went to the HR department and I said - well, I want to [move to another city and] do some voluntary work. And then the HR man says – you exaggerate, eh? There are so many departments in the company where you can do other things than sell money. [...then] I met [the CSR director], she explained to me what is CSR and there was immediately a link with her, and I said – ok, I will try this one [laughs]. [...] But I think everybody at a certain point in time... maybe not if you are always working in the social sector, but if you are working in the commercial sector – [company's name], or [company's name], or whatever, I think at a certain moment you- you have questions, eh? Is it only making money, is it that? And then you get more than 40 years old, and the children are growing up, and they are talking to you about Oxfam and saving the world, and [you think -] am I saving the world? [chuckles]

This narrative emphasizes how various factors within one's subjectivity and in her social surroundings, such as affective unsettlements, relational commitments and moral breakdowns (cf. Zigon 2014), can converge to create a crisis at work. The lack of motivation at work and aspiration to change professional engagement demonstrates how a moral crisis could prevent the employee from continuously and productively engaging in immaterial labor (in this case, marketing of financial products). In a condensed manner that supports the analysis presented throughout the article, this narrative demonstrates how engagement in CSR can assist in overcoming such crisis by pacifying employees' ethical doubts and moral deliberations with their surroundings, a pacification that leads to sustain productive engagement in immaterial labor and contributes to buttressing cognitive capitalism more broadly.

Our article provides, in this manner, a possible answer to the question of the anthropologist David Berliner (2016, 4): "Can a derivative trader, responsible for increasing global inequality, be a humanist with a big heart during his vacations? And, if so, how to be a 'humanist trader'?". Whereas Child (2015) showed how entrepreneurs and directors in fair trade businesses have compromised the profit-maximization logic in favor of 'value rationality', the vast majority of our respondents – including directors – were not in an organizational position that would have allowed them to decide on such compromise, and they had to mitigate the tensions between the profit-oriented logic of the firm and their ethical identity. Muehlebach (2012) claimed that this contradiction between market and morality is embraced by neoliberalism, which creates subjects that are often split. Our fieldwork showed that corporate volunteering is a mechanism that rather than sustaining this contradiction as productive, works to pacify the tensions, contradictions and inconsistencies that arise between corporate work and employees' ethical identity. Corporate volunteering thus constitutes one of the mechanisms that "make it possible to stress a kind of equilibrium that individuals establish in most of the situations of their day-to-day continuity [...which] allows a certain

personal unity to be maintained beyond the various contradictions and beyond their different selves” (Piette 2016, 20). In this way, it assists in maintaining the ethical coherence of neoliberal subjects, and secures their active contribution to the accumulation processes of cognitive capitalism.

The instrumentalization of corporate volunteering in neoliberal governmentality that we described throughout the article is therefore of a more intimate form than what has typically been acknowledged in the ‘instrumental’ literature on CSR and volunteering and its common critiques. We examined how the need of employees to feel themselves as coherent moral subject, and to be considered as such by others in a social context that increasingly glorifies ethical commitment, is important for their compliance with corporate actions. These insights demonstrate that conceptualizing corporate volunteering as a governmentality technique also enables to understand why corporate volunteering is not always a top-down managerial project, but can also emerge from initiatives by mid-management, and why increasing numbers of employees, sometimes very enthusiastically, lend their subjectivities to be molded by this technique. Between those who believe that corporate volunteering is an instrument used by the management to suppress workers (see literature review above), and those who believe that corporate volunteering can also be seen as a bottom-up phenomenon (e.g., Van Der Voort, Glac, and Meijs 2009), the governmentality perspective reveals how power and control operates through, rather than on or from, individuals. Through corporate volunteering programs, employees are taking an active part in the company’s CSR strategies, while also playing a central role in upholding the governmentality apparatus that ensures their compliance and productivity.

The aspiration to be considered as an ethical subject is encouraged beyond the boundaries of a particular corporation, as we could have noticed in the case of YS that successfully aligns public schools with various corporations. This assemblage fits within the

broader aim of neoliberal governmentality to produce and mold ethical subjects, an aim that aligns with corporate ‘classwide rationality’ to enhance subjects’ engagement in the contemporary cognitive mode of capitalist accumulation. However, the focus of skill-based corporate volunteering programs such as YS on the highly-skilled segments of the labor force that are intensively engaged in cognitive capitalism, further reproduces “the unevenness and differentiation that neoliberal government introduces into subject formation” (Vrasti 2013, 128), which creates a “competition over political subjectivity” (130). Future exploration could examine the ways in which becoming an ethical subject is entangled with privilege, in times in which morality is increasingly associated with volunteering (Muehlebach 2012) and particularly with more privileged forms of volunteering such as voluntourism (Germann Molz 2017, Vrasti 2013) or skill-based corporate volunteering. This nexus of morality and privilege further ties employees to the project of capitalist accumulation rather than to a more emancipatory vision; a vision that some employees, such as those who have ethical doubts regarding their work, may hope to pursue. Possibly, such a vision has higher chances to be attained if contradictions between corporate employment and morality are recognized rather than pacified.

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