

A geography of international volunteering and development

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Abstract

International volunteers are among a series of new development actors to have emerged in recent years as international development itself has undergone change in response to shifting global economic and geopolitical circumstances. This paper examines their increased profile in development by critically exploring the Northern geographies associated with international volunteering. It makes a case for a more nuanced interrogation of international volunteering, and its construction of volunteers as development actors, through the idea of the ‘incidental encounter’ with development. In this way we focus attention on how development and subjectivities are co-produced across and between spaces in ways that change over time. We argue that alternative imaginaries – such as those around conservation or faith – frequently frame volunteer placements and locate specific volunteers in the places, spaces and relationships of international development. Through these themes, the paper seeks to challenge established, instrumental and geographically framed narratives around the constitution of the ‘development actor’, and to highlight the importance of paying attention to discourses, experiences and imaginaries outside the traditional boundaries of development research.

Introduction

International volunteers are gaining an increasingly profile as development actors in the popular imaginary. Alongside groups such as celebrities, philanthropists, militaries and diasporas they are also figuring more prominently in development policy making and NGO strategies. Like these other actors, however, their involvement in development is not ‘new’ per se. Rather, the rationales for their engagement, the policy frameworks which shape their participation and the organisational structuring of both international volunteering and international development have changed rapidly in recent years, giving volunteering a new profile and presence in international development. As a result, the complex relationship between international volunteering, citizenship and development is currently being negotiated across new uneven economic fortunes and geopolitics of aid. In these contexts some former recipient countries, now among the fastest growing economies in the world, are themselves

becoming significant aid donors (Mawdsley, 2012, Tan-Mullins et al., 2010, Mawdsley and McCann, 2011). These factors are challenging established narratives of development, poverty and responsibility and therefore shaping how volunteering is understood and practiced globally.

Recession and policy transformation around citizenship and civil society in the North, together with fast economic growth in the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China), and new articulations of citizenship forged by Southern social movements, have created a new shifting, mobile and uneven policy context (Peck and Theodore, 2010) in which to locate international volunteering. This means it is no longer embedded in a development silo or a stable national policy environment. As such, international development volunteering can be seen as a microcosm of key contemporary debates in international development theory, policy and practice as it simultaneously challenges and reinforces established imaginaries of development, its actors, sites and practices. In this paper we provide a framework which enables us to analyse the degree to which international volunteering is able to contain the tensions and contradictions associated with recession in the North and fast economic growth in parts of the South which serve as popular destinations for northern volunteers. We bring centre stage the shifting kinds of agency volunteering promises and produces for different interest groups associated with the international volunteering sector.

International volunteering has become an increasingly prominent feature of neoliberal economies (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011). It forms part of state policy on development and inclusion (Lewis, 2006), underpins corporate recruitment and CV building (Jones, 2011) for development and is central to the marketing and rhetorics of the 'gap year' industry (Simpson, 2004). Linking up with the agendas of other new development actors, it also has a growing presence in popular culture through celebrity support (Mostafanezhad, 2013) and is becoming an increasingly important part of diaspora engagements with development (Thomas et al., 2013). International volunteering also figures highly in state, voluntary and private sector initiatives to create global citizenships (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011). Reflecting on research on these trends, here we argue that much contemporary research on international volunteering is in danger of reproducing the institutional and instrumental logics that have given rise to the high profile of international volunteering in the first place. It contributes to neoliberal celebrations of the individual and privileges globally mobile Northern volunteers over other actors.

Drawing on fieldwork in the UK, India, South Africa and Latin America, including participation in and observation of a range of European policy fora¹, this paper has two main conceptual aims. First, to bring to light and examine the development engagements of a series of new volunteer development actors as we contend that the analysis of such actors changes understandings of volunteering's relationship to development and in turn, how development more broadly can be imagined. Second, drawing on postcolonial approaches, we aim to highlight a series of limitations to existing understandings of volunteering and development. We argue that a Northern geography of international volunteering has privileged elite mobility, obscuring the range of actors in the South that international volunteering engages in development. It has sidelined how development is negotiated between different actors in the South and North and under theorised the informal and un-programmed ways international volunteering shapes development. This geography is not accidental but rather is embedded in state and corporate investments in particular visions of (global) citizenship and responsibility, economic restructuring, processes of neoliberal professionalisation, corporate understandings of global skills and work and broader public imaginaries of development.

We seek to problematize volunteering's Northern geographies through a postcolonial de-centring of established international sites and programs, Northern citizens and processes of citizenship formation. We question the foregrounding of elite mobilities and the celebration of international volunteering as 'exotic' in the sector. In particular, we consider the implications of paying attention to the encounters that often take place in between and against planned volunteering practices to generate a more nuanced understanding of the role of volunteers as development actors. In order to do this we bring together debates around citizenship and development with ideas of the 'mundane' (Edensor, 2007) and the 'everyday' to reflect on the incidental encounters that can shape development. This enables us to address the hidden and unexpected ways development subjectivities are negotiated and produced through international volunteering. By challenging established imaginaries of international volunteering in this way, we offer a critique of dominant ideas of what development is, who development actors are and when these can be seen as 'new'.

¹ Including 'Development Education: Responding to the Crisis', Developing Europeans' Engagement for the Eradication of Poverty Conference, May 2013; European Union Development Days, Warsaw, December 2011; European Congress on Global Education, Lisbon, September 2012; European Multi Stakeholder Group on Development Education meetings in Warsaw (December 2011), Lisbon (September 2012), Dublin (May 2013); Brussels (November 2013).

The first section interrogates the Northern geographies of volunteering and includes an analysis of the factors that have shaped the re-imagining of volunteering in recent times. The second section focuses on the persistence of these geographies and examines the different investor interests that have helped sustain them. Both these sections draw on interview data with stakeholders engaged in overseeing international volunteering at a range of levels in order to illustrate the arguments. Next the paper moves on to develop a framework for de-centring the Northern geography of international volunteering. We draw across and analyse data collected as part of a range of research projects and engagements with international volunteering². We make extensive use of qualitative material to flesh out the nuances of our framework and develop a postcolonial approach that emphasises mundane and incidental encounters with development.

A ‘Northern’ Geography of International volunteering

International volunteering and its facilitating processes have only recently received systematic scholarly attention. Initially subsumed within more generic fields like tourism (Wearing, 2001) and education (e.g. Heald, 2003, Wade, 2000), more specific research emerged from the mid 2000s addressing the relationship between globalisation and international service (Lewis 2006), the commodification of international volunteering and its use as a form of capital (Jones, 2005, Jones, 2008, Jones, 2011, Simpson, 2005) and international volunteering’s role in business development and Corporate Social Responsibility (Hills and Mahmud, 2007). More recently research has focused more explicitly on citizenship, with Lorimer’s (2010) work on environmental citizenship and ours and, Rovisco’s and Snee’s analysis of the relationship between international volunteering and

² In particular we draw on a UK government research council project on young UK evangelical Christians’ volunteering in Latin America (AHRC project ‘Youth transitions, international volunteering and religious transformations: the experiences of young evangelical Christians in Latin America’ AH/G016461/1; A collaborative project with Peter Hopkins [Principle Investigator] and Elizabeth Olson), centred on qualitative interviews with sector stakeholders, volunteers (before and after departure), and on reflective diaries kept by volunteers whilst overseas). We also draw on research on conservation volunteers in South Africa. This focused on a cheetah conservation project and involved interviews in South Africa with European volunteers, a national paid volunteer manager who was an ex volunteer and an interview in the UK with two long term British volunteers who reside part of the year in South Africa in 2010. We also draw on research on intermediate NGOs in South India, and on our experience of a research partnership with the international development NGO, Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) on diaspora volunteering and Baillie Smith’s experience of working with volunteer hosting NGOs in South India.

cosmopolitan citizenship (Snee, 2013, Baillie Smith et al., 2013, Rovisco, 2009). But with some exceptions (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011; Georgeou, 2012), there has been limited research on the relationship between international volunteering and development. Research on the ways international volunteering relates to the rise of other ‘new’ development actors as they disrupt established imaginaries of rich and poor also remains limited.

The limited interrogation of the complex relationships between international volunteering and development reflect the popular and policy constructions of volunteering in terms of the benefits to the volunteer and the ways development scholarship has been historically defined. Rooted in colonialism, development scholarship has been increasingly associated with the institutional practices of development and associated and aid framed interventions, with the emphasis on how encounters with development construct specific categories and targets for poverty alleviation (e.g. Escobar, 1995). Building on such approaches, scholars have examined the mobilisation of these identities in a range of contexts from, for example, the indigenous Andes (Andolina et al., 2009) to the rural grassroots in India (Kapoor, 2005). Work has also explored these identities in relation to competing forms of cosmopolitan politics, and the ways mobilities, commitments to universals and openness to difference shape development theory and practice. There is also a growing body of research around development and cosmopolitanism, characterised by a separation of work on development and universal commitments, (through issues such as human rights (e.g. Pogge, 2002)) on the one hand, and attention to subaltern cosmopolitanism on the other (e.g. Kothari, 2008, Gidwani, 2006, Baillie Smith and Jenkins, 2012). But significantly, there remains limited work that moves beyond the spatialising of development along North/South lines, nor that steps outside the confines of the development industry and its ‘beneficiaries’.

Until very recently, the engagements of Northern citizens in development, and the framing of their engagement, remained marginal within much development research (Baillie Smith, 2013). It is seldom considered in analyses of dominant understandings of what constitutes development practice and where it is spatially located or in debates on the allocation of development budget support. However, there is a growing literature that examines the diverse range of practices that shape encounters between UK citizens and development, connecting development to modes of cosmopolitan citizenship in the North. This includes research on efforts to popularise and make development ‘sexy’ (Cameron and Haanstra, 2008) through events such as Make Poverty History and the particular modes of citizenship this has

produced (Biccum, 2007, Sireau, 2009). The fundraising activities of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) which dominate public engagement in development have been subjected to long standing analysis (Arnold, 1988, Smith, 2004a) as they convey much critiqued geographies of the South that foster transactional forms of citizenship through donations and child/project sponsorship schemes (Baillie Smith, 2008, Chandoke, 2002), framing the agency of Southern citizens in certain ways (Kelsall and Mercer, 2003). However, this research has been dominated by work on representations, aid polling and critiques of NGO practice, meaning there has been limited work on the ways citizens – individually and collectively – negotiate changing development imaginaries or their relationships to new development actors.

Questions about the impacts of volunteering on development on the ground in the South have also shaped Northern re-imaginings of international volunteering in a number of ways. There has been a growing popular critique of the practice, evidenced in the recent ‘gap yah’ video widely viewed through youtube (VM Productions and Unexpected Outcomes, 2010), which presents a parody of the rich gap year student. On the other hand, participants in the new international volunteering and gap year landscape are also increasingly producing critical scholarship on the topic themselves, as evidenced by the high number of undergraduate and masters dissertations in the field as well as VSO’s ‘Valuing Volunteering’ project centred on volunteers as researchers (VSO, 2013). Much of this work is of a reflexive nature, emphasising that the volunteers often learn and gain most from the experience. Such awareness chimes with the increasing emphasis from diverse stakeholders in the sector on their capacity to develop volunteers whose influence on UK citizenship and global equity emerge on their return as much as during their stay overseas. This increasingly includes a wider demographic with international volunteering in the UK being shaped by the early-retirement, career sabbatical and voluntary redundancy packages that have been part of public and private sector strategies for coping with recession (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011). There is also a growing move to link volunteering to the achievement of the MDGs, particularly where this macro development policy objective is made a condition of donor support. This coming together of factors has meant the Northern volunteer experience has dominated research to date. This has provided an increasingly rich set of data on how volunteers understand their experiences in terms, for example, of global work (Jones, 2008) and also for some as part of a faith journey (Baillie Smith et al 2013; Brickell 2013; Hopkins et al. 2010). Work has also explored how Northern volunteers’ practices link to geographies

of ‘care’ and responsibility as people aim to ‘do good’ (e.g. Sin, 2010). A growing body of work explores volunteer tourism and short term placements (e.g. Palacios, 2010, Brown, 2005, Lyons et al., 2012) while other work explores the ways in which employers and recruitment agencies view the experiences of Northern volunteers in an increasingly global job market (Jones, 2011). There is also a developing body of work on the relationship between international volunteering and ‘global’ citizenship (e.g. Baillie Smith et al. 2013; Lyons et al., 2012; Lough and McBride, 2013).

Despite the breadth of this work, a focus on the Northern volunteer experience produces a partial geography. Within this, the Northern volunteer has been privileged as the principal actor, the one whose experiences matter and whose agency is engaged with, if critically. This is not to deny research on Southern perceptions of volunteers (e.g. Sin, 2010), but this can also produce a focus on perceptions of the Northern volunteer by the Southern actors. Underlying this is a conceptual and methodological emphasis on the individual, reproducing a vision of international volunteering rooted in discourses of neoliberal professionalisation and citizenship. There is also an emphasis, including in our own work, on ‘before’ and ‘after’ analyses which are defined by the Northern individual and sending organisation’s temporal perspective. This timeline reflects a focus on the changes to the Northern individual rather than the host communities and their often sustained hosting of volunteers over time. This bias in part reflects the fact that research has tended to engage with sending rather than hosting organisations when exploring how international volunteering is produced. In this way research becomes focused on Northern mobilities and their effects, as opposed to the multiple mobilities and ‘fixings’ that international volunteering produces as it works to particular imaginaries of rich and poor.

Such an emphasis on Northern individuals, sending organisations and mobilities has produced limited engagement with the wider policy framings of international volunteering and development, and how it connects with broader agendas around citizenship. As a result, scholarship has been tied to formal volunteering processes managed by the types of Northern organisations that register in popular understandings of the ‘gap year’ and international volunteering. This then excludes informal international volunteering activity, such as through faith-based institutions like churches and mosques or personal family and friendship ties including those of diaspora communities. It also limits our understanding to programmed encounters and engagements where volunteers’ experiences and practices are managed and

circumscribed by codified systems for project management and health and safety. As a member of a faith based NGO that supports youth volunteering put it:

“Safety and security is our life blood because as soon as one of those things go then they haven’t got anything left and I think that’s what the benefit of being part of [this organisation] is because we’ve got all this back up and support, we’ve got a 24 hour phone, we’ve got an insurance company that would do singing and dancing stuff for us but we’ve also got access to the international group and the security back up there is although we’ve had instances which have happened we have always contained them really well because we have a clear understanding of what to do and the team have a clear understanding of what they can and can’t do.”

Consequently, little work has located international volunteering within an understanding of the power relationships through which it is practised and its meanings generated, with limited attention to the co-production of citizenship in Southern settings, where local volunteers, professionals and activists work with international volunteers. Addressing such an agenda first requires us to understand why the dominant Northern geography of volunteering has been so persistent and difficult to shift in recent years.

Investors in Northern geographies of international volunteering

The Northern geography of international volunteering is not accidental, but reflects significant investments in its institutions, effects and imaginaries. Whilst NGOs and religious organisations are perhaps the best known facilitators of international volunteering, volunteering has become framed and performed in increasingly global ways and diverse institutional spaces as new partnership have been formed. For example, VSO, the leading UK international volunteering NGO not only works with NGOs, the state and others in the South, but also with a range of Northern public and corporate institutions (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011). International volunteering has become a vibrant and diverse sector, playing a key role in UK government attempts to construct new forms of citizenship premised on active engagement in civil society organisations and spaces over the last few years. The growing profile and symbolic significance of international volunteering can be seen in Barack Obama’s public commitment, expressed during his first UK state visit in May 2011, that the

respective UK and US state supported organisations, VSO and Peace Corps, were to cooperate more closely. Through this, international volunteering becomes part of processes of global diplomacy, an expression of what Nye (2004) describe as ‘soft power’ in international politics, its high public profile providing a means to perform state commitments to global ‘humanity’ and ‘doing good’, underscoring ideas of particular countries as good global citizens.

Historically imagined as a form of ‘charity’, recent manifestations of international volunteering in the UK have often relied on a rhetoric that balances collective social responsibility to development in a post-colonial world with individual CV-building for labour competitiveness. This can be linked to the on-going commercialisation of the gap year (Simpson, 2004) and the ways youth travel, and more recently, post-retirement travel, have become important markets in their own right where short-term volunteering placements are offered on a professionalised basis alongside holiday programmes. ‘Doing good’ is facilitated by profit making actors weaving together discourses of CV enhancement, exploration and ‘charity’ to promote their product. These new and shifting international volunteering actors and imaginaries interweave with more established development and volunteering practices. For example, our research has shown how short-term faith-based mission is being re-imagined as volunteering, bringing ‘new’ actors into development discourses through the re-branding of long established missionary practice (Baillie Smith et al., 2013). One faith-based volunteer manager explained how the wider culture of the gap year influences the volunteer demographic in the organisation he works for:

“I think it’s fair to say it has been an influence ... [the] gap year culture [has] to some degree moulded it. There is nothing for example that says [names his organisation’s volunteer programme] has to be young people but naturally it does become [that]. It’s that keenness to try and introduce younger people to mission. What might [once] have started off as missionaries for [the] longer term[now] people want to go for shorter times and test the water so to speak rather than jump on a boat and see what happens. That’s my impression anyway.”

These processes of diversification, embedding in state policy, corporate promotion and connection to wider imaginaries of charity, citizenship and professional development, reflect significant investments in the Northern volunteer and underscore the Northern geography of volunteering.

Whilst state support for international volunteering organisations is not new, nor is it confined to the UK or US, state investments in international volunteering have changed over time. In the US, international volunteering has at times been framed in terms of promoting international understanding and as a feature of US foreign policy. In Ireland, the Minister of State for Trade and Development recently announced a new Irish Aid Volunteering Initiative as part of the country's new Policy for International Development – One World, One Future – placing particular emphasis on 'mature' volunteers:

Given the recent increase in early retirements in the public sector I believe there is huge potential, in particular, to attract interest from more mature volunteers who have a unique range of skills and experience that can be shared overseas” (Costello, J.D. 2013).

Here, we can see how the state's scaling back of the public sector comes together with state aid policy through international volunteering. In the UK, originally rooted in ideas of post-imperial technical assistance and 'development', state support for international volunteering has reflected changing UK government understandings of rights and responsibilities in a global and post-imperial context, playing a role in promoting a particular vision of active (global) citizenship for British citizens. Under New Labour, their international volunteering initiative for young people, Platform2, specifically sought to promote social inclusion and foster understanding between different UK communities in a post 9/11 world. It also played a role in delivering the Department for International Development's new 'development awareness' strategy, drawing on VSO ideas and practices to work with returned volunteers to raise awareness and educate about international development (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011). In this context, 'development' and 'charity', at least in terms of formal marketing and promotion, became less significant. The change of government ushered in a new initiative, 'International Citizen Service' (ICS), launched in April 2012, whose title echoes a military 'national service' in which 'giving' and making sacrifices for one's country are foregrounded. As the Prime Minister commented at his party conference, the scheme is intended to '*Give thousands of our young people, those who couldn't otherwise afford it, the chance to see the world and serve others*' (David Cameron speech to the Conservative party conference, October 2010). This reveals the significant rhetorical investment being made in international volunteering, with its inclusion in a key speech and role in demarcating government vision and identity. It highlights a weaving together of ideas of inclusion and 'doing good', paralleling the commercialised 'voluntourism' sector which claims to be able

to meld adventure and short term pleasure seeking with contributions to poverty eradication. This vision again connects international volunteering to discourses of inclusion, being means tested and free to families with incomes under £25,000 per annum. ICS in the UK can also be seen as part of wider political investment in changing ideas of civil society, particularly under the 'Big Society' banner. A recent thinktank report on ICS took the title 'The Big Society without borders' (Birdwell, 2011) locating it within a broader set of debates and "policy speed-up" around ideas of civil society, voluntarism and "discourses (of fairness, intergenerational justice, well-being, responsibility)" (Barnett et al., 2011).

The engagement of corporate actors, the recent credit crunch and processes of neoliberal professionalisation further underpin a Northern geography of international volunteering. International volunteers are supported as part of the enhancement of corporate workforces, as well as fitting into ideas of social responsibility. To facilitate international volunteering as corporate social responsibility and reflecting its significance, private sector actors have emerged as brokering and enabling organisations, themselves then generating profit from international volunteering. Jones who has explored how we can understand international volunteering as a form of 'global work', has highlighted its role within processes of corporate recruitment (Jones, 2008). Central to these emergent practices are the ways international volunteering is seen as 'CV enhancing', as illustrated in the following quotation from a corporate actor listed on the website of Raleigh International, a leading organiser of volunteering opportunities for young people:

When we see on someone's CV that they've worked with Raleigh, we always get more interested. The people at Innocent [the employing company] who have previously done Raleigh expeditions have greater confidence, enthusiasm and a belief in what can be achieved that motivates both themselves and others around them. When I am recruiting I am looking for something special in people and that is what they get from Raleigh: the gene for ingenuity. Richard Reed, co-founder of Innocent Drinks (Raleigh, 2011a).

This comment illustrates the meaning that corporate actors invest in international volunteering experience, something that is then reproduced as young people or the recently unemployed, seek volunteering opportunities overseas as part of strategies of becoming more employable. Throughout, the benefit of international volunteering is firmly embedded in the

enhancement it can offer the Northern volunteer, as the following comment also from the Raleigh website illustrates:

Taking some time out from full time education will give you breathing space and the chance to really think about what you want to do rather than rushing into a course or university that may not be right for you. What's more, using this time productively and doing something structured like volunteering overseas will give you a whole host of transferrable skills that not only prepare you for university but the world of work as well. According to the Association of Graduate Recruiters academic grades will get you so far, but make up only 20 percent of what employers are looking for with the other 80 percent being a mix of key competencies and soft skills (Raleigh, 2013)

Here, young people who may not have achieved the grades they required at school are encouraged to think about international volunteering as providing both 'time out' and skills enhancement. In this, the South is simultaneously a way of stepping out of the 'rat race', and ensuring one is well equipped to excel in that very race. Both comments highlight the ways in which a non corporate international volunteering actor is able to make use of particular ideas of skills, professional development and worth to market their opportunities. They also highlight the ways volunteers, sending agencies and wider societal actors including universities and corporations invest particular meaning and money in international volunteering and what it promises. Paradoxically, this identification of 'something special' that international volunteering offers, forms part of a wider marketing of international volunteering that ensures larger numbers can participate, ultimately undermining its claims for distinctiveness and advantage.

A final investment in a Northern geography of volunteering can be found in the ways it fixes geographies of development and citizenship in ways that resonate with established popular ideas of need, authority and responsibility. Conceptualisations of citizenship are built on particular notions of responsibility and civil society that express and are embedded in different geographical imaginations. At the heart of international volunteering is a vision of a linked and sometimes co-dependent, co-producing world, but one which nevertheless ascribes Northern volunteers with agency and influence to act into that space. This idea of international volunteering resonates with and sustains persistent public imaginaries of the South as places that are lacking or deficient in ways that Northern benevolence or charity can address (Smith, 2004b). Such Orientalist imaginaries are historically and culturally rooted,

working to sustain and fix established geopolitical orderings and identities. In this way, international volunteering is part of a history of ideas and imaginaries in which the North has significant investment tied to postcolonial and geopolitical ambitions. Its imaginaries also serve to enable the public legitimations of volunteers whose placement overseas becomes hard to justify on the basis of particular or relevant language or skills development. As one sector stakeholder commented in an interview as part of research on young Christians volunteering overseas:

“They spend their time digging a ditch, they haven’t got a lot of language so they want to do something practical, they do the basic work. They’re under a foreman from the place, so they’re told what to do, but you can’t justify that in terms of how to get a church hall built in Bolivia is sending a dozen people from Britain to dig a hole.”

In the context of an emergent geopolitics of aid and development in which volunteer destinations are also ‘rising powers’ with higher economic growth than volunteer sending countries, traditional and persuasive imaginaries of rich and poor, giver and receiver are needed to sustain a rationale for short term international volunteering in which volunteers’ skills may be limited or have little relevance to the setting they are visiting. India provides an interesting case to reflect on in this scenario. Historically a destination with a long tradition of UK volunteering dating back to the colonial period and particularly missionary endeavours, in recent years there has been wide exposure in the North to the socio-economic and cultural tensions associated with India’s contemporary development trajectory. An array of postcolonial, international award-winning films and books (e.g. *Slum Dog Millionaire* and *White Tiger*) have begun to shape popular global understandings of India and explain a context where despite extreme levels of poverty, rapid growth is turning it into a key economic player on the world stage. In 2012, as UK growth forecasts were downgraded to zero (August), the India country director of the World Bank, Roberto Zaghera, suggested in March that a growth rate of 10% is possible for India, rising from the current range of 6 – 7.5% (World Bank, 2012). Such an endorsement makes it a potentially important site for those seeking global CV credentials. In this way, established imaginaries of rich and poor and the ideas of employability that may frame participants’ motivations to volunteer in India become complicated by a changing geopolitics, with diverse and multiple citizenships being negotiated and produced through volunteers’ work and interactions within India.

Financial, cultural, political and emotional investments in a Northern geography of volunteering have produced a dominant set of policy debates and initiatives, as well as shaping scholarship. To date, the South and development have often been contextual rather than centre stage. In the next section, we outline a set of interventions that we argue can unsettle a Northern geography of volunteering, opening up spaces for more critical debate and understanding of international volunteering and new forms of development action.

De-centring a Northern geography of volunteering

In this section we critically reflect on how we look at international volunteering as a means of de-centring the Northern volunteer. As a counter to the exoticising of the South, and persistent deployment of colonial imaginaries in framing international volunteering, here we draw together a range of contemporary and theoretical debates from beyond development. In particular, we bring ideas of the incidental and the mundane into dialogue with notions of development. We point to a range of practices outside the aid industry such as individuals' unexpected encounters with the places, spaces and relationships of development through expanding global mobilities, package tourism in the South and/or interests in the global environment and conservation. Doing so enables us to identify a range of new development actors whose volunteering has largely been ignored by scholars and to problematize the ways in which development is conventionally approached and understood. This not only involves "shifting away from taking Europe, or the North more broadly, as the theoretical and normative reference point for theorizing about countries in the South" (McEwan, 2009: 252), but requires that we challenge the spatialising of development discourses and scholarship. Through this, we can focus attention on the ways in which development and subjectivities are co-produced across and between spaces in ways that change over time. Such a postcolonial approach also demands that we then look between the established spaces and places of development and beyond established ideas of who development actors are and how their careers form.

Northern based sending organisations and projects that are framed by established development imaginaries of rich and poor have dominated scholarship and policy debate. Our research on the interweaving genealogies of international volunteering and development (Baillie Smith and Laurie, 2011) highlights how development and aid modalities shape the institutional settings and global imaginaries that influence encounters with the spaces, places

and relationships of development. However, here we argue that building theorisations *only* from development can limit conceptualisation and obscure practices outside the aid industry that also affect the relationship between development and subjectivity. Focusing on development framed encounters generates understandings that remain rooted within the instrumental, professionalised and programmatic approaches shaped by dominant development discourses and practices. We would now argue that such development led approaches offer only a small part of the story, providing a conceptualisation of the relationship between development and subjectivity that ignores the complex and often contradictory roles of personal biographies, imaginaries, mobilities and identities of those from the South and the North as they come together incidentally. Such approaches sideline the ways these meetings may challenge and (re)construct encounters with development and shape subjectivity, with implications for how global inequalities are understood, embodied and acted upon as we elaborate below.

Incidental encounters with development

Whilst attention has been focused on the particular and programmed impacts volunteering can have on volunteers and on development, ‘incidental’ encounters with international development have been largely ignored; that is, the ways development is encountered outside contexts defined and framed by development or aid. This gap in knowledge results from the methodological and conceptual challenges of capturing ‘incidental’ encounters with development, particularly as it challenges the traditional focus on programmed interventions within development research. Such research has tended to be geographically bounded (Humble and Smith, 2007) and confined to specific topics or conducted in distinct sub-disciplines (Pollard et al., 2009, Vira and James, 2011). There has been little dialogue across these ‘silos’ and even less within a South-North context as research has tended to be ‘either’ / ‘or’. Together, these factors produce a narrowing intellectual gaze that has excluded encounters and engagements with development that are negotiated through individual biographies and everyday and mundane social practices.

International conservation volunteering highlights the significance of paying attention to the incidental ways development may be encountered, and what can flow from this. Research at a conservation site, a cheetah sanctuary in South Africa and with returnee volunteers in the UK, challenges the assumed spatialities of volunteering, supporting but also disrupting dominant discourses focused on the Northern volunteer. Fifteen years ago a successful commercial

enterprise donated land, water and electricity on its site to create the cheetah sanctuary. Over time this expanded and now also includes a wildlife centre. According to the young South African volunteer manager, the sanctuary relies heavily on a frequent supply of volunteers to deliver its outreach programme. This involves raising awareness about cheetahs as an endangered species through a visitors' centre where tourists can see and touch cheetahs and via an extensive education programme for local schools. At peak times volunteer numbers reach up to 15. International volunteers are recruited directly by the sanctuary through its website and a number of organisations in the UK and Germany also pay a fee for the sanctuary to host their volunteers. Volunteers are largely young Europeans and Australians, although a number of older volunteers and national volunteers also participate regularly.

Whilst conservation is arguably a form of development (Bebbington, 2004, Cowen and Shenton, 1996), it has not previously been conceptualised as brokering 'incidental' encounters with development even though people volunteer in destinations that are popularly framed by development imaginaries, which can include a particular focus on the wildlife over the inhabitants, as is the case in East Africa. Development and conservation are often written about separately (Brockington and Scholfield, 2010: 3), but despite some engagement with development debates in the conservation volunteering literature (Gray and Campbell, 2007, Raymond and Hall, 2008), and important interventions by Lorimer on environmental citizenship and "the material assemblages of human and nonhuman bodies, practices and affects" (Lorimer, 2010: 311), the incidental ways conservation actors, (activists, paid employees and local and international volunteers) encounter development and how this shapes the subjectivities of Northern and Southern actors is missing from existing scholarship.

Much empirical research highlights the persistence of established motifs of poverty rooted in media dominated public representations of poverty through ideas of charity and 'need'. In the cheetah project such motives shaped volunteer's reactions and responses to incidental encounters with development. When asked if she had seen much poverty, a young German volunteer reproduced 'poor but happy stereotypes' while feeling paralysed by those same representations.

"It was apparent in ... near the township, there are lots of people with no things. It's very sad. In our apartment there are other volunteers (German girls) and they work in the townships with kids. It's very nice to do this. I can't do this, I'm too

sad to see them and reflect on them. People in the apartment have become my friends they say the people are very friendly, open, welcoming and they have no things and lots of kids and they have no things and I can't help them."

Research focused on formal volunteering programmes fails to capture the spatiality of the sorts of everyday aspects of a volunteering expressed by an older British couple when, in response to a question about whether they do conservation volunteering in the UK, they talked about the different lives they lead in the UK and South Africa.

"No we are quite wrapped up in our lives here [UK]. I have my church commitments. I've always had my church commitments. [My wife] spends a lot of time now with the grandchildren. I like music so I do a bit of orchestra playing on the double bass. So I have my interests. We decided when we went to Africa we'd have a different life. So I do ... I go to church there, sometimes I go to the cathedral in Cape Town something like that but I don't want to get sucked in to the same sort of type of life that I have here, there. So that's one of the reasons we like to go to [the cheetah project] because it's like we have a life here and we have a life there."

The faith of the older British man may well be a factor in his volunteer work in both places but he decided that in South Africa this would not be in the institutionalised church setting that he was 'sucked into' in the UK but rather being elsewhere gave him the opportunity to be and do something new and different through another type of volunteering.

Research on young Christians volunteering in Latin America revealed that it was often the unexpected, the everyday and disruptive that proved the most transformative elements of volunteering (Baillie Smith et al., 2013), rather than planned activities and volunteering work. Furthermore, these experiences tended to be explored in personal diaries, rather than in interviews or through other public communication, further illustrating the need to look beyond the formal and the 'public' in exploring international volunteering. It is in the unexpected and everyday moments that the fixed geographies of giver and receiver are weakened, opening possibilities for the negotiation of roles in ways that problematize existing ideas of development and agency; reflexivity and self consciousness are mobilized through "surprising intrusions or dissident or competing performances" (Edensor, 2007: 202) rather than established patterns. As one volunteer commented in his diary:

“Dad and I tried to build a support for the water filter. You would think an architect and an engineer would be perfect for this job. We spent ages making it, adding supports and it still ended up quite unstable. One of the locals wandered over and built one in a matter of seconds. This instantly gave me masses of respect for him. It shows that it doesn’t matter how much Westernised training you’ve had and that these guys were more intelligent than us westerners often give them credit for.”

Here, the assumed utility of technical knowledge and inability to contribute or volunteer, unsettled ideas of ‘training’ and knowledge. Key in understanding this is paying attention to how particular events or experiences are made dissident by the particular ‘rationales’ that frame distinctive volunteering schemes and experiences – such as those that are faith-based or linked to corporate social responsibility or focused on global citizenship, or any combinations of these and others. We would argue that such rationales do not necessarily only fix what is dissident. Rather they also provide a ‘frame of contestation’ where ‘competing performances’, outside formal framings of expected development behaviours and anticipated development outcomes, can also become unsettling acts.

We can also see the ways development and volunteering can come together in accidental ways through the unplanned articulations of multiple policy domains in other contexts. For example, whilst India continues to be seen as an iconic volunteering destination with a long history of hosting UK volunteers, this can interact in unexpected ways with emerging development policy at the state rather than the national level, as the economic fortunes of the country and specific regions change. Recent fieldwork revealed how international volunteers with an advocacy NGO in Tamil Nadu had to be ‘concealed’ or redefined by the organisation’s director. He and others explained that the withdrawal of national funding for civil society organisations from Tamil Nadu (on the basis that it no longer requires assistance due to its recent economic growth) has resulted in growing unease about international visitors and increased state attention to their engagements with national civil society actors. In this example, we can see a contradiction between national policy on development and civil society in Tamil Nadu and the needs and actions of local NGOs on the ground. We can also see inconsistencies in the ways in which international volunteering is promoted in the global North, focusing on its ability to ‘do good’ and foster global citizenship, while in South India, alongside hosting student study visits, international volunteering is increasingly providing an important alternative income source for NGOs which have lost state and other donor support.

In this way, the commercialisation of volunteering is reproduced and embedded in the global South, as NGOs use it to fund their other on-going activities.

Mundane and ordinary

Writings on tourism as ‘mundane’ and ‘everyday’ are useful in examining Northern geographies international volunteering as they problematize the principal focus on the mobility of the international volunteer and on their visits to places that are seen as ‘other’ or ‘exotic’. Edensor for example argues that:

[the] penetration of the exotic into everyday lives and banal urban spaces, and the dense intertextual and interspatial resonances which resound between similarly themed and designed spaces have the effect of rendering the exotic mundane, diluting its power to confound normativity ... Tourism’s capacity to provide occasions for confronting and consuming otherness is further diluted by the sheer proliferation of occasions for leisure that are now available to increasing numbers of people (2007: 201).

Extending this analysis beyond tourism, below we explore how different mobilities are rendered everyday, mundane and ‘more than Northern’ by the proliferation of occasions that volunteering makes available to increasing numbers of people.

For many ‘gap year’ students, their overseas placement provides ‘time out’ to reflect on what they have in material terms and to see something more of the world. Nevertheless for many of these young people this has become part of an expected ritual, repeated each year by different cohorts attending particular schools whose make up reflects their wider capacity for mobility. For others who are perhaps older, and have lived in the UK for a long time, the motivation and experience is often different and more of an unusual event in their lives. This point is illustrated by the comments of a staff member in a leading faith-based development NGO that works through volunteer placements.

“I mean, they’re all definitely quite common things we get feeding back. Some people definitely, you know, just feel a lot more alive if they’ve had the chance to escape after many many years of living in quite nice but quite secluded rural England, or rural UK life, and to have their eyes opened to some of their [advantages]... And I think for some, as well, it’s actually getting over the mindset of, look at me, I’m healthy, wealthy and rich.”

While development encounters of this sort may be ‘out of the ordinary’ in the lives of many Northern volunteers, from the perspective of the host organisation, many of which are paid to take volunteers, their visits can become an onerous event, which takes them away from the everyday aspects of their development work. As the same staff workers explains:

“I think, whilst it’s always the wish of all of our teams to really integrate into the life and work of a project, inevitably, if you’re hosting a team for two weeks, for the host it does feel like an event, and a lot of their time is [taken up] ... Certainly a lot of their staff are connected with that visit while they’re there, taken up with the hosting and the time spent with that.”

As hosting often occurs quite frequently, this distraction can become routine in the life of an organisation and the communities they may work with. As a Canadian volunteer working in another project context elsewhere comments:

the kids were so used to these volunteers coming in and buying them gifts and that kind of being the way for them to. . . benefit off them. . . reinforcing [that] these people from abroad are the only ones who really give them stuff financially.
(Canadian volunteer, cited in Tiessen and Heron, 2012: 51)

Here, the presence of volunteers becomes normalised, as does their repeated performance of established ideas of giver and receiver.

Another account, however, that reverses established expectations about the differentiated mobilities of Northern and Southern development actors in volunteering, involves the older British couple who volunteer at the cheetah sanctuary. They own a house in South Africa and spend up to three months a year there, volunteering one day a week at the sanctuary. In an interview the husband recounts what Robinson (2006) would describe as an ‘ordinary’ development encounter:

“The manager and his wife came for dinner with us last year, simply because they’d heard we’d been on holiday to the Emirates and they wanted to see our pictures of Dubai and Abu Dhabi because they wanted to do that as holidays. So they came to our house (laughs) to talk about that. Of course we spent most of the time talking to them about cheetahs and their life and their house”.

There was nothing exceptional about this encounter – it was merely friends getting together to share a meal, but was nevertheless facilitated by the social relations of international volunteering in a development conservation setting.

These examples suggest that the mobilities afforded by international volunteering which are deemed so central to its impacts, need to be located within a more critical understanding of contemporary patterns of mobility. This is not to say that everyone has opportunities of transnational mobility, but that viewing international volunteering through the lens of a limited, time bounded, single one way North-South movement is inadequate. It fails to capture the very ordinary aspects of volunteering and tends to privilege accounts of the (young) Northern volunteer, while ignoring the very similar dynamics at work among volunteers in the South. This is particularly evident in debates on volunteering and CV building which have to date ignored the agency and subjectivity of Southern actors as they forge their own, often similar, career pathways, as we explore below.

Personal Transformation and CV building in the South

As noted earlier the experience of Northern volunteers has been increasingly framed in relation to CV building and professionalisation discourses. Examples from young volunteers in the Cheetah Sanctuary in South Africa illustrate this point well. A young German woman about to start a biology degree thought that a volunteer experience in a project with animals would be generally relevant to her studies, whereas for a young British woman the placement was directly related to the zoo keeping course she was undertaking in the UK. By contrast, another young German woman studying an unrelated course said she was interested in the placement because her grandfather had been a vet and she had holidayed extensively in East/South Africa with her parents. While initially it seemed there was no CV building element to her choice, both she and the other young German woman claimed that working in an environment where they could practice their English played an important role in their decision.

The conservation case study suggests that volunteering as work experience relating to particular career choices is also important for Southern development actors. The volunteer manager of the cheetah sanctuary said that a regular trickle of national volunteers seeking work experience relating to particular study programmes come through the system each year.

At the time of the interview, for example, there was a long-term national volunteer, working unpaid for a year, as part of her nature conservation programme at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in George, in South Cape.

While there is a general acceptance of the relationship between economic recession, careers and volunteering, this too has largely focused on the Northern volunteer as discussed above. Research describes how the recession often acts as a push factor, or in the case of an older British volunteer at the cheetah sanctuary, the recession was the context for accepting a longer unpaid sabbatical at the suggestion of his employer. He explained that his own preference had been to take a shorter period of unpaid leave:

“I’ve been working for such a long time, 5 years in my last company. It was high pressure and I wanted to take time out. I asked for 2 months sabbatical then they said take longer... Obviously they can’t keep jobs open... because of the job market at the moment they can’t guarantee ... I will keep in touch and see them when I get back”.

Despite the importance of recognising the ways in which a rapidly shifting economic climate shapes volunteering, to date most analyses have failed to extend the same perspective to volunteers from the South, despite the global realities of the current economic crisis. The volunteer manager, himself an ex volunteer, dropped out of university to take up his current fulltime paid position, explaining his career decisions in the context of a depressed economic development scenario in South Africa:

“[I am] turning 22 with lots of responsibilities (smiles). Obviously what I studied was not what I was interested in. Now I’m intending maybe to do a degree in field guiding... [My parents] were not keen when I was a volunteer. Now that I am earning a salary they are pleased, finding a job in this country... so many of my mum’s friends their kids don’t have jobs. So many people have degrees and don’t get jobs”.

Exploring the often complex stories of CV building through international volunteering echoes wider work in development studies about the ways in which diverse actors move through different volunteer and employment sectors to make development career. These range from ‘third sector’ workers in Bangladesh moving into state employment (Lewis, 2008) to

indigenous activists in the Andes finding paid jobs in public and NGO development institutions (Andolina et al., 2009).

Bringing these arguments together around the incidental, the mundane and CV building processes decentres the North and makes visible the potential mobilities and economies of solidarity that can emerge from the everyday development encounters forged through volunteering. The following quotation from the South African volunteer manager, referring to his own future life plans, illustrates this well:

“Here I have a five year plan. I don’t see this place as a stepping stone. It might work out if things work out. But if I can’t see how things can work out in the country then I have a European passport so maybe I’ll go to a zoo there. I have a lot of friends around the world now, especially when I was a volunteer and not their boss. If I ever have to go anywhere, I won’t have to pay!”

These sorts of findings chime with emerging work on diaspora volunteering (Thomas et al., 2013), where the informal ways in which churches or mosques encourage and sponsor young people to visit partner faith groups in the South also offer incidental development encounters. Participants do not necessarily name themselves as volunteers or their work as development and they may be visiting sites (e.g. Nigeria) that do not fit within the standard and often iconic volunteering destinations. However diaspora volunteers do often see themselves as a type of insider (Thomas et al., 2013), and like the older British couple who spend three months a year in South Africa, this distinguishes them from other more mainstream volunteers in their minds and allows them to forge different volunteering rhythms across space and time. As the British man who owns the house in South Africa explains:

“you’ve got different kinds of volunteers – you’ve got local volunteers. We would be local, we are local volunteers because we live in south Africa and we go and work for them and international volunteers are the students who go out and live in the club house and I think they get a small allowance. They are there 5 days out of 7 every when they are there. We certainly couldn’t do that. 1 day a week is enough for me because it’s hard work being with the cheetahs, in the heat and all that.”

To summarise, while structural inequalities mediate encounters with development, shaping who can travel and what seems ‘everyday’ and ‘mundane’, it is important that particular mobilities are not conflated with acting or being different.

Conclusion

In this paper we have concentrated on the profile of international volunteers as an example of one of a number of new development actors emerging in response to shifting global economic and political circumstances and related changes in the understanding and delivery of international development. We have argued that much international volunteering research focuses only on the international volunteers and their sending organisations, without locating volunteering practices in diverse contexts in the South and within the global relationships in which they occur. Currently we therefore have an inadequate conceptual base from which to analyse international volunteering, especially in the present climate. Reflecting emerging calls for “hybrid economic/development intellectual ‘trading zones’” (Vira and James, 2011, Barnes and Sheppard, 2010) and postcolonial envisaging of economic geographies (Pollard et al., 2009), we have drawn attention to the need for the interrogation of interwoven economic, political and social constructions of subjectivity present in incidental development encounters through volunteering.

Our paper highlights the uneven ways international volunteering is constituted by a range of actors engaged by international volunteering practices. It reveals the importance of including Northern alongside local volunteers, families, community members and staff in accounts of international volunteering. In this way, we have tried to construct a geography of international volunteering across biographies, distance, inequality and national and international narratives of citizenship. To do this we focused attention on subjectivity as a multi-layered process constructed in overlapping sites in order to address how volunteering and development are embodied, understood and practised in international settings. Such an approach moves beyond a reading of global citizenship, mobility and development as they are embodied in Northern international volunteers, to an engagement with the ways in which dynamics, tensions and imaginaries of development, citizenship and recession are embodied in the multiple encounters, experiences and interactions of international volunteers, sending and host organisation staff, national volunteers and community members in the South.

We have stressed the need to significantly enhance understandings of international volunteering by locating it within the changing geopolitics of aid, highlighting the importance of questions such as: What happens to volunteering in countries that are poor as well as those moving from being aid recipients to becoming new donors? How are international volunteering and volunteers themselves negotiating changing geopolitical and economic imaginaries and reconfiguring citizenship and development? Such an agenda problematises the boundaries of knowledge through which notions of subjectivity and development are constituted, enabling theorisation beyond historically and colonially rooted geographies of international volunteering.

By removing our readings of the encounters produced by volunteers from established spatial imaginaries and the organisational modalities of development, we can begin to explore what is *co-produced* through international volunteering. Rather than think of international volunteers as development actors, we can understand diverse volunteering processes as producing multiple development actors in expected and unexpected ways. Methodologically this perspective enables us to place our approach towards specific citizenship initiatives and languages (such as in the UK setting, ‘the Big Society’ and ‘muscular liberalism’) within the context of longer term histories, in which charity has been the dominant narrative, and to capture how international volunteering’s “specific sites of citizenship formation are connected with and are inseparable from other sites, discourses, and values” (Staeheli, 2011: 396). This is particularly important in the context of changing geopolitics, and the ways volunteers may pay for opportunities to volunteer in particular settings, and where those settings may be experiencing significant periods of economic growth and rising power. In the context of a changing geopolitics of aid and economic growth both Southern and Northern actors consume colonial, postcolonial as well as more progressive global development imaginaries, albeit often in different ways.

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