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# **Rethinking Volunteering and Cosmopolitanism: Beyond Individual Mobilities and Personal Transformations**

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# **Rethinking Volunteering and Cosmopolitanism: Beyond Individual Mobilities and Personal Transformations**

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## **Abstract**

In this paper we use assemblage thinking to offer a new interrogation of the relationalities of volunteering and development and to revisit volunteering's relationship to cosmopolitanism. Recent debates about the rise of new actors in development cooperation have seen a growing interest in the geopolitical significance of volunteers and their contribution to development. Research has addressed the ways international volunteering can shape cosmopolitan subjectivities, whilst claims for volunteering's universality are a key feature of global development policy. However, we argue that existing approaches to volunteering, cosmopolitanism and development remain contained by established development imaginaries and their ascription of agency, authority and expertise to actors from the global North. We use the idea of the assemblage, and data from two research projects, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent's (IFRC) Global Review on Volunteering, and a doctoral research project on diaspora volunteering, to explore the constitution of what volunteering is within and between places. Through this, we identify alternative sites for interrogating the capacity of volunteering to challenge established ideas of agency, care and responsibility in development.

**Key Words:** Volunteering, Cosmopolitanism, Development, Assemblage, Mobilities, Diaspora, Migration, Governance

## **Introduction**

Recent debates around the rise of new actors in development cooperation have led to a growing interest in the geopolitical significance of volunteers and their contribution to development (Baillie Smith, Laurie, and Griffiths 2018, Banks and Hulme 2014, Gore 2013). Their distribution and activities across and within particular geopolitical boundaries positions volunteers within global diplomacy as well as the changing geographies and politics of aid and development cooperation (Baillie Smith and Laurie 2011, Georgeou and Engel 2011, Schech et al. 2015). For example, the UK government's International Citizen Service (ICS) programme promotes particular visions of global citizenship for young people (Griffiths 2017) through volunteering in the global South in partnership with national volunteers, marrying a neoliberal and colonial imaginary of development, while also recognising the agency of the global South and the value of collaboration. In a similar vein, South Korea, a new Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donor, is now one of the largest senders of volunteers overseas in Asia (Brassard, Sherraden, and Lough 2010), and international volunteer allocations and partnerships are an important feature of aid diplomacy. For global volunteer-engaging organisations too, volunteers play central roles in debates around the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): both United Nations Volunteers (UNV) and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) cite volunteers as key actors in achieving the SDGs (Burns 2014, Hazeldine and Baillie Smith 2015).

Reflecting these geopolitical framings, cosmopolitanism has played a growing role both in scholarship on development and on volunteering's relationship to development (Rovisco 2009, Snee 2013, Baillie Smith et al. 2013). Deriving broadly from a commitment to 'think and feel beyond the nation' and an 'openness to difference', cosmopolitan thinking has seen a resurgence since the late 1990s. Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen's (2002) much cited typology illustrates the diversity of cosmopolitanisms that this produces, being variously understood as a socio-cultural condition; a philosophy or world view; a political project of transnational institutions; a political project of multiple subjects; and an attitude or disposition and a practice or competence. Development as a post-war project of amelioration via intervention in the 'Third World' (Hart 2001), can be mapped onto some key features of cosmopolitan thinking; it appeals to the ideal of thinking and feeling beyond the nation and demands attitudes, practices and institutions framed more by a concern with a global humanity than that contained within the nation state. However, some articulations of cosmopolitanism have themselves been critiqued as colonial and very much 'from somewhere' despite claims to universality and being from nowhere (Van der Veer 2002). Iterations based on elite mobilities and normative goals have been contrasted to subaltern and strategic forms of openness to difference necessitated by marginality and exclusion (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2012, Gidwani 2006, Kothari 2008).

Despite rhetorics and evocations of solidarity, suggesting a foundation in transnational political relationships (Featherstone 2012) with the marginalised in common cause, the reality of development has often been one of care for the poor expressed through layers

of colonial history, geopolitical interests and a desire for emotional fulfilment through giving. Through this, a dominant development imaginary has been constructed in which the South is a place to which things are done, and the North is a place from which action emanates; agency, authority and responsibility are ascribed and fixed to particular places and its constituents, with the self of the global North remaining relatively immutable in the process of transforming the other of the global South<sup>1</sup>. Through a (mostly critical) focus on international volunteering from global North to global South, research on volunteering and development has largely remained contained by this imaginary, notwithstanding some recent exceptions (Brown and Prince 2016, Baillie Smith, Laurie, and Griffiths 2018). For example, work on international volunteer tourism has particularly drawn upon non-representational theory (Everingham 2016) and affect (Crossley 2012, Griffiths 2014) to challenge these framings. Cheung Judge (Cheung Judge 2017, 264) has challenged the ‘homogenising figure of the “privileged volunteer”’ through her focus on class, Laurie and Baillie Smith (2018) have suggested more flattened topographies of volunteering scholarship, and Baillie Smith et al. (2018) have focused attention on South-South international volunteering - volunteering within the global South by people from the South. However, the focus on the mobility of international volunteers has bolstered established dominant development imaginaries of agency and responsibility, and as we argue below, parochialises forms of volunteering that are not apparently as ‘international’.

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<sup>1</sup> The recent hardening of policy framings of aid and development in terms of national self-interest (DFID 2015 UK Aid: tackling global challenges in the national interest, London: DfID) offers a particularly stark illustration of this.

Towards a counter to such an imaginary of development, we bring together cosmopolitanism and the idea of volunteering as assemblage to explore data on diaspora volunteering, and data from an International Federation of Red Cross and Crescent (IFRC) review of global trends and challenges in volunteering. Doing so enables us to foreground how volunteering is constituted in a particular place and time through a complex set of ‘contested relationalities’ (Featherstone 2012) across scales and over time that are elided by an emphasis on international volunteer mobilities and encounters. While an understanding of volunteering as service delivery fixes meanings of volunteering within the rationalities of development programming, our approach attempts to foreground volunteering as a practice that is continually emerging and changing over time. In foregrounding the relationalities and processes of contestation that constitute volunteering, and conceptualising it as always emergent and uncertain, we are able to identify where configurations of volunteering offer the potential to destabilise established development imaginaries and the ordering and fixing of a world into carers and cared for.

To do this, we particularly draw on Delanty’s (2006) idea of the cosmopolitan imagination, which emphasises processes of mutual transformation as being central to a cosmopolitan order. This then stands in opposition to both development’s historical focus on the transformation of the global South ‘other’ whilst the ‘self’ remains unchanged and absent, or the framing of international volunteering as being as much about changing the volunteer by inculcating forms of global citizenship or the development of skills for the global marketplace. Drawing together Delanty’s idea of the

cosmopolitan imagination and Hannerz's (2006) identification of the potential for political possibilities to unfold from cultural openness provides a framework for conceptualising the encounters and contestations illuminated by exploring volunteering as an assemblage.

We develop the idea of volunteering as assemblage (Burrai, Mostafanezhad, and Hannam 2016, Collier and Ong 2005, McFarlane 2009, 2011) to explore how it unfolds and emerges across social-spatial relations. Assemblage thinking has often been used to 'emphasise emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy, and connects to a wider redefinition of the socio-spatial in terms of the composition of diverse elements into some form of provisional socio-spatial formation' (Anderson and McFarlane 2011, 123). This thinking emphasises the coming together and dispersions that constitute a particular formation in a particular moment, as well as their breaking apart or reconfiguration. This emphasis on both spatiality and temporality (McFarlane 2009, 562) helps us to destabilise ideas of volunteering that 'fix' volunteers within particular geographies, or which locate it within the time constraints of development project programme (Laurie and Baillie Smith 2018). In using assemblage thinking, rather than exploring its effects or its rationales and linking these to particular geopolitical agendas, such as fostering global citizenship, we focus on how volunteering is socially and spatially constituted in particular moments. Through this, we challenge the idea of the 'international' (or national/local) in languages of volunteering, highlighting how all volunteering is intrinsically constituted through assemblages of bodies, ideas, languages, histories and power relations that may emerge through and across national borders. By foregrounding

the ‘emergent and processual’ (McFarlane 2009, 561), assemblage thinking provides an analytical lens to revisit established claims for what volunteering delivers, and instead prioritises how it unfolds. However, we remain attentive to the kinds of political possibilities this holds. In his discussion of assemblage and articulation, Featherstone (2011, 140) notes the importance of attention to the ways ‘social/political processes are generated through relations between sites, rather than configured through “internal relations”’ in sites’. Drawing on Delanty’s (2006) idea of the cosmopolitan imagination, this directs our attention to the ways the relations that constitute volunteering across space and time open up possibilities for more cosmopolitan iterations of development in which the established geopolitical orderings of care and solidarity that define much current volunteering and development thinking are de-stabilised.

The paper proceeds in 3 main sections. In section 1, we explore academic literatures on volunteering, cosmopolitanism and development. In section 2, we examine claims for volunteering’s universalism within volunteering and development policy discourses. In section 3, we explore the idea of volunteering as assemblage through three lenses: volunteering governance; volunteering and migration; international diaspora volunteering. We show that, rather than fixing volunteering in specific places or essentialising it in terms of certain universal values, volunteering needs to be understood as a relational and contingent process between and across sites, constituted by multiple collectivities, institutions, mobilities and actors (Burrai, Mostafanezhad, and Hannam 2016, Collier and Ong 2005, McFarlane and Anderson 2011). This enables us to understand volunteering as fluid and emergent, and in terms of ‘becoming together’

(McFarlane 2011, 219) over time and between places and spaces, providing a new lens on the relationships between volunteering and cosmopolitanism.

### **Volunteering, Cosmopolitanism and Development**

Academic literature on volunteering has offered various assessments of the degree to which international volunteering can be defined as cosmopolitan, and explored what kinds of cosmopolitanism different forms of volunteering express. This has included work on the kinds of partnerships it opens up (Schech et al. 2015), how volunteering shapes more global subjectivities (Baillie Smith et al. 2013) and its connection with universal values (Rovisco 2009). In this section we critically explore some of the ways volunteering and cosmopolitanism have been characterised, and argue that much of it remains contained by established development imaginaries, their constructions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ and ascriptions of agency and authority to particular places, subjectivities and mobilities. Consequently, too narrow a lens is being deployed to interrogate how and where volunteering might offer new configurations of development, agency and authority.

Governmental agencies, International NGOs (INGOs) and for-profit operators increasingly link volunteering and engagement in development to processes of both personal and social transformation. Central to these claims is the impact of encounters with previously ‘distant strangers’, across cultural, economic, geographical and social divides, and volunteers’ demonstration of care and solidarity beyond borders. This then fits with Hannerz’s (2006) commentary on the ways encounters with others across

cultural difference can translate into cosmopolitan political subjectivities orientated around issues of justice and inequality. International volunteering, therefore, as it is promoted in the global North, can be seen as embodying values central to cosmopolitanism (Lyons 2012). Scholarship has focused critical attention on the kinds of citizenships that emerge, emphasising the degree to which they reflect and contest neoliberal and/or colonial subjectivities (Georgeou 2012, Griffiths 2017, Mostafanezhad 2013). For example, Griffiths (2017) has explored how state imaginaries of the role of the UK in global development shape the kinds of citizenship promoted – and contested – in the UK government sponsored International Citizen Service programme. Relatedly, Cheung Judge (2017, 173) has explored the classed experiences of volunteer tourists and the ways relations across difference through volunteering are ‘enfolded in particular social dynamics’. Baillie Smith et al. (2013) have explored the kinds of cosmopolitanism fostered by faith-based international volunteering and mission, identifying a performed cosmopolitanism that flattens inequality in order to promote a sense of shared humanity.

A recurring theme – both implicit and explicit – in the literatures is the ways that international volunteering can equip participants in the global workplace (Jones 2011). This calls forth a strategic cosmopolitanism in which volunteering’s inter-cultural encounters might furnish individuals – and their future employers – with the competencies and skills to participate in and benefit from global capital’s transcendence of national borders (Jones 2011). From this perspective, international volunteering is reduced to a global corporate training ground in which volunteering’s cosmopolitanism is more akin to a ‘banal’ cosmopolitanism (Beck 2006) that simply describes a more

globally interconnected world, rather than working towards a more just one. We can also understand the strategic development of competencies in terms of a 'colonial cosmopolitanism' of control over (Van der Veer 2002), where the process of encounter and familiarity is part of enabling the exercise of power.

In current volunteering debates, the transnational mobility of international volunteers is foregrounded. This is a further area where 'banal' (or worse) qualifications to cosmopolitanism come to light. Through a focus on the mobilities of volunteers from the global North, the cosmopolitan subjectivities promised by volunteering have been largely confined to mobile elites able to cross borders and access privileged forms of encounter with others. Geography scholars have particularly highlighted the importance of engaging with 'non-elite' cosmopolitanism, offering a counter to accounts that focus on encounters with difference that are the chosen privilege of often mobile elites (Cheung Judge 2017). For example, Kothari (2008) has explored the non-elite cosmopolitanism of migrants in Barcelona, while Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2012) have analysed the strategic cosmopolitanism of South Indian NGO activists as they negotiate global civil society. What these accounts highlight is a tendency to overlook the journeys across difference within smaller or alternative spatial scales that volunteering of different kinds may enable, as well as those that do not fit within the short and prescribed timeframes of development projects. The non-elite cosmopolitanisms of national, local, diaspora or forcibly displaced volunteers are often absent, or viewed through the prism of their experiences of and encounters with international volunteers (Baillie Smith et al. 2016, Sin 2010). The obvious implication here is the reproduction of the historical

conflation of cosmopolitanism with international mobility; as Schiller et al. (2011, 404) argue, while transnational mobilities and connections may provide possibilities for cosmopolitanism, mobility is not necessarily cosmopolitan, and nor does cosmopolitanism require mobility.

As scholarship engages with locally differentiated accounts of civil society and citizenship, the label of ‘volunteer’ also seems able to travel unchanged and unhindered by international and other borders when allied to international volunteering. Central to building our argument at this stage is to flag that scholarly accounts have overwhelmingly focused on cosmopolitan international volunteers, rather than volunteering and cosmopolitanism. This reflects a preoccupation with individuals and with volunteering as an individual and time-constrained act, something that emerges from a largely Western and increasingly neoliberal concept of the volunteer, and which does not necessarily fit contexts where volunteering emerges through more collective forms of social organisation and care-giving (Hazeldine and Baillie Smith 2015). Some scholars have recently drawn attention to the forms and practices of politics that fall in between or happen against neoliberal logics, such as Griffiths’s (2014) work on affect, and Laurie and Baillie Smith’s work (2018) on happenstance. But overall, there has been less attention to the relationalities through which all forms of volunteering emerge and change over time, nor how these might create more cosmopolitan spaces for contesting and challenging existing configurations of care and solidarity.

## **Methodology**

The paper draws on data from two research projects: the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies' (IFRC) Global Review on Volunteering (Hazeldine and Baillie Smith 2015) carried out in 158 countries; collaborative research on diaspora volunteering in Nepal and Nigeria. The IFRC study employed qualitative interviews to gather the voices and perspectives of almost 600 volunteer managers and volunteers from the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, as well as wider stakeholders involved in policy and strategy roles relating to volunteering, humanitarianism and development. The Review explored the challenges of volunteering in the context of multiple and increasingly interlinked local and global social and economic changes, and the ways these are shaping what volunteering means in different contexts. The study on diaspora volunteering explored the ways members of the Nigerian and Nepalese diaspora communities in the UK volunteer in their countries of origin, and analysed their potential contributions to homeland development. The research employed semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to collect data from 25 diaspora volunteers, 5 diaspora charities/ associations in the UK, 25 host organisations and local communities, and 12 international volunteering organisations/ government stakeholders in Nigeria and Nepal. Personal identities and, in the case of the IFRC research, country identifications, have been removed, to ensure anonymity.

Assemblage thinking has also extended to approaches to research and data, but in our case, neither of the two projects on which we draw was approached using an assemblage lens. In both cases, the research was linked to programming and strategy goals of development organisations, something that sits at odds with the focus in assemblage

thinking on emergence and contingency. However, in both pieces of work, our attempts to understand particular configurations of volunteering revealed the importance of developing accounts that capture its constitution between spaces and over time. Not only does this present challenges for development organisations, but it also demands new conceptualisation, something we felt assemblage thinking could help us towards. We do not claim to reach the full potential of assemblage thinking for volunteering here, but rather offer an initial incursion that we hope lays a foundation for further research.

The dominance of international volunteering scholarship, and relatively limited research on volunteering by volunteers from the global South, has produced definitions of volunteering that remain rooted in ideas from Europe and North America (Georgeou and Engel 2011). In this paper, we adopt a broad definition of volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the society, or individuals or groups other than, or in addition to, close relatives (adapted from NCVO). However, as we show, the meaning of volunteering – and indeed the word and its translation – is critical to processes of contestation over its constitution. For example, the notion of being ‘unpaid’ becomes entangled with questions of inclusiveness in volunteering, histories of volunteering as acts of charity, and what counts as ‘payment’.

### **Volunteering as cosmopolitan universal?**

Central to the global promotion of volunteering as a tool for development has been claims for its universalism; that the values that underpin volunteering are found in all societies in some forms, even if named differently (ILO 2011). The language of

volunteering as universal provides a means of harnessing the ‘particular’ within popular and strategic efforts to construct universal volunteering and development narratives and policy repertoires. For example, the United Nations’ State of the World’s Volunteerism Report of 2011, subtitled ‘Universal Values for Global Well-being’, constructs volunteering as consonant with a kind of universal humanity often found in cosmopolitan discourses that are rooted in the agglomeration of local commitments to care. According to the Report, ‘an ethic of volunteerism exists in every society in the world, albeit in different forms’ (UNV 2011, xxii). This universalism is reflected in the identification and celebration of multiple histories and expressions of ‘volunteering’ in volunteering research and policy literatures, such as, ‘Ubuntu’ in Southern Africa (UNV 2015), ‘guthi’ in Nepal (Yadama and Messerschmidt 2004) and ‘service’ in South India (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2012). But through this approach, volunteering tends to become fixed in specific localities, with the various gatherings, dispersions and disruptions across space and time that shape it, being obscured. For example, in the context of volunteering for the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasis is placed on what can be learnt from volunteering approaches and practices in different places. But this learning is contained by strategic policy objectives, and mediated by the institutions of the international aid and development system. The specific kinds of top-down transformation that these processes of learning might engender obscure the interpenetration of ideas and practices of volunteering fostered by processes of rapid social change, displacement and mobility (Hazeldine and Baillie Smith 2015).

The celebration and promotion of volunteering as universal also brings with it a risk of

spatially and temporally ‘fixing’ and parochialising some ways of doing volunteering. In this geography of volunteering, despite its diversity within the global North (Holdsworth and Quinn 2012, Mills 2013, Smith et al. 2010) a homogenised notion of Western European and North American volunteering is rendered as norm from which national variations differ. For example, in current policy drives to quantify the value of volunteering, we can detect a grounding not only in European and North American histories of volunteering shaped by particular configurations and understanding of state and civil society, but also an emphasis on volunteering as a practice that can be quantified at an individual level, rather than as a collective practice whose contours and boundaries may be fluid. The International Labour Organisation’s Manual on the Measurement of Volunteering (ILO 2011) proposes a methodology to measure the economic value of volunteering in diverse country contexts in order to aid cross-country comparisons of volunteering and global policy making. The cosmopolitan universalism of volunteering being proffered is then highly partial, with the Euro American ‘we’ behind the ‘universal’ suppressed (Jazeel 2011). It is, in the words of Jazeel (2011, 85), a cosmopolitanism that bears ‘the burden of European thought and history – the (self-denying) centre – that will continue to measure and arbitrate on difference through the very categorisations it has conjured into existence’.

This framing of volunteering as universal suppresses how the unequal relations of development shape volunteering over time. The building of a universal volunteering narrative on particular volunteering ‘cultures’ invokes a sense of timelessness, and implies the absence of imposing forms of social organisation and action from outside;

the relationalities and flows that constitute volunteering are absent. But research (Hazeldine and Baillie Smith 2015) reveals the ways volunteering is experienced through overlapping volunteering histories and presents. In the following data, two local volunteer managers identify ways of volunteering with specific social institutions and histories within their countries or regions. In the first example, the respondent identifies a relationship between the forms of volunteering he manages for the Red Cross, and the faith community of which they are a part. In the second, the respondent identifies how an idea of volunteering works across scales and over time within the country where they manage volunteers:

In the church we, people still encourage people to support each other, so when a priest talks about supporting each other, this is one influence that they are coming, one thing that can influence our [Red Cross] work to go ahead. So a positive influence. (Volunteer manager, East Africa)

There is an unorganised volunteer work that was done before the establishment of our Red Crescent Society. There is something named [.....] which means aid or cooperation and it's still known till today and practiced as well in our villages, camps and provinces. (Volunteer manager, Middle East)

Both respondents locate particular context-specific volunteering ideas and practices within the broader context of the Red Cross and Red Crescent for whom they work. They allude to a relationship between a kind of formalised and named volunteering and an

established volunteering or cooperation history. Through this move, it becomes possible, in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, to produce a global narrative around volunteering that is also consonant with commitments to ‘local ownership’. However, as the following quote by a volunteer manager from an Eastern European country illustrates, such a narrative risks obscuring contestation around the meanings and practices of volunteering:

In my opinion, the main cultural influence is related to the communist period during which people had some kind of obligation to be members of social care organisations/be involved in social care activities. Due to that heritage, those who lived in that period and still remember that are less willing to get actively engaged in social/humanitarian organisations and volunteering activities, while the new generations (those who were born in the 90s’ and after) who didn’t experience that period look at volunteering from a very different perspective, they are more willing to get actively engaged in social/humanitarian organisations as volunteers, they are more responsible for local communities. This change is still on-going. (Volunteer manager, Eastern Europe)

This shows how the historical involvement of the state creates a contested setting in which to talk about volunteering. It illustrates how attitudes and approaches towards volunteering are contingent upon people’s relationships and interactions with changing political-economic and social contexts, and that this may produce volunteering that is far from the universal values espoused in policy framings. In a similar way, our research

on diaspora volunteering in Nepal revealed how global discourses of development are undermining some particular forms of volunteering:

We have many different types of volunteering, going through our history, because there is not just one single majority of culture in Nepal. There are so many cultural groups and there are so many types of volunteerism. There were some volunteering practices initiated by a group of youth during some national festivals or something, they collected some money and they used that money to repair their school building, or some times to construct the temple [guthi]. Such types of volunteer practices are very commonly done in Nepal and still it is continued, to some extent. While there are cultural festivals or cultural practices, all come together and help each other. (Volunteer manager, Nepalese NGO)

The evocation of ‘spirit’ and ‘values’ in policy documentation provides a vagueness that is attractive when seeking to find common ground. But the attractiveness comes in the convenience of ‘fixing’ places that enable them to be contained; the use of the language of specific volunteering cultures suggests that it is a particular thing that can be identified, captured and managed in a particular place, allied to global narratives on volunteering. The contradictions, contestations and plurality of ways of volunteering within and between places over time risk being written out, reflecting a ‘violent normalisation[s] of a universal claiming to speak for the particular’ (Jazeel 2011, 88).

## **Volunteering assemblages**

Building from our initial incursions into the data, to deterritorialise volunteering from the established spaces, temporalities and agencies of the international volunteering and development sector (e.g. see also Laurie and Baillie Smith (2018)), we approach volunteering as an assemblage. In doing so we work towards an understanding of volunteering as a relational, contingent and emergent process between and across sites, enabling us to suggest an expanded account of volunteering and its potential contribution to more cosmopolitan iterations of development. We focus our attention on the multiple practices, values, institutions, mobilities and actors that constitute volunteering, and the constraints, resources and agencies through which different approaches to volunteering emerge in diverse settings. Rather than fixing volunteering in specific places or essentialising it in terms of certain universal values, this enables us to understand volunteering as fluid and emergent, over time and between places and spaces. It also sensitises us to the ‘tensions and contradictions, clashes and displacements’ that shape volunteering and which play an important role in accounting for how it, as a ‘divergent spatial and temporal’ order, hangs together (Allen 2011, 156). To do this, we use three lenses to foreground the flows, articulations, and constraints that we consider integral to a rethinking of volunteering and cosmopolitanism: volunteering governance; volunteering and migration; international diaspora volunteering.

## ***Volunteering Governance***

To date, much research on volunteering and development has focused on the mobilities of particular volunteers, rather than on the ways ideas of volunteering move and circulate. As others have noted, assemblage thinking has proved particularly useful when exploring policy mobilities (McCann and Ward 2013, Temenos and McCann 2013). Volunteer using and facilitating organisations play a key role in circulating and auditing particular ideas of volunteering at different scales, such as between the IFRC and National Red Cross Red Societies within each country, or between International NGO headquarters, and their regional and national offices. Using an assemblage lens enables us to see the different ways in which these circulations, and associated contestations and re-workings, constitute volunteering at particular conjunctures.

In our ancestral tradition, there are practices which we call “ikibiri”. This signifies, for example, that if a hundred people are working in a field for the person who invited them, this person offers them a pitcher of beer. The Red Cross has just rekindled this flame which had been lost with the decade of war. We showed the communities these examples of the old [country] in order to rekindle this flame. They were set a challenge. Those who tried it liked it, and spoke to those around them, and it spread from one colline to the next ... These practices show that old [country] had values. (Volunteer Manager, East African Red Cross Society)

In this example from East Africa, we see the coming together at a particular conjuncture – after a decade of war - of the mobile policies, discourses and governance arrangements

of the Red Cross, and a set of local dynamics, affects and emotions. While global policy discourses might evoke 'Ikibiri' to illustrate volunteering's universality and ubiquity, here we see the importance of its history, entanglement in wider social structures and relationships, and dynamics of change. We also see its affective and bio-material dimensions. Volunteering's relationalities partly evolve through the exchange of beer and labour and through responses to 'invitations' to participate. The 'flame', and the emotions, memories and passions it evokes, comes together with and is re-animated by the Red Cross, and its set of discourses, representational devices, technologies and values. Whether people 'like' the articulation of the rekindled 'flame' of ikibiri and the Red Cross governance and facilitation of volunteering, shapes how volunteering is constituted across and between social formations (collines) and scales. These sets of relationalities then shape a constitution of volunteering that pushes against and in relation to established approaches to volunteering, with community and collective action prioritized over individual acts of care for the less well-off.

The process described here, and subsequent significant growth in volunteer numbers and activity has become a cause célèbre in the Red Cross Movement. Bringing assemblage thinking and a cosmopolitan lens together help us to interrogate the relations that enable the emergence of this particular volunteer assemblage. This is conceptually and practically significant. The temporalities of a development project perspective fail to capture the various colliding histories, presents and affects that shape volunteering practices in a particular moment (Laurie and Baillie Smith 2018, 5). Consequently, analyses of what works and how remain too narrow. In this case, a notable and celebrated

feature of the example was the decision of the National Red Cross to eschew funding from donors. This is both a necessity given reduced aid spending and also suggests a challenge to aid-led and externally determined change. But to fully understand what has taken place and its significance demands attention to the precise interplays of histories, discourses, policies and affects. Rather than a rejection of development or development institutions, we see how volunteering's constitution through the coming together of various elements at a particular conjuncture and in particular ways can lead to practices that challenge established thinking about care and responsibility, evidenced in the sector's celebration of this example.

However, as McFarlane (2011) notes, where agency lies in assemblage thinking remains an important problematic. In the example above, we can see an embrace of change and emergence across different trajectories. But this configuration and such relationalities will not be universal. Paying attention to how different configurations and constitutions of volunteering rub against each other across scales reveals important power inequalities. Mainstream thinking and ideas of volunteering governance emerge from the historical dominance and self-representation of European and North American ideas of volunteering as universal, backed by apparently neutral systems of audit and accountability. How these articulate with discourses emerging from poorly resourced contexts with ideas of volunteering that have been marginal to mainstream thinking, is a critical site for interrogating volunteering and its relationship to development.

There are traditional and cultural ways of volunteering that is practised in the communities, and this is when in times of need communities come together to help to people who are either less fortunate or they come together to help a community who is struggling. But the cultural practice that we have as a national society is where one, I would say is one that we are, it's volunteering but it's where we are reimbursing volunteers or we are giving volunteers allowances and through these allowances that's how they carry out activities, so it's a cultural practice but it's not really pure volunteering, but it's based on them getting some sort of allowance. (Volunteer manager, Southern Africa)

In this example, the respondent from a country in Southern Africa expresses uncertainty about what volunteering is: 'it's not really pure volunteering'. The relationalities they highlight between a cultural practice, community solidarity and particular institutional approach sit uncomfortably with the rationalities for paying volunteers, such as ensuring inclusion for marginal groups, enabling low-cost service delivery or sidestepping employment laws (Hazeldine and Baillie Smith 2015). In the previous example, the emerging volunteering assemblage appears to be a site for dynamic change and emerging possibilities. Here, the attempt to stitch together a notion and practice of volunteering across discourses, histories and institutional approaches leads to a sense of disavowal and uncertainty. This example then provides a lens on contestation and disjuncture within a volunteering assemblage. The framing of volunteering as not for pecuniary benefit emerges from largely Western histories and idea. Its discursive power here

constrains the constitution and emergence of a volunteering assemblage that can transcend and challenge established development thinking.

### ***Volunteering and Migration***

Just as volunteering governance and policy mobilities form part of the relationalities and contestation of what volunteering is, individuals' mobilities and the relations this produce also shape volunteering's constitution. This can be seen particularly clearly in the context of migration, and how this mediates the entanglement of different meanings of volunteering across spaces and over time.

In a way here, we have two worlds and you see it when they come from the country where volunteering is a way of life, it's not formal volunteering like we know it but it's just a way of life, if the neighbour doesn't have any food you give them some or if the storms are coming you help the elderly to organise their home, it's just the way our traditions are. But when they come into the city they are looking for money, and the traditions, they just aren't here like they are back home, everything changes and their relationship with helping others either formally or informally changes too, they are struggling to survive, they are needing money, they don't have time, they don't belong to communities in the same way. Now they are connected in social media, they are looking for opportunities, they will participate but it is for shorter times, and they want something, it changes.... (Volunteer manager, East African National Society)

In the context of international migration or internal displacement, someone may not have been a volunteer in the country or community they left, but bring with them ideas of volunteering as they become a volunteer in their places of settlement. Their identity as a volunteer shifts with the changing economic circumstance and status that can come with mobility, particularly when forced or coerced. Therefore, someone whose volunteering was based around professional skills or local networks, may become a beneficiary of volunteering in a new country/ place, and may then develop their volunteering from their position as newly (and often) marginalised immigrants. They may then return to their country of origin or move onto a different setting, embodying and expressing traces of multiple volunteering ideas, practices and experiences that can provoke shifts and contestations at different scales. This presents a site of contestation and coming together as traces of previous volunteering ideas and experiences encounter forms of volunteering, care and solidarity shaped by different social, spatial and economic configurations of communities and their needs, as revealed in this data on rural and urban volunteering:

98% of village volunteers join volunteering without requiring compensation, but in towns you are going to see when the volunteers come they are going to ask for something and they are going to ask for transport and so on. Because for the most part they are young people with qualifications and they need a bit of, [support] right. So this is it, the lack of employment that makes often the

volunteers are looking for sources of revenue. But this is large cities.

(Volunteer manager, West African National Society)

These circulations and articulations of volunteering are not then divorced from social inequalities and indeed, we argue are best understood in terms of ‘relationalities of openness of difference across differences rather than through the celebration of difference’ (Schiller, Darieva, and Gruner-Domic 2011, 403). Volunteering assemblages are then partly configured through the changing biographies of individual volunteers as they negotiate these changing development spaces and fortunes.

In the case of migration, volunteering assemblages become entangled with wider immigration politics, producing highly unequal relationalities that underline existing development imaginaries more than shaping processes of ‘mutual transformation’ (Delanty 2006):

In the last ten years, we actually have admitted a lot of foreigners. We’ve given a lot of permanent residence, and citizenship to people, especially from the Asian region. There is a lot of young people in university, who have become volunteers so that they can help their adopted country and so that it can help engender a sense of belonging here. (South East Asian National Society)

Here, patterns of migration and mobility, and their relationships to citizenship, ideas of belonging, and the performance and practice of care and solidarity as part of expressing

community membership and affiliation (Mercer, Page, and Evans 2009, Thomas 2016), come together to shape what volunteering is in a particular place and at a particular moment. Volunteering can play an important role in enabling immigrants to develop a sense of belonging (Handy and Greenspan 2009, Sinha, Greenspan, and Handy 2011, Terrazas 2010) and this sets an important context in which volunteering ideas and practices are brought together and circulated.

Today there is a big increase in immigration and I think that today (our National Society) sees them more like beneficiaries of the actions rather than volunteers. But there are also people who come here and who offer themselves as volunteers, which is what's happening today. I think this is something that could increase over time. (Volunteer manager, South American National Society)

A lot of our programs are with migrants but I would say we haven't been that successful in getting them to volunteer in those programs. (Volunteer manager, West European National Society)

In the above examples, who is a volunteer and what volunteering is, become part of wider debates about who belongs, when, and how they belong. We can see how the intersection of volunteering and processes of migration and mobility are de-stabilising established framings of who is a beneficiary and who has agency, but also how far this process of de-stabilisation goes, and what limits it meets. Rather than an articulation

producing mutual transformations, ‘strangers’ are welcomed, assimilated or ‘tolerated’ (Dikeç, Clark, and Barnett 2009 4, Jazeel 2011 91). By being attentive to the institutional, embodied, policy and affective relationalities that constitute volunteering, we become sensitive not only to the potential for challenging established orderings, but also to the ways in which processes of entanglement are partial and constrained.

### *International Diaspora Volunteering*

In this section we explore the theme of entanglement and relationality further through an analysis of international diaspora volunteering. By diaspora volunteering we are referring to the practice of volunteering by members of diaspora communities in their countries of origin. Diaspora volunteering has become increasingly institutionalised, reflecting both the drive to mainstream diaspora engagement in development with wider aid and development activities, and the growing popularity of the ‘gap year’ and international volunteering. The varied forms of diaspora volunteering programmes that we explored in our research included individual short-term volunteering carried out during holidays, group medical missions and volunteering initiatives organised by diaspora charities and associations in the UK, digital volunteering (e-training programmes) by professional volunteers, and highly structured and sponsored diaspora volunteering programmes organised by Non-Governmental Organisations (eg. Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO)). Using an assemblage lens to understand these forms of volunteering reveal a complex set of relationalities and entanglements across space and time that further illustrate ways in which volunteering assemblages can challenge and re-work established development imaginaries. The diaspora volunteering

assemblage particularly elucidates the ways in which volunteering can work across different spaces, contrasting historical trajectories and diverse ideas of volunteering, development, care and solidarity.

So [British] society has influenced a lot to, not just me, but the whole Nepalese community. The young people have been able to do this because this country [Britain] has given us that opportunity to go and be confident, you know what, your voice is going to be heard, you can do it, draw the power from this society and you can go and bring about change. (Nepalese diaspora volunteer)

Yes, we have to give something back to our countries of heritage. But also coming out of my work with community voluntary organisations [in the UK], it is also about being very much independent, self-help programmes and so on. So I basically believe that, working with communities in the UK, we have the level of resources in our home countries that can be used to contribute towards development.

(Nigerian diaspora volunteer)

In both of the examples above, diaspora volunteers cite the UK as an important source of inspiration in their decisions to volunteer. For both, this decision rests on the ‘opportunity’ and ‘resources’ in the UK that provide necessary skills to ‘contribute towards development’. Significant here is the ways that these articulations are consonant

with domestic (UK) discourses of active citizenship and development. In this sense, a strong feature of contemporary volunteering ideas and practices in one place – the idea of volunteering as a form of citizenship – then comes together in different ways with actors, ideas and practices of volunteering and development rooted in volunteers’ homelands.

The overall aim of this group is to unite all villages. Because even though I am a Ghurkha, I have so many other friends who are from other villages. So I told them, why not we unite together, you represent your village and I represent my village committee and that way we have a stronger team and we can go to Nepal as a team. (Diaspora Volunteer, Nepal)

This is then more than the ‘global citizenship’ promised by international volunteering, and reveals the ‘becoming together’ (McFarlane 2011) of volunteering through multiple overlapping experiences, affiliations and identities. Ideas of global citizenship articulate with overlapping national and ethnic identities and particular social formations in Nepal. This underlines the value of understanding volunteering as an assemblage, emerging and evolving within and between places over time, rather than fixed in particular places or subservient to the encounters of particular individuals, revealing new sites for contestation and transformation.

However, just as established development imaginaries smooth over the complex and unequal histories between places to construct dichotomised accounts of donor and

beneficiary, or self and other, the same can happen in diaspora volunteering as it becomes inserted into the development landscape. The following quote from a Nigerian diaspora volunteer challenges some of these dichotomies and the rhetoric of ‘obligation’ and ‘giving back’ that are often present in diaspora-development discourses.

So I embarked on volunteering to fill the gap regarding my international experience. So that is why I decided you know, for me, career wise, it is a good thing... (Diaspora Volunteer, Nigeria)

The international diaspora volunteering assemblage is then also constituted through increasingly neoliberalised approaches to career building through volunteering. Although our research revealed there were many diaspora volunteers who were driven by a sense of obligation to ‘give back’, like other volunteers, many were also motivated by the professional opportunities, as well as, the emotional and affective dimensions that re-engagement with communities of origin can offer to individual volunteers.

Diaspora volunteering does not then offer a ‘particular’ form of volunteering that is rooted in a fixed diaspora-homeland relationship, as diaspora volunteering discourses suggest, but is shaped and informed by changing individual volunteer biographies, identities and their different ideas and practices of volunteering and development. The members of diaspora communities have varying relationships and connections with their multiple ‘homes’ or sites of mobilities, settling down and belonging. In other words, they are entangled in quite different ways in more than one economic, cultural, social and

political assemblage (Allen 2011). These multiple entanglements and connections constitute the diaspora volunteering assemblage, its heterogeneity, and varied forms of development, care and responsibility. The complex relationalities of diaspora volunteering are critical to its capacity to both reproduce and de-stabilise established development imaginaries, carrying them in continual tension across varied spaces, histories, identities and mobilities.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper we have drawn on assemblage thinking to expand debate on the relationship between volunteering and cosmopolitanism. Volunteering has gained growing geopolitical significance, with volunteers identified as one of a number of new development actors, located within global diplomacy and identified as critical to the achievement of key strategic development policies and objectives. Scholars and policy makers have invoked cosmopolitanism to make sense of the changes promised by volunteering, its ubiquity and universality. However, we have argued that current approaches to volunteering, cosmopolitanism and development remain too contained by established development imaginaries. In research on the ways international volunteering can shape cosmopolitan and global subjectivities, the meaning of volunteering has been subservient to processes of transnational mobility and encounter. In policy framings of volunteering's values as universal, the meaning of volunteering in the South is constructed as diverse, but fixed in particular places. Openness to difference, dynamism, agency, transnationality and expert knowledge are too often located in the global North. This fails to capture the fluidity and mobility of the meanings of volunteering, and how

the interactions this produces can be a site of contestation and disrupt and re-work established configurations of development, agency and care. It also silences and parochialises non-Western forms of volunteering or forms of volunteering that do not fit with or support established ways of doing development.

We have analysed volunteering policy mobilities and governance, volunteering and migration, and international diaspora volunteering to develop an account of different volunteering assemblages and their relations to development. Thinking of volunteering as assemblage focuses attention on it as a coherent formation, but one made up of “relationships and things that jostle, co-exist, interfere and entangle one another” (Allen 2011, p.154). An assemblage thinking helps us grapple with the fact that volunteering is a widely recognised but mobile and heterogeneous concept employed by diverse actors, independently and together, to name and promote equally diverse practices at multiple scales, without a single organising actor or shared definition of what it is. Thinking of volunteering as an assemblage means understanding it in terms of processes of ‘gathering, coherence and dispersion’, the ways ‘elements are drawn together at a particular conjuncture only to disperse or realign’, as made through multiple trajectories and in terms of the distributed agencies that flow from these interactions and events (McFarlane 2009, p.562). We have shown how volunteering emerges, is reconfigured and evolves through institutional dynamics and alignments, changing geopolitical relations, unequal and shifting resource flows, and as local rhythms of affect, care and allegiance unfold. This then reveals critical sites, moments and processes of negotiation

and disjuncture that are intrinsic to what volunteering is constantly becoming, but also to its relationships to development.

This demarcates a new volunteering research agenda, which explores its temporalities and spatialities beyond international volunteers and the policy framing of volunteering as universal. There is an urgent need to develop new ideas and practices of development, care and solidarity that escape the historical ascription of agency and authority to particular places and subjectivities. This is critically important in the context of the changing geopolitics of aid, growing forced mobilities and dislocations as a result of conflict, inequality and climate change, and the demonising of the poor, dispossessed and marginalised in the name of nationalism and self-preservation. Established thinking on volunteering and development remains ill-equipped to meet this challenge, remaining preoccupied with particular mobilities and subjectivities and practices that service rather than transform current development thinking and practice. Viewing volunteering as an assemblage and recognising the multiple flows, ideas, articulations and agencies that produce it, provides a new lens on the potential of volunteering to contribute to more cosmopolitan realisations of development based on reconfigured understandings and practices of care and solidarity across difference, at different scales and between places.

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