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Writing the body, writing Others: a story of transcendence and potential in volunteering for development

1. Introduction

In the ever growing academic literature on international volunteering for development - or voluntourism, gap-yearism, international voluntary service - the insidious creep of neoliberalism has, rightly, become a key concern. Insightful work focused on popular humanitarianism, neoliberalised civil society actors, and a lack of critical pedagogies of development has flagged - and sought to challenge – potential or consequent uneven orderings of the volunteer-host encounter (e.g. Mostafanezhad 2014; Baillie Smith & Jenkins 2011; Diprose 2012). From this perspective, the meeting of (relatively) rich Northern constituents with (always) poor Southern constituents is *always already* delineated by broader uneven processes of historical (colonial) and contemporary (neoliberal) globalisation. Specifically, scholars have explored the ways that hierarchical North-South relations are preserved and reproduced in the spaces of international volunteering through ‘poor-but-happy’ (Crossley 2012; Simpson 2004) rationalisations of poverty; the assumed ‘expert’ roles of unqualified volunteers (Raymond & Hall 2008); and the commodification of empathy (Sin 2010) and sentimentality (Guiney & Mostafanezhad 2015). In such readings of volunteering, global structural inequalities permeate relations between volunteers and hosts; volunteer-host relations are found to be subordinate to, or consistent with, macro-level patterns of uneven power. Even the intimacies of empathy and care are ascribed values drawn out of North-South divides (see Griffiths & Brown 2016). Without intending to draw attention away from what are important reflections on the undoubted asymmetries of volunteer-host encounters, in this article I offer an alternative to the understanding that these encounters are rigidly tied to the structural inequalities that otherwise define the spaces of development.

The objectives here are twofold: first, I wish to explore the affective experience of volunteering for development as a potential realm in which more equitable volunteer-host relations unfold. Second, I seek to move away from the norm within literature on volunteering in which volunteers from the North are invariably the main focus, implicitly placing the experience of Southern hosts in the background. Both of these objectives are fraught with issues to do with representation; studying affect relies on non-representational data that are inherently of a different order to language, and writing in a postcolonial context calls forth the complex politics of Otherness and representation (e.g. Spivak 1988). In negotiating these binds, affective experience may always lose something on articulation, although we might attempt to make ethnographies ‘come off the page’, employing the significant affective capacities of good writing (Bondi 2014). No solution to the tensions surrounding subaltern or Other voices is offered here, but the

ontology of affect, where the body is fleetingly pre-cognitive and while not pre-social then certainly pre-linguistic, may offer scope for writing hosts into research as affecting, and therefore corporeally present and pre-cognitively agentic. The account of volunteer-host relations here, therefore, takes an ‘affective turn’ and is one less of disembodied, rational, socialised subjects, but rather one of material bodies contingent and co-constituted through their ‘fleshy’ contact with the world (see Clough 2008). The writing of the account is performative of this ontology, drawing on the body as an ‘instrument of research’ (Longhurst et al. 2008) and employing a ‘literariness’ that ‘calls on the sensuous, the figurative, and the expressive’ (Pelias 2005, 183). The research presented here is therefore not only ‘*of* the body’ but also ‘*from* the body’ (Wacquant 2004, viii, original emphasis).

The article begins with a discussion of methodology and the key concepts of affect and representation, drawing attention to the important issue of researcher and “researched” positionality within the text. The main body of the article draws on participation and interviews with volunteers on a UK Government-funded programme, International Citizen Service (ICS), in southern India (on ICS see Griffiths 2015). As the narrative progresses, volunteer-host relations form from without the dichotomies imposed by the very uneven patterns of development that make hosts *hosts*, and volunteers *volunteers*. Following the narrative, I briefly reflect on the article’s two objectives: to explore affective life and to incorporate hosts in research on volunteering. A conclusion rearticulates the main argument of the article: that affective life in the spaces of volunteering opens up new possibilities for subjectivity that are insubordinate to – and therefore transcendent of – the subject positions delineated by the uneven flows of global power and privilege. At the article’s close, I move the discussion from transcendence to potential, suggesting that we might research further the potential political agencies that emerge from affective experience in volunteering and development.

2. Methodology and positionality

The research presented in this article comes out of participatory research on ICS projects in six different villages on the border between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, India. These rural projects were focused mainly on sanitation, with the volunteers working alongside a local NGO to build toilets and promote their use. Once on site, I spent time working and (on some projects) living with the volunteers and hosts, participating in their daily lives. This meant days were spent on the projects and evenings were passed eating, drinking chai, playing cricket and dancing. I conducted 32 semi-structured interviews with volunteers and hosts, making notes as I went along. Over time, participation brought with it a realisation that I was involved in the field not only as a thinking, analytical researcher but also as an affected and affecting body (Askins 2009). Field notes subsequently concentrated on the dimensions of the volunteers’ work that are potentially lost to the discursive process of transcription. More clearly, data collection came

to be centred on the ‘mutual buzz’ of shared activity (Dewsbury 2010) and the ‘energetic intensity of connection’ (Conradson 2003, 1987). Doing research in this way ‘takes the body seriously’ (Dewsbury 2010, 326), trusting the ‘gut emotions’ and embracing the body as an important ‘instrument of research’ (Longhurst et al. 2008).

Representation, in turn, brings with it a further set of methodological challenges: the ‘imperceptible dynamism’ of the body’s emotional and affective capacities (Clough 2008) lies beyond the deliberative order of representational thinking (McCormack 2003) and thus ‘may require quite different intellectual models than those that have been used thus far to represent and understand them’ (Grosz 1994, xi). Towards such a different – or alternative – intellectual mode, the data here is presented in the form of ‘performative writing’ that, it is hoped, ‘evokes worlds that are otherwise intangible, unlocatable: worlds of memory, pleasure, sensation, imagination, affect, and in-sight’ (Pollock 1998, 80). This mode of writing is intended to reflect the substance of the data, thus drawing on Liz Bondi’s recent attempts to ‘sustain rather than obliterate’ the ‘affectively freighted’ ‘excess’ to ethnographic encounters (2014, 51).ⁱ

A further, very important issue lies in the practices of research and representation in a postcolonial context. Moving South and writing across cultural difference calls forth the politics of Otherness and positionality. Postcolonial interventions critiquing the ‘permission to narrate’ (Said 1984) or the (re)appropriation of “subaltern” voices (Spivak 1988) have served as a crucial corrective for researchers (geographers, especially) in their encounters and interpretative practices (for example: Jazeel 2007; Noxolo 2009). Broadly, building on Gayatri Spivak’s insistence (to varying degrees) on the ‘irretrievability’ of oppressed voices intervenes in two speaking possibilities: ‘speaking for’ in the sense of political representation, and ‘speaking about’ in the sense of portrayal or re-presentation (1988, 275, 242). In seeking to transgress neither, I avoid reincorporating “Otherness” into a colonial textuality by turning to the body as an ontologically pre-discursive site of experience.

This ontological turn, however, warrants further attention from a postcolonial perspective. Attending to affects as a pre-cognitive, or pre-discursive dimension of experience looks away from history and attendant critiques of Eurocentrism, thus ignoring, what Divya Tolia-Kelly terms, ‘the political fact of different bodies having different affective capacities’ (2006, 213). When pre-discursive becomes pre-social, accounts of affective life risk negating the ‘political facts’ of power and oppression as factors in an individual’s capacity to affect and be affected. Thus affect, when understood more dogmatically as ‘non-representational’, has been critiqued from feminist and postcolonial perspectives for ‘reinstating the unmarked, disembodied, but implicitly masculine, subject’ (Jacobs & Nash 2003, 274), and ‘lack[ing] historicity, and thus a memory of theoretical critiques of universalism’ (Tolia-Kelly 2006, 213). The political potential of affect as pre-discursive – exposing the arbitrariness of the categories that legitimate exploitation and inequality – is also, therefore, the potential sweeping away of differentiations that matter,

such as race, gender and class (see Nayak 2011; Saldanha 2007). Recognising this tension, Jane Jacobs and Catherine Nash ask: ‘is it possible to develop anti-foundationalist and anti-essentialist accounts of embodiment that do not fall back on naturalised categories of bodily difference but also do not elide the materiality of the body?’ (2003, 275). The research here reads affective data as pre-discursive, and thus full of anti-essentialist potential, but, following these correctives, attempts to keep in focus the important gender and race relations with affective capacities.

These important methodological issues are reflected on in the discussion that follows a writing of data that - to reiterate – intends to ‘sustain rather than obliterate’ the dynamics of affects in data (Bondi 2014). It is a story that begins with the data written into a depiction of the romanticised and Othered space of international volunteering. Incorporating direct quotes and notes from the field, the Orientalist binaries are gradually loosened in the narrative to present an account of two disparate groups coming together in co-constitutive entanglement.



Figure 1. Pura, Karnataka, one of the villages where the fieldwork was conducted.

3. A village, Southern India

This is a story about a group of western volunteers in contact with Southern hosts. At the beginning—it is important to remember—the encounter is simultaneously facilitated and bounded by neoliberal globalisation: the westerners travel over an unfettered Earth, pulled by notions of self-advancement,

pushed by the chance to write a narrative of identity. The Others enjoy limited mobility—they rarely move—and they are exactly as passive as the westerners are active. In this way the coming together is delineated by the skewed geographies of globalisation; these weigh heavily. But this is also very much a story of people together, of bodies drifting in a constitutive milieu, through contingent moments of shared affects that animate the lives of these disparate peoples. Contact begins hard but softens in its unfolding on non-verbal channels, it reverberates through the body and incarnates as sensations without names.ⁱⁱ

The scene is a village in **rural** Karnataka, Southern India (Figure 1.). The first thing volunteers notice as they arrive is a “wonderful” contrast between the lush vegetation and the maroon dust of the ground; this is visually sensuous and makes for “great photographs”.ⁱⁱⁱ It’s hot, stiflingly so, the air is heavy with monsoon; the rainy season lingers. There is something uncanny to being here, it’s strange in its sights, smells and sounds but at the same time familiar figures populate the village: cattle doze in the shade, excitable children play cricket and a *sadhu*-like man leans tranquilly on his *chhadi*. Sari-ed women animate the village carrying impossible loads on their heads, their bangles uninterrupted from wrist to elbow. Somehow the westerners knew that it would be this way, they’re part of a post-Band Aid generation (Lousley 2013).

The volunteers are to work for a development charity that builds toilets and compost bins for poor rural communities. Their lack of formal training doesn’t matter; they are full of enthusiasm and eager to *give* their time and sweat to *help* the community, and this, importantly for them, marks them out from less-ethical presences in the South (Mustonen 2007). “Poverty”, one tells me, “brings with it responsibility” and this project is a good chance to “give back”, to “make a difference”. All of the volunteers nod at this point: “these people have nothing and we should do something to help”. As they walk around the village and look on their poor host community they typically reason “but they’re so happy” and “it makes you realise how lucky you are”. “It’s a good thing for my CV” many of them hope. They’re on their way to universities, jobs in the City, LPCs, MAs, NVQs, PhDs, internships on Chancery Lane, social work in Broken Britain. “This is a great opportunity” for them to “broaden horizons”, to “get on the job ladder”; to play in this Southern playground.

By now these volunteers are familiar figures, the planet is full of unqualified (Raymond and Hall 2008) “givers” (Sin 2009) assigning geo-inequalities to mere fortune, or “lotto logic” (Simpson 2004). These are the postcolonial flâneurs of an accessible globe, the “good neoliberal subjects” of international volunteering (Vrasti 2012).

The hosts are different, obviously. They make strange gestures - *yes* seems indistinguishable from *no* - and they apparently spend much of the day cultivating and preparing food; they eat with their hands. Cow faeces adorn doorsteps, morning starts with worship of an elephant deity, breakfast is rice. None of them tweets or *likes*. Instead, as the sun lowers they gather at a mystical tree and tell stories of the beasts

of the surrounding forest. They could also be animals of course but 'beasts' somehow fits. Work comes thanks to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005) which promises a small amount of work at a rate of 120 rupees (£1.20) per day. Pay is often late and partial.

The familiarity of these figures is uncanny, known yet unknown. They are the "receivers" of development, the "volunteered" or "voluntoured" (Palacios 2010) - always needing, and *always* of the Orient. The hosts might first seem everything the volunteers are not, the object to their subject; passive in a world where it's good to be active, the 'exotic beings' on the edge of consciousness (Said 1978). The practice of volunteering depends on structural mismatches, mismatches that might entrench an us-them divide (Simpson 2004).

At the entrance to the village is a small temple fresh with offerings from the morning's *puja*. As the volunteers make their way from their cramped quarters in an old communal hall they feel isolated, none of them has spoken to loved ones back home in more than a week, the closest connection is 35 miles away, and it's dial-up. They feel "cut off from the world", some are enthused by the challenge of "life without needless comforts", others lament "doing great things but I can't tell people". Nonetheless the volunteers feel "out of place", like "they don't belong" - but they knew it would be "tough" and they know it will be "worthwhile in the end". "Worthwhile", "rewarding", "stimulating" and other gratifications of (post)modern labour (Orbach 2008) weave through the long, TV-less conversations before bed.

On this project the volunteers are building 'eco-san' toilets and compost stores to help fertilise the fields around the village. The charity cites health reasons to advocate toilet use, although the hosts by-and-large feel it more natural to use the forest. There are two disused eco-san toilets already from a project two years previous. They sit inconspicuously at either edge of the village until the volunteers arrive, then they take on meaning; evidence of another 'spurious' (VSO, 2007) volunteer project? The volunteers begin to doubt: "it seems they don't even want them [toilets], I wonder why we're here sometimes".

Before work some of the volunteers have *tilak* painted on their foreheads, some practice yoga before the sun begins to sear. It makes them feel more authentic, it makes this place seem more authentic, too. "This is everything I wanted of India" sighs one volunteer, evidently relaxed in her post-yoga sweat, "I love how much they have tradition". They quietly delight in their passage through a 'sacred liminoid' (Mustonen 2007) offered them by this sub-continental pleasure periphery of 'romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences' (Said 1978, 5). One day there is a village feast— 'feast' (like 'beast'), not 'dinner', seems to fit—and the volunteers "love every minute". They get to "dance and eat like real Indians", "experience something you wouldn't [if] just backpacking", each one of them wants to "bottle it up" for posterity. Something niggles, however: as "honoured guests", their immersion is momentary, asymmetric. Each knows that in three or so months she will be home in

the UK living off the cultural capital of just another ‘cool’ volunteer experience ‘to display to peers’ (Simpson 2004) and boast to professional suitors (Jones 2011). From this perspective the village appears a microcosm of globalisation where two worlds collide and one feeds off the other. “Those there” are passive, static and Other. “Us here” progress, augment CVs and reflexively write identities.

After *tilak* and yoga, the volunteers prepare for work. The village is small (“14 families”) but feels busy, across the road (it’s not a road) six huts shimmer in the not-yet fierce heat. Life here wakes promptly to beat the sun, the morning faces of the people in the village greet the volunteers with smiles. One woman in particular smiles expectantly. None of them tell me but she’s obviously familiar to the volunteers. She touches her chest gently and bows her head. Her daughter appears, barefooted in an immaculate pink sari, she has a tray of tea. None of the volunteers particularly care for *chai*, it’s sickly sweet and unfamiliarly spiced. Nonetheless they drink through their smiles while the woman speaks – whatever she’s saying, it sounds nice. They know this not from her words but from her eyes. The daughter is very pleased to be around them and carries the tray enthusiastically. She reverently mimics her mother as we drink, trying to match her sip for sip – though it’s too much for her not-yet-insulated mouth. She’s unsure of tea etiquette, eager to grow up, and copies her Mum. There’s a short silence, a bowing of heads and a fumbled *namaskār* – it’s time for work.^{iv}

High on sugar they take the dusty path to the site they’re digging. Already the sun makes itself felt. The group multiplies along the route as the village’s children follow their curiosity. They stare at the white skin and continually ask “what’s your name?” Each reply – “my name is ... ” brings fits of laughter. It’s less tiresome than it sounds and their energy passes through the group, laughter is a most intense contagion (Provine 1992). The children breathe life into the streets, constantly on the move in their world where everything is curious. As the volunteers’ faces become familiar the kids grow in confidence and begin “grabbing your hand and dragging you down the street”, they play games and always demand: “bowl over-arm”. As they run around after a ball in a game of no rules, sweat pours and breaths shorten. The movement of bodies, the laughter, the un-discussed understanding: “they’re just kids... it’s not an ‘us and them’ thing”. In these moments they forget they’re volunteers and they forget they’re poor; difference pales. That was last night. This morning the teacher comes out of the school, again smiles—this time a little more guarded—he asks for an impromptu English lesson. Gavin, the volunteer leader, asks two of the volunteers to spend an hour in the classroom.

That evening Gemma would speak of the moment she walked in the school “and saw how excited the kids were” she became “nervous”. And having planned nothing, she could feel her body “cringe” in reaction to their anticipation. She is on the back foot, thinking through her body’s cringe and her face’s blush: “so we like did the conga and a Mexican wave and stuff and they loved it”. Her account is staccato—it made for a great story, but not such a great transcription—and it animates the room. Both

enthusiastic and wistful she recalls “and just their little faces... they absolutely loved it”. After the conga, Becky tells us,

it was just like yelling English words and they were yelling them back and they were all so happy for us to be there and I felt ... I don't know we broke down a barrier because when we first came they were all so uncomfortable and it was like oh my god it's us and them and now *it's very much we are them* kind of thing like we've blended in well they don't have any problems in grabbing your hand ...

After the “lesson” some of the children follow Gemma and Becky to the site. They buzz around competing to show how useful they can be. Over time the village's children would come to mean more and more to the volunteers, “they've got nothing but they smile, they have fun”; “they've got so much energy”. Their energies run through the volunteers' days.

As the sun gets too hot the volunteers take a break in the shade. A woman arrives and it seems there's a problem. One of the beneficiary families in the village has already received a compost shed from the charity while she, who is “of lesser means”, would like one. Something's amiss and it seems some leaning-on has come from village seniors with a grudge: she has a child but her husband is dead; that changes things. A compost shed would mean not having to buy compost from the very same “village seniors”. The village contact is not surprised and explains that underhandedness is commonplace, part of the terrain. The situation is instantly messy; via a milieu of charities, NGOs and a facilitator, the needs of one are silenced by the influence of another. Cultural attitudes to marriage and widows bear weight, Brits have been here before. It all seems too much, a Spivakian nightmare.

The woman—her name is Ashima—approaches Gavin. She's slight and weathered. Her black *bindi* marks her out as widowed. She occasionally works, but not as much as she'd like. Gavin is 24, from Cardiff and a graduate in IT management. There's no interpreter but Ashima hasn't even thought about that, she addresses Gavin unhesitantly with words—noises—he cannot decipher. Kannada is a very plosive language and both the tongue and lips work hard. Still, he explains quite eloquently, that he doesn't understand. But she's clearly quite upset and increasingly so, awkwardness passes through us as an ‘affective atmosphere’ ‘dampening’ this ‘shared ground’ and refiguring the contours of positionality, of ‘subjective states’ (Anderson 2009, 78). Her tears deepen the silence; he does understand, and she understands that he understands. Gavin is in an affected state, his body pushes on his words, he wants desperately to act through his intersubjectivity: “we'll do what we can”. While the words tell her nothing, his voice and face tell her everything: “we'll come tomorrow and start foundations”. It's a promise he may not be able to keep (he does in the end) but he's *moved* to make it. Both expressions turn to mirrored smiles, they bounce off each other, each curvature of the mouth goading the next of the other. This is a poignant moment as Ashima and Gavin reach each other and push each other corporeally, through the ‘transpersonal *capacity* which a body has to be affected... and to affect’ (Anderson 2006, 735 original emphasis).

Between Ashima's and Gavin's faces pass messages 'too elusive for science' that 'bewitch' and 'lure', messages that are picked up on by the other's 'facial deftness' and they—pre-cognitively—attune to the other's transmissions (Thrift 2004). These affect and are affected as they pass between their and our bodies. The lines in her face come together as a smile broadens. It's not a fake smile, he knows this because he perceives the *zygomatic major* working with the *orbicularis oculi* under her skin – involuntarily stimulated muscles that assure us the expression is genuine (Ekman 2004, 204-205). He perceives—*feels*—her positive emotion and his *zygomatic major* expands as an 'automatic reaction' emerging 'without attention or conscious awareness' (Dimberg et al. 2000, 2). They're now on a non-verbal channel—but we can pick it up, we're all sentient—where synapses fire to work the face into a smile, a process of 'affective microsequences' that culminate in 'a resonant affective state' (Bänninger-Huber 1992, 292); her smile elicits his (and his hers). Significantly, the subsequent intricate muscle movements 'produce many of the changes in the brain that occur with enjoyment' (Davidson et al. 1990, 332). Slowing down the moment in this way deconstructs the thick layer of socio-cultural formations that otherwise burden, it allows us to puncture and rupture the source of difference. In our fleshiness they are contingent, mutually constitutive.

They dig some more before dusk and mosquitoes arrive. Then, as happens each evening, there's tea and fried sweets at Shyamala's house. Everybody is on a high – Shyamala is happy to have guests, the volunteers feel accepted and no-one notices the tea is too sweet. Shyamala puts on a film and everyone in the room is implored to dance. What follows is a spontaneous dance lesson on the polished floor. Shyamala leads each by the hand for a couple of bars; she's spinning plates, each trainee dancer gradually loses the steps. There are three or four younger girls here too, the beaded fringe of their *lehenga* jangle to the beat – it's delightful and it enriches this musical, colourful and humid sensorium. Hands pass through hands and 'the embodied nature of touch and its intimate and sensuous manifestations' pushes on the 'emotional senses', revealing 'the potential for feeling and connection' (Tahhan 2013, 47). Crucially, this 'moment of 'real' intimacy' (ibid., 46) renders the world sensual, cutting loose – momentarily – structural impositions and attendant constructions of identity. The room is warm with people. The song repeats to fade and the regular rhythm gives way to the staccato of applause, a 'social contagion' *par excellence* (Mann et al. 2013). A satisfied silence follows and there's nowhere else to be: for valuable moments, volunteers and hosts reverberate to the same affective beat.

After work I get to speak to the volunteers in a group as they prepare dinner. I ask what so far has been the most important part of this volunteering experience. There's a unanimous response: the connections they've made in the community.^v "The people, definitely... two families in particular I've built a bond with and we've made a lot of friends", there is an "obvious connection between our volunteers and the village community and so and because it's so easy just to do and get involved". Ellie reiterates the formation of bonds beyond language: "women we've really bonded, but we can't speak a

word to each other really” and Charlie adds “like that lady who comes up to look at us cooking we have like inside jokes with her like she always calls me *Mary* even though it’s not my name and she always finds it hilarious”. They laugh as they talk about it, a sign that the affect lingers. These are connections that “make you think”, restarts Paul, “about all the crap that we have”—this is by now a familiar reflection—“and just how much of it is needless”. Tom picks up the thought: “it’s embarrassing and really makes you feel the difference between here and home”, these idle evenings of chat are replete with introspection. Alice adds: “it makes me question all the stuff that I work for – what’s the point, you know?” Nobody needs to answer this, there’s a (con)sensual silence. They talk of the “guilt” and the “shame” that comes with their privileged positions, how the “warmth” of people puts in sharp relief the falseness of their difference, the “absurdity” of it all.

For three months the bodies in the village would repeat these experiences every day. The sensorium ebbing and flowing in intensity, some days it would be too much, “I couldn’t stop crying”, others it seems impotent, “I just want to be home today”, but each moment courses through the body. It stays with them somehow, becoming part of them through the quotidian repetition and reiteration makes these affects familiar—*known*—to the body, to re-emerge in an unknown future. Eventually the charity will decide to move on to another village. Most probably the charity is pressed by its funder to move on (it is), and perhaps the eco-san toilets will be underused (they are) but these are, for the moment, details. More important is that these moments take place despite such messy actualities. Rather, this is a volunteer presence in the South that opens along the contours of skewed privileges, but elements of that space are, in important ways, insubordinate to uneven privilege .

4. Representation: writing the body, writing the Other

As identified at the outset of this article, the two objectives of exploring affective experience and moving away from a volunteer-centric focus are both complicated by issues of representation. In this section I reflect on the representation of affect and hosts in the writing of the data.

In the exploration of experience beyond the ordering of representational thinking our senses can provide a rich source of data. Documenting and discussing non-discursive experience, however, is an experiment in both positionality and representation, one in which a literal incorporation of affective figures holds potential value. French literary critic, Hélène Cixous recognised that writing is a highly gendered process, imploring us to practice *écriture féminine*, to ‘write through [our] bodies’ in a non-linear style that ‘sweeps away syntax’ and decentres subjects, hierarchies and phallogocentrism (1976, 886). While the syntax remains conventional here, the analogical syntax of academic “good practice” is - if not swept *away* – swept *aside*. And if the volunteer-host encounter is normatively arranged along lines of privilege, gender and race – which it is – then at hand is an exploration of disrupted hierarchies in a form that disrupts hierarchies.

Towards the second objective, writing the experience of marginalised people in the South, **the presumption to know others' affective states might present a markedly (neo)colonial mode of doing research.** As bell hooks writes poignantly: 'I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own ... I am still author, authority. I am still the coloniser, the speaking subject...' (1989, 15). The textual ethnographies of the host community in the village are, to my mind, with my positionality (British, white, male), outside of the frames of reference to which I have (some) access; **I cannot uncomplicatedly speak for or even 'facilitate' the voices of 'distant strangers'.** Rather, what I do present of the host community **takes seriously Gayatri Spivak's criticisms of knowledge extraction from a 'Third World' 'repository of an ethnographic "cultural difference"'** (1999, 388) by evoking an intentionally anti-Orientalist account of volunteering. For valuable moments, **the markers of difference between constituents, the very same markers that position individuals within uneven processes of globalisation, are destabilised.** The result is an evocation of southern constituents who are, in the same way as their northern counterparts, corporeally present and pre-cognitively agentic. In other words, they are not the passive subjects of either volunteering for development, nor the writing of research.

This cannot be an emphatic conclusion, however. The corollary is that the legacies of domination that are constitutive of a differently affecting racialised or gendered body (Nayak 2011; Saldanha 2007) are disregarded. This brings us to the problematic identified above in Section 2: if the political potential of affect as pre-discursive is in exposing the arbitrariness of the categories that mark exploitation and inequality, the more those categories are exposed, the more we risk looking away from differentiations that matter, such as race, gender and class. In concluding, then, the discussion turns to the politics of reading affect as pre-discursive, seeking to explicate its potential in a way that refuses to disregard the materialities of contemporary and historical inequalities.

5. Conclusions: from transcendence towards potential

It is a politically important task to examine the uneven processes of historical (colonial) and contemporary (neoliberal) globalisation and connections with intimate lives. It is, after all, those very uneven processes that open spaces populated by volunteers and hosts. And it would be blithe to look away from the excess of structural inequalities – along the lines of wealth, mobility, education, gender, race, health and so forth – that undoubtedly bear on North-South relations, at both collective and individual levels. **It would be equally careless to disregard the role of affects in the constitution of race and gender, that the bodies of hosts and volunteers in this case, affect and are affected in an unknowable number of different ways. Nonetheless, as the writing of data presents and performs here,** affective bonds do not necessarily defer to the ordering of subjects according to positions in the global division of privilege, **nor do they inevitably**

separate differently marked bodies via ‘viscosity’ (Saldanha 2007). Affective life in this space of volunteering, therefore, opens up new possibilities for subjectivity that may not defer to the subject positions delineated by uneven flows of global privilege. What remains to be seen, however, is the substance of such possibilities for subjectivity and what potential they may hold in the politically urgent calling to resist the very global inequalities that in the first place legitimate and facilitate the practice of international volunteering for development. That is, whether we can locate within the affective experiences documented here a substantive move, or a push, against global inequalities.

To this troubling question there are no sure answers. Complicating the response is the commonplace engineering of affects in humanitarian work and international volunteering (e.g. Mostafanezhad 2014; Vrasti 2012). What complicates is that the embodied passions of empathy and even solidarity are now routinely elicited to the ends of market expansion and/or subject-making, giving cause for caution on the question of proclaiming affective bonds anything other than bodily investment in affective capitalism (Illouz 2007). While affects are no doubt manipulated by powerful actors, they must also be considered in turn against the important conceptual corrective, what Massumi terms ‘the autonomy of affect’: ‘if there were no escape, no excess or remainder ... the universe would be without potential, pure entropy, death ... things live in and through what escapes them. Their autonomy is the autonomy of affect’ (1995, 96-97). Crucially, as a corrective, this opens up affects to possibilities outside attempts at “capture”. Without drawing straight lines between affects and effects, then, I want to close with a perhaps pre-emptive counter to the obvious counter to the arguments laid out in this article: these affective moments are fleeting and apolitical, they negate difference and carry only symbolic value, if any. While acknowledging that this may well be the case - for the autonomy of affects means we cannot know - there are two relevant properties of affect that may well mean we can offer something more substantial to the reading of the data here: the *temporality* and the *quality* of affects - and the ways that these two properties come together in the opening (or closing) of certain political agencies.

While this is a story of passing atmospheres or faint flickers of feeling, based initially on a separation of mind and body, in truth affects are intimately tied to the more cognitive embodiments of feeling and emotion. In the early work of Gilles Deleuze, for example, affects – as *encountered signs* - are notable for ‘contingency’ across time: ‘impressions which force us to look, encounters which force us to interpret, expressions which force us to think’ (1972, 161). Reading Deleuze, Massumi writes of ‘transitions’ that exceed moments: ‘the body’s movements [retain] a kind of depth that stays with it across all its transitions - accumulating in memory, in habit, in reflex, in desire, in *tendency*’ (2002, 213, original emphasis). And similarly (though with a more deterministic tilt) William Connolly implicates body with mind thus: ‘choreographed mixtures of the word, gesture, image, sound, rhythm, smell and touch ... help to define the sensibility in which your perception, thinking, identity, beliefs, and judgment are *set*’ (2002, 20, my emphasis). From this perspective, mind-body dualisms collapse. Allowing this to nuance the vision

of life in the village, we can now speculate on how each moment – the resonant smiles, the sensuousness of touch – leave, as Connolly puts it, ‘deposits’ in “affectively imbued memory banks” [that] might later yet encourage a disciplined train of thought’ (2002, 71).

Accepting of a contingency with cognition we can then consider the direction of such ‘disciplined trains of thought’, a point where the *quality* of affect comes to the fore. At base, this returns to Deleuze and his later readings of affect (*affectus*) via Spinoza in which the register of a particular affect anticipates a consonant conscious state: ‘we experience *joy* when a body encounters ours and enters into composition with it, and *sadness* when, on the contrary, a body or an idea threatens our own coherence’ (1988, 19, original emphasis). Extending this to the possibilities of political agency releases the reading of affects as they ‘resonate into emotions, and shape agential orientation’ (McManus 2011, 2). Towards a continuum of agential possibilities, at one end of the scale is what Lauren Berlant refers to as ‘political depression’, marked by ‘hopelessness, helplessness, dread, anxiety, stress, wary, lack of interest’ (2005, 8), while at the other reside ‘the larger flows of hope that enact various collectivities’ a disposition or ‘a dynamic imperative *to action*’ (Anderson 2006, 744, original emphasis). Making research sensitive to inter-subjectivities, such as those in the village, therefore, may well reveal ways in which attendant affects open and/or close the potentials for political orientation. Relevant literatures focus on the ‘glue of solidarity’ or ‘co-transformative’ energies among leftist movements (Juris 2008; Roelvink 2010) and the potentially ‘radically unsettling’ *felt* reaction to work in development and a desire to work against complicit oppressive structures (Pedwell 2012). While the specific cases in these literatures take a distinctly western perspective, we should not preclude the potential for imperatives to mobilise and act for constituents of either North or South. **Towards a future research agenda, these literatures would inform further inquiry into the political agencies opened up by the practice of volunteering for development where the arbitrary nature of oppressive binaries and categories is left exposed, perhaps signalling a concurrent emergence of political orientations to act.**

The insidious creep of neoliberalism in volunteering (and elsewhere) must be documented and countered. This is especially vital against the disconcerting but very real interventions that buy into the currency of embodied responses to poverty, of which volunteering is surely a part. But there are other stories to be told, stories of mutuality, of solidarity: stories such as this, of people – from both North and South – as emergent that cannot solely be read through a neoliberal frame. Who knows what the affective life of the village effects, one guess would be future orientations that refuse the oppressive lines of empire. The potential for those orientations to become trajectories is a tantalising prospect worthy of further research and facilitation.

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ⁱ For further discussion on volunteering, affects, method and writing see Griffiths (2015)

ⁱⁱ for a shorter discussion of the volunteer projects on the Karnataka-Tamil Nadu border see Griffiths (2014)

ⁱⁱⁱ All of the volunteer quotes come from interview transcripts or field notes from participatory data collection

^{iv} the anecdotal elements to the narrative are reconstructed from interview and focus group transcripts

^v 26 of 28 volunteers