Development Encounters in International Development Volunteerism in Guatemala: Quiet Encroachments in Global Street Politics

Laura Riddering
lr5@umbc.edu
Department of Geography & Environmental Systems
University of Maryland, Baltimore County

Abstract

Neoliberal policies alter development funding, practice, and actors. One effect of this is an increase in untrained individuals from the Global North who travel to the Global South to take action against perceived needs. This paper examines international development volunteerism (IDV) in Antigua, Guatemala. Scholars have documented the problematic nature of both volunteers and development projects; yet the relationships between actors are under theorized. I examine the development encounter: a space where people from the Global North and South meet briefly through development work. This space enables an examination of transnational actors who experience divergent impacts of neoliberal restructuring, and of unnoticed activities that could be indicators for social change. I ask: can development encounters shift perspectives to open the possibilities for social change? Through qualitative research, I show that everyday encounters in IDV can both open and close possibilities to catalyze social change. I make three contributions. First, I address a gap through an analysis of everyday relationships of multiple actors in development. Second, I propose that the development encounter is a productive space to examine changes between transnational actors. Development encounters in IDV projects are both a continuation of problematic development interventions in the Global South and also a space to examine the potential to eventually build solidarities across difference and distance. Lastly, I extended Bayat’s (2010) theories on social nonmovements to actors from the Global North and Global South to argue that their everyday actions are quiet encroachments in global street politics, or the silent actions of noncollective actors to generate change. I argue that development encounters can open possibilities to make a difference for people because strangers meet through projects; and also, it closes possibilities because it makes a difference between people since it is a commodified space with inequalities of power and wealth.
“There was a stage of questioning volountourism. Voluntourism, is it bad, or effective, or is it good? ... I think it’s, you know, my opinion is that it was good. It was a positive thing. It’s that you get people seeing outside of the bubble of Antigua, in this case outside of the bubble and seeing really what the country is like and not just going to, you know like, foreigner bars, and seeing foreigner, that you would see the real Guatemala in this case... And if it's a good NGO, then these volunteers fundraise then they help, you know, continue the cause. Obviously, you’re going to get some volunteers who don’t, who aren’t [good]. And you get some NGOs that also aren’t, constructive. Uh and, or you know they’ll come and build a house or a school. And then they build the school and there are no funds to run the school.”

The man who said this was a white, American-born executive director of a nonprofit that worked with foreign volunteers in Guatemala. For him the positive aspect of volunteering was nonprofit fundraising and volunteer’s personal growth. He was aware of the problematic position he was in - he needed volunteers to fundraise for his organization, but knew that some volunteers and some NGOs do not make a lasting impact. Yet, he also hoped his work would be different than the work of other white development workers. Both volunteers and NGO workers I interviewed expressed this paradox, the aporia of development: that “we cannot, not desire development” (Wainwright 2008, 10). Just as the man above questioned the impact of volunteers and development, scholars have also documented the problematic nature of volunteers (Laurie and Baillie Smith 2018; Vrasti 2013; Georgeou 2012; Devereux 2008) as well as the problematic nature of development interventions (Ferguson 1990; Leys 1996; Sachs 2010). Rather than analyze the outcomes from volunteer development projects, in this paper I examine the potential for social change among three development actors: homestay families, volunteers, and NGO workers.

I examine the everyday encounters in International Development Volunteerism (IDV) between multiple actors in the space of the development encounter (Escobar 1995a); this is a space where people from the global North and the Global South meet briefly through development work. Such encounters occur not only across boardroom tables or in coffee fields, but also at kitchen tables, or in a corner of a classroom. These everyday encounters are where “the (re)production of privilege is often normalised” (Wearing et al. 2018, 506). Intimate relationships between strangers can form new

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1 IDV can also mean international development volunteer. I choose the term volunteerism because the term international development volunteer centers a focus on the volunteer as the main actor; whereas the term volunteerism focuses on a broader range of participants including people who host, organize, or manage volunteer programs (Schech, Skelton, and Mundkur 2016, 148; Vodopivec and Jaffé 2011). IDV is different from volunteer tourism, because it engages volunteers with NGOs as an extension of the services (McLachlan and Binns, 2019). In IDV the volunteer’s primary motivation is to combat global inequality (Vodopivec and Jaffé, 2011). The volunteers in this study were managed on a day-to-day basis by a NGO located in the Global South and not by a government agency or volunteer sending agency (VSA), and thus I argue are closer to the development volunteer end of the spectrum (Devereux, 2008). Nevertheless, I acknowledge that a binary difference between the two activities, volountourism and IDV, is problematic (McGloin and Georgeou 2016, 405) as shown with the quote above by an NGO worker. International development volunteerism should not be confused with independent development volunteers who have no or very limited links to formal development institutions (McLennan 2017).
understandings, or can reify assumptions of the self in relation to strangers. This encounter evokes Gramsci’s (1978) Southern Question: can Northern workers form solidarity with the Southern peasants? Yet the possibility for solidarity is more tenuous because the encounter is commodified, and there is vast inequality of power and wealth between the Global North and South.

In this paper I ask, can development encounters shift perspectives to open the possibilities for social change? This paper makes three contributions to the literature: first, it addresses a gap in the literature to move beyond an analysis of one development actor and instead analyze the everyday relationships of multiple development actors (hosts, volunteers, and NGO workers) (Peck 2015; Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2012; McLachlan and Binns 2019). Second, I propose that the development encounter is a productive space to examine changes between transnational actors. Development encounters in IDV projects are both a continuation of problematic development interventions in the Global South and also a space to examine the potential to eventually build solidarities across difference and distance. (Laurie and Baillie Smith 2018; Sin 2010; Sin, Oakes, and Mostafanezhad 2015; Vrasti 2013). Third, the paper extends Bayat’s theories on social nonmovements to examine what I call, quiet encroachments in global streets. This refers to silent actions by individuals from the Global North and South in IDV, to propose that through the development encounter they could alter identities and solidarities (Bayat 2010, 2000). I argue that development encounters can open possibilities to make a difference for people because strangers meet through projects; and also, it closes possibilities because it makes a difference between people since it is a commodified space with inequalities of power and wealth.

In the following sections, I review literature on development and then encounters. I then reframe Bayat’s theory of social nonmovements as he applies it to people in the Global South coping with neoliberal restructuring, in order to extend it to people from both the Global North and South coping with neoliberal restricting in different ways. Then, I analyze interviews with volunteers, homestay families, and paid NGO workers in Antigua, Guatemala to show how the different positionalities shape the development encounter. In the discussion, I posit that everyday encounters are a quiet encroachment in global street politics to produce or limit incremental change at individual and relational levels.

**Literature review**

**Development actors**

First, I draw from development literature to analyze the politics of the encounters of three actors in IDV. Scholars repeatedly documented failures of development interventions, through either top-down projects led by states of multilateral institutions or through bottom-up approaches by grassroots groups or social movements (Leys 1996; Rist 1997; Sachs 2010; Ferguson 1990; Mosse 2005; Escobar 1995a; Schroeder 1999). However, a focus on top-down or bottom-up provided an incomplete picture of
development institutions because they overlook subjectivity of some actors, disregard agency of some actors, present monolithic views of projects, or draw weak connections to the political economy (Wolford 2010; Asher 2014; Ballvé 2013; Agrawal 2005; Mosse 2005). More recently, some scholars researched institutions that are a combination of top-down and bottom up. This is an attempt to address the complexity in the field, but also a response to a change in development funding and practices. Changes in funding occurred after the financial crisis in 2008 as austerity measures decreased funds for overseas development assistance (Haaland and Wallevik 2017, 203).

Changes in practice occurred with an increase in individual citizens and nonspecialists who start or participate in initiatives to take action against perceived need (Roy 2015; Richey and Ponte 2011; Develtere and de Bruyn 2009). This increased private initiatives is reflective of neoliberal times (Vrasti 2013; Schech 2017; Georgeou 2012). In the literature this takes a variety of names like fourth pillar (Develtere and de Bruyn 2009; Jackson 2005), DIY development (McLennan 2017), citizen initiatives (Haaland and Wallevik 2017), MONGOs - My Own NGO (Polman 2010), and Private Development Initiatives (PDIs) (Kinsbergen and Schulpen 2013). These initiatives harken back to older models of charity in which Northerners feel the need to take matters into their own hands to ‘help’ people in the Global South. The first actors I examine are development workers who are nonspecialists that work in MONGOs.

The second actors I examine are volunteers, who are also nonspecialized actors in IDV projects. Volunteers participated in the development projects from the beginning, yet these actors and institutions now operate with a wider scope of work (Baillie Smith et al. 2013; McLennan 2017; Richey and Ponte 2014; McLachlan and Binns 2019). The transnational labors of the volunteers are emblematic of neoliberal governmentality because they are simultaneously individual actors who are entrepreneurial and also caring, responsible global citizens (Sin, Oakes, and Mostafanezhad, 2015). Ordinary men and women choose to volunteer with nonprofits because they desire to contribute to the global goal to reduce poverty; yet through this consumption-based volunteer action the focus becomes an individual mission (Butcher and Smith 2015, 6–8; Roy 2010). IDV is a type of development intervention, yet the power relations, including the gendered dynamics and radicalized processes between volunteers and host community members, is under researched (Georgeou 2012; Bandyopadhyay and Patil 2017; Lough and Carter-Black 2015).

The final actors I examine are homestay families. In general the IDV literature overwhelmingly focuses on volunteers instead of host communities (McLachlan and Binns 2019). Yet, the interactions between these actors in homes is a unique space to examine the emotions and everyday understanding of development (Baillie Smith et al. 2013; Kapoor 2014; Peck 2015). In sum, I examine two overlooked nonspecialized actors in development, international volunteers, and workers in MONGOs, as well as the host families who take care of the volunteers, because together are part of a change in the geographies of development.
Development encounters

The second literature I draw from is encounters across difference. Encounters are the conjunctures of trajectories of people, places, and ideas (Massey 2005, 139). They are constellations of processes, a “throwntogetherness” of stories-so-far, and a negotiation of relationships (ibid). There is a recent proliferation of scholarly work on encounters in social science because they have potential to catalyze change (Wilson 2017; Faier and Rofel 2014; Valentine 2008). Encounters “offer points of possible transformation and an opening to change” (Wilson and Darling 2016). For example, Amin examines the collaboration of strangers and argues that they can generate trust (Amin 2012, 39). In this paper, I define encounter as “the everyday engagements across difference” (Faier and Rofel 2014).

Other scholars write on urban encounters (Wilson and Darling 2016) or encounters in capitalism (Tsing 2005); I focus on encounters in transnational development work. Development increasingly involves multiple actors from around the world who work together to reduce poverty. Development scholars wrote about encounters as a way to go beyond the legacy of colonial encounters with ‘the other’ to examine the construction of discourses and social differences (Escobar 1995b; Roy et al. 2016). I draw from Lawson and Elwood’s the term “zones of encounter,” which are spaces of (re)negotiation of social differences (class, race, gender) (Lawson and Elwood 2014, 212) to examine the everyday (re)negotiation of relationships between transnational actors who meet through IDV. I propose the term development encounter, as a space of engagement between people with social differences who meet briefly in development work. These everyday encounters are the unseen, unplanned, unexpected activities that can be more transformative than the planned activities (Howard and Burns 2015; Rigg 2012). These encounters are important to study because the iterative interactions of diverse actors from the Global North and the Global South transform project outcomes (Beck 2017).

I combine encounter literature and development literature to fill a gap to analyze a plurality of perspectives. Encounter research frequently focuses on the perspective of the powerful, like the colonizer, or tourist (Wilson 2017, 11), so I include the perspective of indigenous homestays. In contrast, development research frequently focus on idealized concepts of subaltern groups (Narayanaswamy 2014), so I build on relational poverty research to also include the perspective of non-poor actors, like volunteers (Lawson and Elwood 2014). In brief, I examine the everyday relationships between three transnational actors in a development encounter in the Global South.

Stories of nonmovements in volunteerism

Finally, I draw from Bayat’s (2010) social movement theories of quiet encroachment and street politics, to examine how they might explain the encounters with IDVs as a space that may catalyze social change. First, Bayat’s term “quiet encroachment” (2000) means the silent, prolonged direct action by individuals in order to strive for a dignified life. Second, “street politics” refers to streets as spaces of flow and movement where people not only express grievances, but also where they forge identities,
enlarge solidarities, and extend their protest beyond their immediate circles to include strangers (Bayat 2010, 12). Third, Bayat examines the “story of nonmovements” because they are the stories of agency in times of constraints (Bayat 2010, 26). Frequently social movement literature sets up dichotomies of active/passive or individual/collective, or essentializes choices by poor people as survival strategies, resistance, or political actions (Bayat 2000). Instead, this approach enables an examination of unnoticed social practices that could be indicators of social changes. Bayat analyzes the social nonmovements and the street politics of subjects like unemployed people or housewives in the Middle East who use the streets as a space to communicate discontent because they lack institutional power of disruption.

I extend these theories to development encounters and propose the term global street politics; this term refers to flow and movement in transnational spaces where people work with strangers to reduce poverty and, in the process, alter identities and solidarities. I argue that the everyday encounters IDV projects detail a quiet encroachment in global street politics. Even though the term quiet encroachment was proposed for marginalized peoples in “Third World Cities,” (Bayat 2010, ix). The work in IDV is a story of nonmovement, as opposed to a social movement that utilizes visible protests, because the intimate, quotidian moments of the encounter suggest how the collective endeavors of millions of noncollective actors could open possibilities for social change (Bayat 2010, 26). Bayat’s theories of social nonmovements together with the development and encounter literature provide a framework to examine the iterative, overlooked interactions of multiple actors from the Global North and Global South as a space that can potentially lead to social change.

The space of this encounter

I examine encounters in IDV around Antigua, Guatemala. In Guatemala, the legacy of civil war, a low tax base, privatization, religious outreach, and neoliberal social policies contributes to minimal state funds for social programs and increases reliance on NGO projects (Moore et al. 2017). After the 1996 Peace Accord, NGOs were central to expanding social services to address inequality that contributed to the armed conflict (Beck 2017, 46). By the late 2000s over $2 billion was spent on “peace,” through foreign or local NGO proyectos or projects (McAllister and Nelson 2013, 34). This was a time of “magical abundance” when anyone, like an embassy, church, volunteer, or ex-guerilla, could submit the correct papers and begin a NGO (ibid). Currently, scholars estimate that Guatemala has one of the highest concentrations of NGOs in the world with more than 10,000 NGOs (Moore et al. 2017; Rohloff, Díaz, and Dasgupta 2011). Guatemalans increasingly interact with these small NGOs, and they now represent the ‘face’ of development for Guatemalans (Beck 2017; Rohloff, Díaz, and Dasgupta 2011). Nevertheless, Guatemala is representative of many countries with a wide variety of development projects that failed to transform economic and political power structures (Beck 2017, 8).

Foreign volunteers can be found throughout the country, yet they are omnipresent around the UNESCO World Heritage site of Antigua, located about one hour from the capital (Vodopivec and Jaffe 2011). It is a town of 16,000 people in the city center and
46,000 in the entire municipality (PDM 2010). Little (2004, 64) describes Antigua as a town of contradictions: for tourists, the town is inauthentic because of the tourists, yet authentic because of the indigenous people and colonial architecture (cited in Vodopivec and Jaffe 2011, 116).

At the time of my research, there were at least 20 NGOs in or around Antigua that accept volunteers. I spoke with six organizations in Antigua over two months in 2016. I applied a qualitative life course methodology to examine “perceived intentionality of individual action (agency) and to evaluate individual experience (subjective meaning) in the context of linked lives and changing times” (Locke and Lloyd-Sherlock 2011, 1140). I conducted 14 semi-structured interviews, 9 informal interviews, and 4 site visits with development NGOs. I used a snow ball approach to find homestay mothers, volunteers, and NGO workers to interview. I conducted an hour-long interview in English or Spanish, recorded them electronically, transcribed them, translated the Spanish interviews myself, and coded them for emergent themes.

For the semi-structured interviews, I spoke with 15 people in total: 4 homestay families (4 women and 1 man), 5 volunteers, and 5 nonprofit workers. As for the homestay families, all the families identified as indigenous and lived outside of Antigua. Each family had a different quantity of volunteers stay in their house - one only had 3 in total and another family could not count how many volunteers lived with them over a ten-year period.

Of the five volunteers, all were middle-class women under the age of 25. This was not intentional, but is emblematic of broader trends. Scholars estimate that 75% of volunteers are women (Wearing et al. 2018). Three of the volunteers were white North Americans, one was Indian-American, and one Portuguese-Australian. There is a debate about stipends for international development volunteers, some long-term volunteers receive a stipend and others “pay to play” (Georgeou 2012). The volunteers I interviewed are indicative of a wide range of labor experiences: two were paid a stipend but called themselves volunteers, one paid an administrative fee of $200 to the nonprofit, one fundraised $750 at home to fulfill the compulsory donation to the nonprofit, and one had no extra costs besides the travel and housing.

Of the four nonprofit workers, three were foreign born men, between 20 and 40 years old, who were in leadership positions of nonprofits that accepted volunteers. The other nonprofit worker was a 20-year-old, indigenous Guatemalan woman whose family periodically hosted volunteers.

This research is marked by its origins from a place of privilege (Rose 1997; Kobayashi 1994). I identify as a white, middle-class, American woman. I pursued this research topic because I lived on various sides of the development encounter. I volunteered internationally in weeklong trips, semesters abroad, and yearlong trips. I worked for NGOs, and I lived in multiple homestays ranging from weeks to years. Since 2010, I made multiple trips to Guatemala and lived there for more almost four years to date. I first came to Guatemala in the Peace Corps where I, like many volunteers, played the ‘good helper’ role unintentionally. I fell into a role that white-middle class women
played since colonialism; through the work of ‘doing good,’ I gained agency and gave the empire a human face (Koopman 2008). Now, I sit in a new position, as a researcher, and I take responsibility for my complicity while I examine these encounters. Even though I spent thirteen years on multiple sides of the encounter, I am nevertheless situated socially and geographically closer to the foreigners (Sundberg 2004, 3; Lahiri-Dutt 2017, 328). During my research, I lived with foreign friends, I took Mayan language classes with foreigners, and I went out in the evenings with NGO workers. These experiences shape my research questions and subjects. I made a strategic choice to research volunteers because they are closest to my own position, and this choice shifts the typical research focus from marginalized groups to the role of the privileged (Elwood, Lawson, and Sheppard 2016, 5). Yet, because of my observations, I chose to go beyond a focus on volunteers because I do not want to portray the volunteer as the principal actor whose perspectives matter more than other actors (Laurie and Baillie Smith 2018, 99); therefore, I include the perspectives of multiple actors.

Moments in everyday encounters

This section provides everyday stories of in the development encounter. These moments of the everyday encounters in IDV can be collected as a “story of a nonmovement” as they open up the chance to examine unnoticed social practices that could be indications of social changes (Bayat 2010, 26). Development encounters include countless actors. To narrow the focus, I chose three actors in IDV: homestay families who host volunteers, volunteers who live with homestays and volunteer at nonprofits, and nonprofit workers. These actors are rarely all in the same space at the same time, but are connected through encounters with similar people and the project.

I extend Bayat’s theory of street politics. He used the term in two ways, first as a way urban subaltern actively use public space and therefore conflict with the state (i.e.: housewives who do chores in alleyways). And second, “as spaces of flow and movement” where strangers “are able to establish latent communion with one another by recognizing their mutual interests and shared sentiments” (Bayat 2010, 12). For Bayat, this is a way that solidarity can be formed between strangers.

I build on this second definition to call attention to the global street politics of everyday encounters in IDV. The moments of development encounters are not in public streets, but in global streets, which refers to private spaces with transnational actors. This shift in space reflects neoliberal restructuring because the encounters occur in private spaces and through initiative of individual labors. The space is both in the hallways of homes and the hallways of NGO offices. I expand the space of development work from offices, schools, or fields to also analyze work in homes. The strangers are not neighbors, but instead transnational laborers, like volunteers and nonprofit workers. Bayat points out that these street politics occur with immigrants from the Global South to the Global North as they build communities and “assert their physical, social, and cultural presences” (Bayat 2010, 15). In addition, it happens with the constant flow of volunteers and workers from the Global North to Global South and subsequent gentrification of places like Antigua, Guatemala.
Development practice began with state funds, but now, especially in Antigua, the NGOs rely heavily on individual funding. This mirrors Bayat’s observations in the Middle East that there is a political consensus to “shift the burden of social provisions from the state to individuals” (Bayat 2010, 85). The volunteers and NGO workers perceive this as spaces to reduce poverty, and the homestay families perceive it as an economic opportunity. As Bayat points out, there are certain histories and geographies that shape revolutions, scholars therefore should ask why, when, and where change occurs (Bayat, 2010, p. 13). I argue that everyday encounters in the global streets are spaces to analyze where change may occur for individuals and development.

### Homestay families

The families I spoke with articulated two main motivations for hosting volunteers: exchange of money and exchange of ideas. One woman said, “For me it is an exchange. I can show them, teach them my language, my work and at the same time they are supporting my family to prosper.” First, the foreign guests paid the homestay families for food and housing. All of the families had children and stated that they used the money to buy better food, pay school fees, or to improve their house. The money was not regular for any of the families; they did not know when another volunteer would stay with them.

Second, the encounter is a way to exchange ideas with people they would not otherwise meet. The families were aware that it would be a challenge to travel abroad, and therefore enjoyed sharing meals with foreigners. The exchange of ideas that occurred could be simple discussions or learning something new. The homestay father said:

“The volunteer is not a guest, but another member of the family. We never see them as a business, obviously they leave an income (utilidad), because we also can’t deny that, but that is not the primary reason, the income. The primary reason is what I already said, that we have learned something from each volunteer, and a lot of things.”

Again, this homestay family stresses that there is an exchange and money but also an exchange of ideas where the family themselves learned.

In a concrete example, one Guatemalan woman told me the story of one volunteer that shared an idea with her, that still changes her every day.

“The woman loved to make flower arrangements. I had never seen flower arrangements with wildflowers (flores del campo). She made them in vases. When I entered the room where she stayed, she had a small vase on the table. I said, ay, how pretty! And, can I make that with wildflowers? Yes, she told me. Ay, I had seen flower arrangements with very expensive flowers and [the volunteer] with her imagination, and creativity, made them with wildflowers, that are there close to my house...My little sister now loves them and she makes them.”

Therefore, the volunteer’s lesson on floral arrangements continues to shape the homestay space because the volunteer altered their opinion on wildflowers.
Another host family explained the exchange of ideas with one volunteer. She said:

“When a guest was with us, um, with him I could speak in English and that was good because it was free. So, I was practicing, and also, he learned from us. For example, he learned to kill a chicken. So, um, I’m always thinking that if the people worked in teams, and exchanged their knowledges, I think they could make something good. But sometimes there are people who are not open to this idea.”

This woman states that her family taught a foreigner to kill a chicken, while at the same time she could practice English with him. This was valuable for her to practice freely on a daily basis because English classes are expensive. Many jobs, like hospitality or call centers, pay above minimum wage with fluent English. The ability to learn how to live and work with foreigners and practice English could change her future job opportunities.

The literature on volunteers focuses on the transformative experiences of the volunteers (Gray & Campbell, 2007), yet ignores the potential for change in the other actors in the encounter. The homestay families I spoke with presented everyday moments of change through exchange of stories across the dinner table, lessons in flower arrangements, and English practice at home. As one woman said: “For me it was a great experience to have them because I learned a lot with them...So I felt that my mind began to function in a new way.” Therefore, the stories of the homestay encounters could be a harbinger for social change as people learn across difference and distance.

Volunteers

Through interviews, I found that volunteers use their privilege to travel to the global streets to take action and in the process forge new identities. The volunteers grew up differently: rural, urban, Catholic school, public school, religious, and nonreligious. All of them volunteered before, either near their homes in a food kitchen, on spring break trips with Habitat for Humanity, or school organized service-learning trips. One thing similar about them is they identified themselves as middle class. Several of the volunteers mentioned that their parents grew up with less economic opportunities. Two out of five of the volunteers had immigrant parents.

All of the volunteers I interviewed spoke of their choice to volunteer as a change in their lives. Their choice to volunteer in Guatemala was a different choice than people around them, and this choice is now a part of their identity. For example, one woman said:

“But I think that my parents see me here in Guatemala, and they think that I’m crazy. [...] So I want to be tell my kids that I think they’re crazy too. Yeah, I want to be able to tell them that, like I want them to be able to do things that are like interesting to them, that I think are crazy.”

Another volunteer reflected on her childhood and said:
“As grateful as I am for all the opportunities … my regret is that I wasn’t exposed to many different cultures and many different lives and modes of thinking in my upbringing, and I wouldn’t want that for my children. Yeah, so I want them to be able to connect with people and be sympathetic and empathetic, um, beyond sympathy. Um, yeah and just see the value in meeting different people and having different experiences and bringing that home to the United States.”

In both of these cases, the young women bring up that they want their children to have similar experiences as them: to travel, to do something ‘crazy,’ to connect to different people, and to learn empathy. Since they are both thinking about encouraging telling their volunteer stories to their unborn children, this demonstrates that their new identities as doers, travelers, and learners are important. These two volunteers forge identities from their volunteer stories as a way to better their own lives and the lives of their future children.

Each volunteer expressed the desire to work, they want to ‘do’ something, to improve people’s lives; yet they were aware of critiques of volunteering. No one claimed they wanted to change the world. They do not want to ‘give and run’ (Develtere and de Bruyn 2009), they wanted to ‘make a lasting difference. For example, one woman who volunteered for six months with one organization said:

“That’s why I wanted to like do something long term because I feel like on short term things a lot of the gain is more like personal and like the kids or the people you’re working with don’t change as much as you change in that week […], and like I’ve done like one day, I’ve done like my fair share of like one day events or like one week events […] I was like very conscious to choose something where I felt like I would be able to make like a lasting difference.”

Therefore, she wanted the experience to be about more than personal gain, she wanted her work to make a difference in the school. Another volunteer who worked as a teaching assistant said she knew she would not make a difference.

“And you also have people who are like, you know like questioning your volunteering, they’re like, are you making a difference? Or are you doing this, and I think, yeah, at the end of the day it’s just helping. Like am I changing the world by what I’m doing? No, but I really do think that I’m benefitting the [Guatemalan] teacher. Like, you know the work that I do like, you know, it’s not crazy or anything…it is making a difference in a small way.”

She saw her work as making a small difference by helping a teacher. For both of them, This volunteer experience was a time to take action; yet this is problematic normative view that women from the Global North are ‘doers’ with the power to do development (Lahiri-Dutt 2017, 326). Through volunteering, the women “gain liberal subjectivity through being seen as good” (Koopman 2008, 291). Even if the volunteers do not intend it, it implies a vertical relationship.
The volunteers lived with host families for at least a few weeks. In contrast to the host families who approach the homestay as a survival strategy, the volunteers approach the homestay as an experience. The reactions ranged from "the worst experience" to "my favorite experience." Three out of five of the volunteers I spoke with moved out of the homestay into apartments with other volunteers after a couple of weeks, the other two stayed. The volunteers who moved out of homestays quickly stated that they like Guatemalans; but they wanted freedom, to eat at restaurants, and a cheaper place to live.

The volunteer who said the homestay was her favorite part of her trip to Guatemala so far, stated that her family in the United States is small; and the host family is an extended family that all live under one roof. She enjoyed that they share meals with her, included her in family events, patiently spoke Spanish with her, and watched television with her. She did not expect to connect with her family.

"Them being so welcoming too has been such a relief. Because I think that was my biggest fear going into the trip was like not being welcomed and not being able to connect with the people I was going to be with and not being able to, like being more in the way than being able to offer something."

For her, the homestay is a moment to learn from and connect with Guatemalans in an intimate setting. Yet, this volunteer knew the experience of connecting with Guatemalans would be helpful for her. She wants to be a teacher and to be able to connect with immigrant students from Central America. She said, “When I become a teacher...I want to be able to, at least connect with them on some level and be able to be an ally with my students and, um, best support them.” Therefore, she reveled in the learning opportunities in everyday encounters with her homestay family. She also recognized that those lessons could be useful in future professional positions when she returns to the Global North. The difference in the relationship with the homestay families is that the volunteers do not see them as people to be ‘saved’ or ‘helped’, they are people to live with for a moment. In this space, it is possible to recognize mutual interests and shared sentiments.

In brief, the volunteers forge new identities of travelers and volunteers; they took action in projects, and shared moments with strangers in homestays. For the volunteers, the experience of learning across difference motivates them to choose to live with families, and also to experience nonprofit work.

Nonprofit workers

The final group of people I interviewed were paid nonprofit workers. Like the volunteers and families, they took those positions because they wanted a dignified life. For the workers, their motivations were to contribute and learn. For example, one foreign worker explained how he moved to Guatemala after he graduated from college because he had friends who recently moved there too. He explained his motivation to work: “I ended up looking into Antigua and finding an organization that was focused on economic development, where I could live locally and get to know kinda the country and hopefully contribute in a meaningful way.” Therefore, he chose the organization and country based on friends, a desire to learn and contribute. Another foreign worker echoed this: “I just
feel good because you see how in some cases you change people’s lives.” Each worker knew they could earn more money in other jobs, the foreigners could return to the Global North and the Guatemalans could work in call centers in the city, yet they wanted to work in Antigua because they could contribute to social change.

The second motivation for people to work for NGOs was to learn. All of the NGO workers I spoke with stated that when they started working for the nonprofit in Guatemala they had no NGO experience. They gained experience while working. For example, one Guatemalan worker I spoke with was a recent high school graduate and proud to be learning. She said: “[After starting the job] it’s been very nice, until now it has been very nice. One, I am learning many things. Two, my mind keeps opening more and more and more.” She expressed a similar sentiment as the homestays, as the work was a way to learn for future jobs and a way to learn about new cultures. In another example, a foreign NGO director told me that he learned from the community in Guatemala. However, when he arrived he had no work experience: “When I first got here, I was smart and did well in school, knowledgeable about the world, but I hadn’t had much experience in actual work.” At first, he arrived to volunteer and several years later he became the director of that organization. Instead of learning management and community development in school, or an established nonprofit, or in a corporation, he learned it working with communities in Guatemala. Both of these examples of learning demonstrate that work could be an opening to social change because they valued learning from Guatemalans. Also, this could be an example of a closing because the workers from the Global North is the executive director and represents a dominant political group who directs development. This is the contradictory nature of the development encounter.

One overlooked effect of untrained actors, like volunteers and nonprofit workers, working together is they momentarily avoid the professionalization that occurs in social movements or nonprofits (Alvarez 1999; Mawdsley, Townsend, and Porter 2005; Andrews 2014; Beck 2014). Katz analyzed the effects of professionalization in NGOs and found that professionalization “compromises more radical agendas and blunts the power of opposition” (Katz 2005, 627). Katz argues that becoming a subject of professionalization, can possibly lead to a place where the chickens guard the chicken coop, but in the process, it also enables the dominant political groups to define the resources. Then, as more people are trained to be professional NGO workers, they are shaped by the demands of those in power. The fact these volunteers and workers lack training and skills could be an advantage because it provides a moment to learn from non-dominant political groups. In sum, the interviews with the NGO workers revealed that they have similar motivations to work in development as the volunteers: to learn and contribute to change. In the following section, I will analyze how these everyday encounters in IDV are both an opening and closing to social change.

Quiet encroachment in global street politics

In this research I focused on the everyday encounters in IDV. My intention is not to overlook the problematic nature of IDV, but to delve into the space of encounters because they are a coming together of bodies across transnational spaces that could potentially “make (a) difference” (Wilson 2017, 14). The everyday encounters can make
To begin, this encounter could close the possibilities for social change because it makes differences between people in three ways: it is not open to everyone, it does not alter systemic inequalities, and it (re)produces hierarchies. First, IDV excludes the engagement of many people. It excludes young people from the Global North who cannot afford to work unpaid or pay to travel to the Global South. Also, the homestays do not occur with the most marginalized families, but with families that have an extra bedroom or space for the family to move. Lastly, in general, the nonprofit sector in Antigua Guatemala does not remunerate employees well and requires college degrees. Most nonprofit workers earn the minimum wage (~$350/month), even if they work for many years. And only the largest NGOs have established donors that can offer a sense of job security and increased pay. Therefore, only some people can enter the encounter.

Second, the immediacy and personal nature of the IDV work focuses on the importance of helping individuals (McLennan 2017, 886). This evokes the trends in millennial development, to rely on a modern, western self who is both aware of poverty’s devastation and is also empowered to act upon it (Roy 2010, 12). These actions do not challenge the state or elites. The labor done by volunteer and nonprofit workers actually attempts to do the work through the provision of social services. In this way, IDV reflects the privatization of public services, marketization of the non-profit sector, and orientation to neoliberal individual (Georgeou 2012, 24). However, unlike the state, NGOs can choose their beneficiaries, and the management decisions are frequently made by one or two people. Therefore, I agree with Bayat that, “what NGO activism means in reality is the activism of NGO leaders, not that of the millions of targeted people” (Bayat 2010, 88). There is also a possibility that IDVs can perpetuate problematic interventions as they lack the ability to recognize their privilege and lack critical understanding of structural inequalities in development projects (McLennan 2017). IDV initially changes individuals more than systems.

Third, this encounter could be a closing to change, as it could reproduce binaries of north/south, guest/host, and active/passive. As Wearing et al (2018) point out, the volunteer experience has neocolonial tendencies, and the tendency to construct hierarchies between people. For example, the volunteers and many foreign nonprofit employees work illegally on tourist visas in Guatemala because the state does not offer short term work visas, yet unlike other transnational migrants they suffer no harassment for this activity. Additionally, I only interviewed men in leadership positions of NGOs, whereas all the volunteers were women. In Antigua, there are some women in charge of NGOs, but more are men. Therefore, gender relations could continue tendencies that support the patriarchy.

In the relationship between homestay and volunteer, the volunteers pay the families to live with them. This can (re)inscribe centuries of discourses that construct white people as more powerful than indigenous people. For example, one homestay
mother told me a story about a volunteer who was terrified of spiders. The volunteer saw a spider and instead of speaking to the host family about it, she spoke to the volunteer coordinator. The host family was a Mayan family and the volunteer coordinator was *ladina*. In Guatemala, *ladinos* are people who do not identify as indigenous. The identity of *ladino* was elevated through a process of whitening during the nation-building phase (Sundberg 2004, 63). Subsequently, the volunteer coordinator spoke to the family about cleanliness. The host mom remembered: “I said to [the coordinator] that I felt a little bad. [The volunteer] should have told me, she should have trusted me.” For the host family, this was a question of *confianza* or trust. They imagined that there was a level of trust between the family and the volunteer; but the volunteer felt more comfortable telling the volunteer coordinator. The volunteer used her power to avoid the conversation, and then make a *ladina* question the cleanliness of the indigenous family. The hierarchies of race and class were reproduced. In this way, the encounter can make differences between people.

In spite of this, the development encounter could also open possibilities for social change as it makes a difference for people through two methods: the drive for a dignified life and the direct action in projects. First, I propose that Bayat’s theories on social nonmovements can be extended to explain the encounters with IDVs because each actor strove for what they perceived as a dignified life. As Bayat stated a dignified life can be defined differently, but requires the possession of cultural/material abilities (Bayat 1997, 12–13). For the homestays, a dignified life meant earning extra money and having the opportunity to learn from foreigners. As one woman said: “My favorite part ... is to have friendships with foreign people.” They chose to find work in the informal sector to pay for living expenses, like school fees (Bayat 2000, 546), and to learn. Similarly, for volunteers and nonprofit workers, a dignified life meant contributing and learning. For them, the quiet encroachment, or direct action, is when they choose to pay for travel to Guatemala with the aim to obtain work experience and lived experience in Guatemala. As one volunteer told me bluntly, her resume did not show experience and she could not find a job at home, so she came to Guatemala to gain experience to become employable back home. In this way, the actors, driven by unseen effects of globalization, like economic restructuring, seek opportunities to improve their lives. This is when actors could form new identities and form new solidarities, when these strangers recognize “their mutual interests and shared sentiments” (Bayat 2010, 12). This is the potential for incremental change at the personal level.

Second, the labor of these actors is a quiet encroachment, or the “non-collective but prolonged direct action” into development projects, which could lead to an opening for social change. This encroachment is not into physical spaces, but into the spaces of the development industry and informal labor. Teaching English, fundraising, and paying homestays are direct actions that impact development and people. The actor’s actions are not about resistance to the state or the rich and powerful as Bayat originally used the term quiet encroachment, but in IDV their actions are “unorganized incidental acts” (Scott 1985, 292). Bayat argues that if the actions continue then they will see them as “ordinary, everyday exercises”; yet if their activities or personal gains are threatened then they could become aware of the value of their gains and defend them in a collective fashion (Bayat 2010, 60). In the case of IDV, this could occur if the state enforced the need for work
visas, or if the state taxed homestays. Currently, the actors use the development institutions in order to meet their needs and do not perform prolonged action yet. However, lessons learned in development encounters could initiate political action. For example, if foreigners protested immigration policies in their home countries, or if NGOs workers advocated for improved state services in Guatemala. For example, a NGO worker explained a way that direct action could continue:

“Like there was [an American woman] and she was 19 and it was her first time ever out of the country and she got a passport specifically to come here and I worked with her very closely. And she worked with two different projects...and she, [the volunteer trip] was only three weeks, and so the lasting impact of what she did, there probably isn’t a whole lot of lasting impact. But the long-term impact is that she is going home. [...] She is going to be telling people about Guatemala. And, you know, being the contrarian to all the things that are coming out about Central America, the violence and things like that because she was in the communities. She saw, and you know, she worked directly with the communities.”

For this nonprofit worker, the trip impact went beyond the actual development work, and also includes future conversations the volunteer would have about her experiences in Guatemala. Therefore, the space of encounter in development should be analyzed because the unintended consequences of these everyday actions makes differences for people.

Conclusion

In summary, the development encounter in IDV projects is a quiet encroachment in global street politics that both opens and closes the potential for future social change. I propose that the everyday encounters in IDV provide a space to analyze the beginning of incremental changes that must continue into the future. I analyzed the stories of nonmovements of homestay families, volunteers, and NGO workers. Homestay families learned across difference through quotidian dinner conversations, English practice, or flower arrangements. The volunteers forge new identities as ‘doers’ and international travelers. The nonprofit workers contributed their untrained labor to learn about nonprofits and Guatemala. Only time can tell if these activities will lead to an incorporation into neoliberal development or more radical agendas that contest neoliberal development.

As I showed, development encounters can close possibilities because it makes differences between people as it is not accessible to everyone, focuses on individuals, and can (re)inscribe hierarchies, and also open possibilities to make a difference for people through material gains and direct action. I made three contributions to the literature. First, I addressed a gap in the literature through an examination of everyday understandings of multiple development actors in development encounters. Second, I demonstrated that development encounter is a productive space to examine changes between transnational actors. And lastly, I extended Bayat’s theories on social nonmovements to actors from the Global North and Global South to argue that their overlooked actions are quiet encroachments in global streets.
In conclusion, scholars should continue to study these actors and spaces as they (re)shape development geographies and geographies of social change. Future research should be longitudinal to assess long term consequences of development encounters. These everyday encounters can produce new identities, demonstrate agency, and reconstruct subjectivity; however they are only the beginning of the story and not the end of the story (Katz 2004, 242). The stories of nonmovements of homestay families, volunteers, and NGO workers are just the beginning of possibility for social change.

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