



VOICE MATTER

COMMUNICATION, DEVELOPMENT AND THE CULTURAL RETURN

Oscar Hemer & Thomas Tufte (eds.)

NORDICOM

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Editors' Preface and Acknowledgements

Voice & Matter was the overarching theme for the fourth *Ørecomm Festival* in September 2014. When we founded the *Ørecomm Centre for Communication and Glocal Change* in 2008,¹ it was our pronounced long-term aim to establish a centre of excellence in Communication for Development research with a bi-national base in the Øresund region (Malmö and Roskilde). From 2011 to 2014 we organized a yearly *Ørecomm Festival*, focused on specific concepts within – or at the margins of – the field: *Agency and Mediatisation* (2011); the *Public Sphere* (2012); *Memory and Social Justice* (2013). *Voice & Matter* (2014), with the subtitle “Glocal Conference on Communication for Development”, was in a way a summing up and synthesis of all the previous themes, with the significant addition of *Hope*, and what Indian-American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has defined as “the capacity to aspire”. It is our ambition to continue to organize *Ørecomm Festivals*, on a biannual basis,² as part of our strategy to foster further developments of meta-theory within Communication for Development. The purpose of such meta-theory is, firstly, to integrate ComDev as a research field in its own right, and subsequently, to define and refine the theoretical context of ComDev, with regard to specific key concepts or themes, and thereby also systematise its connections with related research fields. So far, three anthologies, including this one, have come out of the *Ørecomm Festivals* (Askanius & Stubbe Østergaard 2014; Hansen, Hemer & Tufte 2015), and a number of other publications are directly or indirectly the fruit of this collaboration (i. e. Enghel & Wilkins 2012; Ngomba & Wildermuth, forthcoming).

This *Voice and Matter* anthology largely reflects the topics dealt with at the conference. We are immensely thankful to all the speakers who agreed to elaborate their presentations for this volume. We also wish to thank the former vice-chancellors of our universities, Ib Poulsen and Stefan Bengtsson, and the heads of our departments, Lene Palsbro³ and Sara Bjärstorp, for facilitating our interregional collaboration, with support from the European Regional Development Fund (Interreg IV A) and Roskilde University's vice-chancellor office for financial support to this book. A special heartfelt thanks to information manager Ulrica Kristhammar, research assistant Yuliya

Hudoshnyk and the interregional project coordinator, Marie Brobeck. Finally, we thank Ulla Carlsson, Ingela Wadbring and the full team at Nordicom for taking on and publishing this anthology.

Malmö and Roskilde, May 2016

Oscar Hemer & Thomas Tufte

Notes

1. The official launch was in a panel at the IAMCR Conference in Stockholm in July 2008, with Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Karin Wilkins as invited panellists.
2. The 2016 Festival addresses the communication challenges of the so called Refugee Crisis in a glocal perspective
3. Lene Palsbro was head of department at the Department of Communication, Business and Information Technologies until December 2014.

Foreword

Readers will find in this assembly of essays a cluster of remarkable empirical studies in the first two sections, and some very penetrating discussions of basic concepts in the third. All focus on Communication for Development and Social Change, the discursive network that is set to subvert and replace older Development Communication paradigms grounded in exploitative and/or philanthropic strategies towards what used to be called the ‘Third’ World during the decades of US-Soviet rivalry for planetary dominance. In other words, the majority of humankind living outside circles of power and wealth. The bi-annual Ørecomm Festivals serve as a petri dish for invigorating this network.

A key pair of concepts investigated here for their capacity to illuminate core issues are ‘voice’ and ‘capacity to aspire’. The term ‘voice’ is especially associated with a much-cited book by political economist Albert Hirschman (1915-2012), *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (1970), and the term ‘capacity to aspire’ with a 2004 essay by cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai.

However, while the concept ‘voice’ has its merits in emphasizing the fundamental importance of the ability of the world’s poor to express their needs and demands in public fora from the streets to the Internet, the work of Charles Husband (1996; 2000; 2005) over more than twenty years now takes the issues still deeper. Others, such as Australian Communication researchers Tanja Dreher and Penny O’Donnell, Australian sociologist Cate Thill, and UK political scientist Andrew Dobson, have also contributed valuably in this direction.

Basically, Husband and the others underscore the limits of simply aspiring to speak, as per the argument presented in Gayatri Spivak’s much-cited 1983 essay “Can the subaltern speak?” Admittedly, speech itself is terrorized in many ways in many places, but the act of speaking alone, even when successful, still guarantees rather little. The essence of the matter, argue Husband and the others, is whether anyone is listening. And by ‘listening’ they mean active listening, not simply having the radio on in the background.

Beyond even active listening, Husband emphasizes “the right to be understood.” Let us take a moment to get hold of this. Human rights are conventionally arrayed

in three categories, or Generations. The first is the 1948 UN Declaration's freedom of speech, from persecution, and so on. The second is economic, the right to food, housing, health care and the like. The third includes such matters as environmental rights, or the right to communicate – which comes back to 'voice' of course. But if no one is interested in understanding *speakers' priorities, context or experience*, all the voice – all the low-power radio and all the wall graffiti and all the subversive songs in the world – will still end as monologues addressed to the powerful. Or worse, understanding those speakers may be undertaken by sociologists and anthropologists, organically (Gramsci) meshed with circles of power, whose labors may serve to understand in order better to discipline the world's poor.

So while the notion of "a right to be understood" initially offends common sense (and could even seem to propose a certain *carte blanche* for the professoriat!), upon inspection it nails the primary problem. Thill (2009) suggests a nice term, "courageous listening," by which she means listening with the anticipation that the speaker's viewpoint may likely clash with one's own, implying the intention directly and constructively to engage with difference, rather than muting or avoiding it.

However, much of this discussion presupposes some kind of interactivity between communities of the poor, and the powerful. The vital dimension is *lateral*: how are forms of listening developed *among* the world's poor, not least where issues of patriarchy, religion, language, nationality, caste, 'tribe' and 'race' may bedevil such projects? How may such endeavors strengthen the voice of the dispossessed so it cannot remain dismissed by the powerful? What are the social movement media experiences which can illuminate fresh local possibilities? How do they interact with strikes, road blockages, occupations – and with community self-care projects in health and education?

Some significant shortcomings of Appadurai's 'aspire' notion are identified in this volume. Both he and some of the contributors discuss in abstract terms the notion that the 'capacity to aspire' to a different world or worlds is a muscle that requires exercise. Yet the evidence for the actual, practical exercise of this muscle is voluminous in the multifarious instances of social movement media activism, from dance, song and dress all the way through radio, video and the Internet. These experiences are no fiction, and bypassing what can be learned from them is a form of political suicide.

These issues present themselves in the Global North, not only in dispossessed communities comparable with the Global South, but also in the chilling effect of our *awareness* of mass political Internet surveillance, as uncovered in particular by Edward Snowden's revelations. This permutation of the issue of 'voice' and 'listening' in liberal democracies, and potent signal of their blockages on the 'capacity to aspire', hold very grave implications and pose major challenges.

Brooklyn, NY, March 2016

John D. H. Downing

Editor, *Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media* (2011)

Introduction

Why Voice and Matter Matter

Oscar Hemer & Thomas Tufte

In *Why Voice Matters – culture and politics after neoliberalism* (2010), British media scholar Nick Couldry pointed to the lack of means for people to voice their opinions under neoliberalism. He accused the media of, in fact, reinforcing neoliberal values. But, perhaps most importantly, he also claimed that gaining voice is not enough – neither for social change, nor for other visions of society to thrive. While voice, and the polyphony of concepts related to it – such as participation, agency, activism, narrative and artistic expression – is fundamental in any vision of democracy and a fair society, it is absolutely vital for those whose lives depend on the material conditions of development and social change. For them, gaining and exercising voice relates directly to critical matters like education, infrastructure, transportation, health services, food security and environmental damage.

When we chose Voice & Matter as the overarching theme for the fourth *Ørecomm* Festival, we deliberately paraphrased Couldry, who by the way had been one of the keynote speakers at the second *Ørecomm* Festival (*Reclaiming the Public Sphere*, 2012), playing with the double meaning of ‘matter’. We find the pairing of Voice and Matter to be an apposite metaphor for the interdisciplinary field of theory and practice that we commonly call Communication for Development.¹ By attempting at re-positioning this yet emerging cross-discipline, we have been obliged to revisit our previous inventory of the field, *Media and Glocal Change: Rethinking Communication for Development* (2005). The decade between these publications appears, in fact, as an intriguing time frame for analysis of the dynamic between Voice and Matter, as mirrored in the makeover of the field itself.

Media and Glocal Change was launched in September 2005 at a meeting at the University of the Philippines in Los Baños, which aimed at founding a global university network. Twelve universities, including Malmö and Roskilde, contributed to the event and signed the Los Baños Statement.² That initiative, driven by the Rockefeller Foundation funded Communication for Social Change Consortium, was one of many in what seemed to be a new momentum for media and communication in development cooperation, in the run-up to the first World Congress on Communication for

Development (WCCD) in Rome, 2006.³ But the anticipated breakthrough did not occur. The Rome congress was a major achievement in the sense that it managed to assemble more than 800 practitioners and scholars. Yet it was ensued by a peculiar backlash, first and foremost in the area of development cooperation. FAO, one of the three organizers,⁴ even demoted their C4D department after WCCD, and it has only recently been revitalized. Another of the organizers, the World Bank, also closed down most of their ComDev work shortly after the Rome congress, when their principal donor, the Italian government, pulled out. Within the UN-system there is however one noteworthy exception to this gloomy scenario. UNICEF, which always played a significant role in ComDev, has in recent years strengthened and consolidated its position as world leader in the institutionalized practice of ComDev.

The university network from Los Baños did not evolve as expected, either, although many important bilateral contacts have come out of it, such as the long-standing pedagogic collaboration between Malmö University and the University of Guelph. And although the Communication for Social Change Consortium today is only a vague shadow of what it was a decade ago, the development of university curricula in Communication for Development and Social Change did eventually take off, most significantly in the Spanish-speaking world, with MAs and BAs popping up both in Spain and across Latin America. Good examples of this late development are seen in Paraguay, Peru, Colombia and Ecuador.⁵ The UK has likewise experienced a significant boom in curriculum development, with MAs at SOAS, University of London, London School of Economics, and the universities of East Anglia, Sussex, and Westminster. Other initiatives have emerged with institutional support from professional organisations, such as the MA programmes developed with the support of UNICEF in India, or the ones with a strong practitioner-oriented profile under the heading of ‘social and behaviour change communication’ (SBCC), supported by the US American NGO Academy for Educational Development (AED), in Albania, South Africa and Guatemala. But what remains missing in the academic world is a strong orientation towards research.

The emerging research field in communication for development has in the past decade yielded a growing number of anthologies and special issues of journals, not least two thematic issues of *Nordicom Review* (2012 and 2015). We have ourselves been engaged in this process, along with many others. The main function of these anthologies has been to reinvent the field, both consolidating it and opening it up to new issues and challenges. As for more comprehensive studies that have gone deeper into the conceptual debate, the theory-building and epistemological inquiry of the field, significant contributions have only begun to emerge in quite recent years (Sparks 2007; Quarry & Ramirez 2009; Manyozo 2012; Scott 2014; Enghel 2014; Stenersen 2014; Thomas & Fliert 2014; Tufte 2014; 2015). Altogether, the past decade can be seen as a bumpy, contradictory and difficult-to-grasp pathway – with significant fall-outs amongst the otherwise promising practitioner institutions; with the growing but still insignificant establishment of the field in the world of university teaching, and with

the slow evolvement of ComDev as a research field *per se*. Nevertheless, a new impetus seems to be in the making.

A new momentum

The above described momentary fall-out of the field after 2006 incidentally coincided with the veritable explosion of social media and smart phones⁶ and the subsequent emergence of new forms of social mobilization, which were to take the world, and not least the development industry, by complete surprise in 2011. At the IAMCR⁷ conference held in Istanbul in July 2011, at the height of what was still referred to as the Arab Spring, the role of the social media in the new social movements was discussed in almost every panel. But, as we have previously noted (Hemer & Tufte 2012; 2014), these world-shattering occurrences were rarely, if at all, associated with Communication for Development. Hence, ironically, when at last the crucial potential role of media and communication in social change processes became evident to everyone, the dominant institutionalized field of Communication for Development, with its roots in the post World War II diffusion of modernization enterprise, was obviously bypassed, unable to seize the momentum. The other significant strand of Communication for Development and Social Change, originating in the Latin American tradition of participatory communication, did not grab this event to move forward either. While not being recognized, let alone regarded as relevant to ComDev in the first instance, this startling turn appears in retrospect as a watershed moment, not only for the re-orientation and, possibly, redefinition of the field, but for its scientific deepening and broadening. The urgent need to analyse and understand the new phenomena further underscored the need for new theory and transdisciplinary approaches.

The impetus in current media and communication research on social media, civic engagement, and social movements, has arguably impacted on the discipline of Media and Communication Studies as a whole, pushing it towards less media-centric and more globally oriented perspectives. These new subjects were very present in the mentioned IAMCR conference in 2011, but they simultaneously sparked a lot of attention in other areas within the social sciences; amongst political scientists, (Bennett & Segerberg 2013; Kavada 2011 and 2014; Della Porta & Rucht 2013, to mention a few), media sociologists (Couldry 2014; Gerbaudo & Treré 2015) and a growing number of anthropologists, as we will elaborate further upon below. Development Studies has during the same period tended to move from hard-core economics and social sciences towards a humanities orientation, increasingly focusing on cultural aspects and *representations* of international development and globalization (i. e. Dogra 2012; Lewis, Rodgers & Woolcock 2014). A third tendency, closely connected to and overlapping with the two above, is the rise of Anthropology as principal discipline in the field, at par with Media and Development studies, as can be observed in the prominence of media ethnography and visual and digital storytelling. A gradually growing anthropo-

logical engagement with media and communication practices came in the aftermath of a series of anthologies in the early 2000s (i. e. Ginsburg et al 2002; Murphy and Kraidy 2003), gained further impetus with the rise of global radical activist networks (Juris 2008, 2012) and has obtained particular momentum with the current attention to social movements (i. e. Postill 2014a and b; Barassi 2011 and 2013, Mollerup & Gaber 2015; Pink 2009).

World development

For the larger retrospective analysis of world development in the last ten years, there may be several decisive breakpoints, but the 2008 financial crisis appears as paramount, with its restructuring of the global economic order. Although the BRICS⁸ brand is seriously undermined as we write, with Brazil's economic stagnation and Russia's political and economic regression, China's rise to hegemony remains undisputed, with deep-going consequences for international development cooperation. The shortcomings of Neoliberalism, as symbolized by the Argentinean meltdown in 2001, has paved the way for what Jan Nederveen Pieterse (2008) called "the return of the development state", and typically not a democratic one. New aspiring economies in Asia and Africa no longer look to the West for role models, but to East Asia. China as a new hegemon has the significant advantage of not bearing the legacy of colonial master. North-South donor-recipient relationships are increasingly giving way for more and less equal South-South collaboration, as the agency of development shifts from the former metropolitan centres to former developing countries (Pieterse 2010). On a global scale, the most dramatic transformation in recent years, besides the implosion of the Middle East, is no doubt Sub-Saharan Africa's makeover in the global imaginary, from disaster-stricken continent of no hope to the new frontier of world capitalism, with a number of *lion economies* tailing the East Asian tigers.

Parallel to, but also far earlier than these moments of global economic and political crisis, a long-standing questioning of the Western development discourse has gained new impetus. The fundamental critique concerns the narrow focus on economic growth, the centrality of market logics, the lack of concern for social consequences, and the absence of sustainable long-term considerations. Amongst the most prominent critical voices is Indian economist and philosopher Amartya Sen who already in the 1980s and '90s worked with the concept of a "capabilities approach", defining development as "a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy" (Sen 1999: 293). There have been many other scholars, mainly from within the broad postcolonial literature, not only critiquing and questioning the Western development discourses, but also providing a range of other ways to conceive of development – ranging from the Bhutanese notion of 'Gross National Happiness' and Latin American notions of Good Living, *Buen Vivir* (Sousa Silva 2011), to radical revisions of the African "post-colony" (Mbembe 2001; Chasi 2014). The Portuguese scholar Boaventura de Souza

Santos (2014) summarizes these many new takes on development as ‘epistemologies from the South’. Surprisingly, and sadly, the field of ComDev has paid little attention to these discussions, as compared to the emphasis put on communication and media. Hence, in the light of the current radical rethinking, in particular these epistemologies from the South, a moment of opportunity has arisen for the revision and strengthening of the ‘Dev’ part of ComDev.

As demonstrated above, most of what we regard as the academic renewal of the field has happened within specific scientific disciplines and amongst researchers who do *not* see themselves as communication for development scholars. They do however represent the issues and disciplines that have come to mark the territory from which Communication for Development now re-emerges with stronger epistemological stands and with more clear notions of what theories to draw upon. Reasserting its truly inter- and multidisciplinary character, Comdev continues struggling with differing approaches and perspectives, whilst digging both deeper and broader into the humanities and social sciences, and not least into anthropology.

The ethnographic turn

The subtitle of this anthology, *Communication, Development and the Cultural Return*, indicates a pre-eminence for culture in this deepening and broadening scientific reorientation. That may at first glance seem like old news. The 1980s and ‘90s saw a *cultural turn* in the social sciences, as expressed for example in the ‘qualitative turn’ of audience studies within media and communication research. Already in 1988, the US American media scholar James Lull spoke of ethnography as an “abused buzzword”, indicating the inflation in using this notion amongst media and communication scholars who engaged with qualitative audience research, while anthropologists, with a few exceptions, yet had to discover media and communication studies.

The cultural turn within the social sciences at that time also impacted on development cooperation and, not least, communication strategies. In the post-war Modernization paradigm, culture had been regarded as an obstacle to development, a vestige of tradition and “backwardness”, and development communication was precisely – and merely – a tool to enhance development, i. e. modernization and economic growth. The momentary, never hegemonic, Dependency paradigm of the 1970s opposed the dominant, diffusionist and technocratic Rostow Doctrine,⁹ but retained the socio-economic frame of analysis and a firm belief in state intervention and developmental policies. Communication was still merely an instrument to this end. The cultural turn brought, however, a reaction to both these paradigms. With the focus shifting from the development state to the local community, communication became more than simply an instrument for persuasion and individual behaviour change; it was increasingly regarded as a *process* of democratization and empowerment and hence an end in itself. The monolithic model for modern development was challenged by

the plurality of culture-sensitive *alternative development*, or dismissed altogether, as in the post-development debate mentioned above (i. e. Escobar 2012[1995]; Rahnema & Bowtree 1997; Ferguson 1990, Illich 1991).¹⁰ Although top-down diffusion models for behavioural change prevailed, *participatory communication* became the new buzzword, if not the new paradigm, at the turn of the millennium. It was in part based on the revival of the Latin American strand of participatory theory and practice, which had a strong influence on critical social science of the 1970s. A key scholar and source of inspiration was Brazilian liberation pedagogue Paulo Freire, with his focus on “conscientization”, dialogic communication and revolutionary pedagogical practices (Freire 1970).¹¹

Ironically, the critique of development “from below”, and from within the proper field of theory and practice, coincided with the hegemony of Neoliberalism in the global economy with its dismissal of development politics, at national or regional level, as obstacles to the market logic; according to which global capitalism will eventually bring universal benefits for all, unless it’s inhibited by protectionist or other particularistic measures, will eventually bring universal benefits for all. This “unholy alliance” of interests can be seen, if you like, in the commercialisation and privatization of development aid, with increasing focus on celebrities. The notion of *Live Aid* goes back all the way to the 1980s,¹² but the prominence of celebrities as ambassadors for the development industry is something that has largely crystallized in the last decade (Richey & Ponte 2011), and so is the rise of corporate philanthropy to leading positions in the donor league. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has in its first fifteen years grown to the largest private foundation in the world and one of the major players in global health care and poverty reduction, especially in Africa. In the current third or fourth stage of the digital revolution, we are witnessing a veritable Scramble for Africa and other emerging markets between, on the one hand, Microsoft, Google and Facebook, and on the other, China, India, Brazil and, of course, the former colonial powers in new disguise.

‘Voice’ and ‘Matter’ are not synonymous with ‘communication’ and ‘development’, but the concepts are similarly interrelated, and one can detect a fluctuating primacy of one before the other. Within the field of communication for development, there has been a shift from the primordial focus on development (matter) in the early years of both theory and practice (far up into the 1980s) to one on communication (voice), not as merely a tool but as a process (from top-down diffusion to bottom-up participation), mostly in scholarship but also implemented in development cooperation from the mid ‘90s. Now the pendulum seems to be swinging back. Culture clearly has a crucial part in this dynamic, as discussed above. Culture in development context has however tended to become synonymous with identity and identity politics. As much as it may have promoted community participation and empowerment, the privileging of *cultural diversity*, i. e. what the UN World Commission on Culture and Development (1995) defined as “the right of a group of people to follow a way of life of its choice”, arguably also hampers social change by regarding culture as a bounded group identity

to be protected and preserved.¹³

The cultural turn has in recent years been supplemented by a “material turn” in the social sciences; that is, a growing interest in the importance of artefacts, natural forces, and material regimes to social practices and systems of power (Mukerji 2015). The new focus is, more specifically on “the methodological value of studying *materiality* for illuminating under-examined forms of social life—particularly the lives of non literate or suppressed groups” (Ibid., emphasis added). Voice and matter hence converge in this approach, as what we choose to call *the ethnographic turn*.

ComDev in the margins

Although differing and sometimes contradictory, the tendencies and currents above speak in favour of the field of ComDev, albeit not in its conventional hands-on conception of communication *for* development. In our broad, culturally oriented understanding, ComDev is rather the analysis, at meta-level, of the interplay and convergence between communication *and* development (voice and matter). Perhaps it is in fact only now that ComDev is beginning to come of age as a problem-oriented academic field of research in its own right. Simultaneously, partly as a consequence of this reorientation but mostly because hard-core development issues are gaining renewed priority in marginalized areas of the globalized world, we may be seeing a resurgence of the original DevCom; that is, the strategic, solution-driven communication practices with roots in agricultural extension.¹⁴

These seemingly oppositional tendencies mirror in a way the field’s constitutive tension between theory and practice, academics vs. practitioners, and there is not necessarily any contradiction. Colombian media scholar Clemencia Rodriguez, one of the keynote speakers at the IAMCR conference in Montreal in July 2015, advocates the notion of *media at the margins*, a concept and approach which may apply to remote rural communities as well as transnational activist networks. Instead of focusing on media technologies, Rodriguez suggests that we look at the appropriation of media at grassroots’ level. With examples from the geographic margins of Colombia, as well as the Occupy movement in the US, Rodriguez underlined in her IAMCR address how some of these grassroots’ initiatives have developed “idiosyncratic media pedagogies” based on local languages and aesthetics. Rather than looking for linearity and homogeneity, she says, we should focus on processes of cross-pollination, adaptation, hybridization, and replication, which are often visible in grassroots media.¹⁵

What Rodriguez is suggesting ties well in with the ethnographic turn we are proposing. On the one hand, the focus on appropriation of media resonates scientifically with the “qualitative turn” in audience studies in the late 1980s (Jensen 1991), although their focus was less on grassroots media and more on audiences of mainstream media. It ties well in with the more recent resurgence of a “practice approach” as spearheaded largely by anthropologists working with media studies (Bräuchler & Postill 2010),

where the analytical focus of media appropriation lies in studying the actual everyday practices. Moreover, Rodriguez' focus on "cross-pollination, adaptation, hybridization, and replication" ties well in with another current focus area within anthropology, namely *communication ecologies* (Altheide 1995; Slater & Tacchi 2002; Tacchi 2006). However, the explicit emphasis on communication practices, ecologies and environments, suggests perhaps a rephrasing to "*communication at the margins*", whereby, as we have suggested above, the attention moves away from the media and towards the social practice which communication entails.

As for the element of "the margins" it may signal the grassroots level, but more fundamentally, it also speaks to the symbolic or physical distance to power. Thus, it emphasizes the interests of the most marginalized citizens of the global polity.¹⁶ In relation to Communication for Development, we find the margins to be a strikingly relevant metaphor. ComDev is thriving at the margins, both in theory and practice. When (if) "participatory communication", "empowerment" and "social justice" become buzzwords in the hegemonic development speak, there is really reason for caution; not only due to the devaluation of the concepts, but because the institutional logic itself tends to be counter-productive and even destructive. There are innumerable examples of NGOs and other agencies that, albeit well meaning, quell rather than incite citizens' own initiatives (Quarry & Ramirez 2009). As ComDev scholars and practitioners, we must be open to the possibility that ultimately the main obstacle to change may be the development industry itself. In the last ten years, innovation has primarily, if not exclusively, come from the margins – from social movements and other forms of citizen-driven initiatives. Whether this will eventually even render "international development cooperation" obsolete is too early to say. What we do state is that the players in the field of institution-driven communication for development are challenged to reinvent themselves in a world where transnational (glocal) media and communication practices are fundamentally redefining social dynamics and social relations.

The structure of the book

The contributors to this anthology, who were all participants in the 2014 Voice & Matter conference, substantiate our arguments above: the new momentum for ComDev in times of social media and social movements; the close interdependency of voice and matter; the renewed cultural impact in the form of an "ethnographic turn"; and, finally, an approach to the field as from and at the margins. Altogether, it is our conviction that the 17 chapters that follow are substantial contributions to a continuing articulation and re-definition of the theoretical foundation of Communication for Development.

We have organised the book in three sections. Section 1, **Reframing Communication in Culture and Development**, offers the opportunity to revisit our understanding

of communication, embedding it in a theoretical framework of culture *and* development. The anthropological chord that resonates through the entire volume is struck already in the first chapter, where Francis B. Nyamnjoh, using encounters in and with Africa as example, demonstrates how communication studies and anthropology as social sciences are mutually entangled in the struggle for and production of meaning in a world of interconnecting hierarchies. Linje Manyozo helps in the following chapter to deconstruct notions of (postcolonial) development by putting Frantz Fanon's colonial subject in dialogue with Gayatri Spivak's "subaltern" in an analysis of marginalized groups' contestation of oppressive power relationships.

Stefania Milan takes us to the world of digital activists to explore how their struggle for justice, equality and transparency is based on core activist values that ultimately will help recontextualize our understanding of "voice" and "matter", showing that the everyday means of communications are not neutral, and arguing that technology ultimately embodies a moral dimension.

While a large body of literature in the field tends to focus on the opportunities for voice and agency, the materiality – the politics, economics and infrastructure – of social change and development is often overlooked or at best underestimated. Karin Gwinn Wilkins and Kyung Sun Lee unpack the political economy of the development industry, offering an overview of the key donor countries and agencies and the potential implications of the currently changing scenario. Susanne Schech focuses on the specific role of volunteers in development cooperation, subjected to both foreign policy interests and neoliberal management structures of the governments that fund them, but at the same time offering voice in multiple manners.

We conclude the first section on a cultural studies note, with a conversation between Anders Høg Hansen, Faye Ginsburg and Lola Young about the legacy of Stuart Hall and its possible implications for the field of ComDev. This conversation took place after a public screening of John Akomfrah's film *The Stuart Hall Project* (2013) in which Hall reflects on culture, identity, social change, and the movements and ideas that he inspired and was inspired by.

Section 2, **Ethnography and Agency at the Margins**, presents a variety of case studies that in different ways emphasize the role of ethnography in exploring agency and citizen engagement at the margins. Firstly, Jo Tacchi offers a very grounded study on how voice can be conceived and misconceived within the complexities of everyday life, in this case in a low income area of New Delhi, India. It points us to the necessity of understanding the contexts in which we study voice.

Staying in India, Sheela Patel's discussion on the mobilization of the urban poor in informal settlements, in Mumbai and other cities, highlights the example of the transnational grassroots organisation Shack/Slum Dwellers International, which has served as inspiration for Arjun Appadurai's reflections on the "capacity to aspire", to be discussed in-depth in the third section.

Andrea Cornwall is also drawing on an Indian case in her chapter. Based on a critical review of films telling stories of sex workers in India, Cornwall's chapter explores the

politics of these representations and how such films speak to a set of larger questions about development intervention. The chapter reflects on the complexities of development communications in an age of global connectivity.

Sharath Srinivasan and Claudia Abreu Lopes' chapter takes us to Africa, presenting findings from a Zambian case study examining how and why African audiences engage in growing numbers in local radio shows through mobile phones. They critically reappraise what kinds of engagement count in communication for development, what kinds of 'publics' audiences in interactive shows constitute and how we should understand the power of these 'audience-publics'.

Faye Ginsburg unpacks a powerful experience of what she terms "televisual sovereignty" in contemporary Australian Indigenous Media. Through the drama series *Redfern Now* Ginsburg uses a historical lens focused on experiments with Australian Aboriginal television in remote communities beginning in the 1980s, to further explore contemporary developments in the neighbourhood of Redfern. It was historically the urban center of Aboriginal political action, and has now become an innovative site of cultural activism both on and off screen.

Pegi Vail connects media practices to the scholarship on development, tourism studies, and the anthropology of tourism. She does so by offering an analysis of the trajectory of her own documentary film, *Gringo Trails*, over a two year period. The analysis catalyses a discussion on the role of long-term, ethnographic filmic observation and research in exploring globalization processes.

The third and final section engages with **The Return of The Politics of Hope**; that is, whether and how hope informs citizen engagement and struggles for freedom, equality and justice. The section is based on a conversation between anthropologists Ronald Stade and Arjun Appadurai around "the capacity to aspire". While Appadurai acknowledges his debt to both Amartya Sen's capabilities approach and the more expanded philosophical dimension articulated by Martha Nussbaum, Stade advocates Ernst Bloch's "principle of hope" as a challenging notion. In direct response to the conversation, Nigel Rapport, Gudrun Dahl and Thomas Hylland Eriksen, give their critical reflections upon Appadurai's notion of hope, and specifically the understanding of poverty as an atrophy of hope. Rapport refutes Appadurai's cultural approach which allegedly turns the human capacity to aspire into a question of cultural difference, Dahl warns against blaming the victims of poverty, and Eriksen suggests that it is those living in abundance, rather than the poor, who lack the capacity to aspire.

All three sections of this book hence end with open-ended, unfinished conversations, and we wish to regard that as more than a mere coincidence. The world is in a state of transition, and communication for development, which strives to both explicate and, actually, change the world, is by definition at the crossroads of disciplines and practices of knowing. Our humble hopes are that we have brought some new topics and strands to these conversations, and even led them in some new directions.

Notes

1. There are many nominations in this field. Development Communication (DevCom) is the conventional generic term in North America (and the Philippines), whereas European, Australian and Latin American universities commonly refer to the field as Communication for Development (ComDev, C4D; sp. Comunicación para el desarrollo). Communication for Social Change was for many years a competing concept, promoted by the CfSC Consortium, and the rather clumsy Communication for Development and Social Change (abbreviated CDSC) has lately been used as a generic term.
2. http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/pdfs/university_network_statement_en.pdf
3. A parallel endeavour, also initiated by the CfSC Consortium, was the *Communication for Social Change anthology* (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006), a volume gathering fifty years of thinking in this field, represented by some two hundred articles, as excerpts or in extenso, many of which had previously only been published in Spanish.
4. The other organizers were The World Bank and the Communication Initiative, <http://www.cominit.com>
5. Most recently, the Universidad Estatal de Milagro in Quito, Ecuador, has approved an MA program in communication for social change, opening in 2016 CIESPAL, in Quito as well, is also planning an MA, in 'political communication and development'.
6. Facebook was founded in 2004, and the first iPhone was launched in 2007.
7. International Association of Media and Communication Researchers.
8. The acronym BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China), coined in 2001, was adjusted to BRICS in 2010, after the inclusion of South Africa.
9. US Economic Historian Walt Rostow was one of the leading advocates of the Modernization paradigm. In his hugely influential *The Stages of Economic Growth* (1960), he launched the aeronautical analogy of "take off" for the moment in a country's political and economic maturation, "the old blocks and resistances to steady growth are finally overcome".
10. For a comprehensive overview and critical analysis of the post-development school, see Ziai 2007 and Nederveen Pieterse 2010 [2001].
11. In the 'Communication for Social Change Anthology' (Gumucio-Dagron and Tufte 2006) the strong Latin American significance in this field becomes evident: more than 40 percent of the contributions were Latin American, selected based on thematic relevance.
12. It started on the initiative of Irish rock musician Bob Geldof with the *Band Aid* charity campaign for the victims of starvation in Ethiopia 1984 (the record *Do they know it's Christmas?*) culminating in a concert on Wembley 13 July 1985.
13. See our introduction in Hemer and Tufte 2005: 17
14. DevCom, as an abbreviation of Development Communication, is the concept used by University of the Philippines in Los Baños, one of the oldest academic programmes in the field, founded by legendary Nora Quebral in 1972.
15. Clemencia Rodríguez keynote address is available on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HjTWxnBbKbU> (accessed 10 November 2015)
16. A number of recent publications by IAMCR members have recently dealt with media and the margins, i.e. Savigny 2015a and 2015b.

I. Reframing Communication in Culture and Development

Communication and Cultural Identity

An Anthropological Perspective

Francis B. Nyamnjoh

Abstract

If relationships and transmission are critical to sociality and the very idea of human society as a dynamic reality, understanding cultural identities and development entails taking a closer look at how the negotiation and navigation of ever unfolding encounters with difference shape and are shaped by competing modes of social reproduction and transformation. This chapter explores myriad forms of encounters in and with Africa to suggest how communication and anthropology as social sciences are mutually entangled in the struggle for and production of meaning in a world of interconnecting hierarchies.

Keywords: anthropology, communication, development, identity, interconnectedness, mobility

This chapter addresses the theme of development communication and cultural identity in Africa from an anthropological perspective. Given the importance of the socio-cultural context and in view of the hierarchies that inform human relations, anthropological insights are critical for understanding the dynamics of persuasive communication and how audiences of different social backgrounds and positions relate to the media and advocacy communication that target them. Using Africa as an entry point, this chapter discusses the intricate interconnections between anthropology and communication, arguing that different forms of the one beget different forms of the other, and that the quality of development communication research in any context requires paying closer attention to this nexus.

What is communication?

Communication is the process of production of meaning, through symbolic action. It is possible for someone who suddenly appears, by some miracle or act of magic on a virgin island, to produce acts that are meaningful, to himself. But let us explore the limits of these meanings. For lack of a better example, let's name this man Friday,

as in Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. When Friday and Robinson meet for the first time, they start foraging for mutual intelligibility. They realize that communication is public, that meaning is made in a social context.

Communication as a social act is the process by which negotiated or collective meaning is produced, circulated and consumed by social actors. Ideally, social communication should be democratic, that is if democracy is even realisable in important ways in our everyday lives. Unfortunately for democracy, society and the social are shaped by hierarchies of various kinds, hierarchies informed by but not confined to considerations such as gender, geography, race, class, status, age, and education. And democracy is tainted by the reality that the most privileged persons and groups within particular hierarchical orders maintain the hierarchies. And feel it their right – acquired by birth and inheritance or achieved through personal or collective ingenuity or industry – to own and control the communication process, by determining who shall play what role in the social production, circulation and consumption of meaning.

The Fridays of society can continue to claim or aspire to have the voice and agency to activate their creative imaginations to the fullest, but if the Robinsons exercise the full extent of the power deriving from their ownership and control, the voices of the Fridays are reduced to deafening silence through various acts and mechanisms of domestication and docility, subtle and overt. By domestication I mean taming, or bringing the wild home to civilisation, through acts of conversion and obfuscation – in the manner we tame and train animals like dogs, cats, monkeys, or elephants, or discipline newly born human beings in the name of socialisation. As Foucault (1975, 1995) would put it, the ultimate purpose of domestication is not to produce informed individuals capable of making choices in total freedom, but rather to fabricate and guarantee self-regulating docile bodies that can be used, manipulated, subjected, and purportedly improved and transformed by those who know best and the institutions they have erected for the reproduction of standardised, routinized, predictable behaviour to fulfil their dominance.

Sooner or later the Fridays become perfectly in tune with their circumstances, the order of things, and what is expected of them in society and social relations. At least so it seems to the triumphant Robinsons who, in the words of Chinua Achebe (1964), have the yam and the knife. Unequal communication suddenly becomes participatory, because the Fridays appear to contest nothing, even to the point of seemingly celebrating and encouraging their own subjugation, claiming their subservience and lowliness of status to be the one best thing ever to have happened to them. And here, we are still talking about individual societies and the power dynamics within them.

If we provide for societies, just like Friday, not being islands – given human capacity for mobility – a question arises as to what happens when one social system encounters another through various forms of mobility? The logic of hierarchies internal to each society does not disappear with such encounters. Like in a game of boxing or most other games for that matter, the winner takes all. Zero sum games and prioritisation of difference are the order of the day in the world we inhabit. Similitude and inclusiv-

ity are more dreamed and talked about than realised, as everyone within the logic of zero sum games – however defective, inadequate or incomplete – is all too ready, in victory, to raise their inadequacies, incompleteness or defectiveness to the standard of measure of excellence and to downgrade or debase the vanquished (Nyamnjoh 2015a). Societies that come out victorious in such encounters – however transient their victories – impose their will, and with this, their own communicative order, drawing on repertoires and technologies of dominance they have perfected with time and the whims and caprices of victory, and on systems of representation and practice that have become second nature to their members.

Hierarchies introduced by agents of the mobile victor society either blend in with local hierarchies of the vanquished or captive society, or, in case of persistent resistance to the logic of force, create and encourage parallel hierarchies aimed at subverting and supplanting existing ones. A good example in this regard is the colonial encounter, where instead of foraging for mutual intelligibility on equal terms by promoting conversation, the colonising societies conversed by brute force and imposed their worldviews, representations and practices through the guise of benevolence and the sharing and globalising of supposed superior values of human civilisation (Nyamnjoh 2012a, 2015a).

Different types of relationships require different forms of communication. If one privileges hierarchies and inequalities – especially when these work in one's favour – the tendency would be for one to seek to reproduce, even by brute force if necessary, these hierarchies and inequalities and one's advantages therein. One would instinctively distance oneself from any form of interaction that challenges, contests or seeks to mitigate this particular order of relationships, especially if one is able to calculate a priori or foresee the detrimental outcomes to one's interests. Communication for such a person, far from being horizontal, democratic and participatory, tends to be thunderously vertical, top down, dictatorial, directive and prescriptive (in the manner eloquently captured in Charlie Chaplin's film *The Great Dictator*, 1940), where there is a clear sense of autocratic authority and totalitarian legitimacy regarding who qualifies to initiate what manner of communicative act, and with what consequences. In such communication, there is no doubt where and with whom power lies. There is no equivocation about who can speak how to whom, or who can assume what posture when addressing or listening, representing or being represented.

Those lower down the hierarchy of credibility or authority and legitimacy are not expected, within this order of things, to initiate anything. They are meant to be passive recipients of communicative acts centrally conceived by or with the benediction of the authorities at the heart of the hierarchy of credibility in place. They are expected to enact prescribed directions of social action without question and in accordance with the rules and regulations at play. It is not their role to think and exercise their minds independently or to act, behave or deploy their bodies as if they were autonomous beings with freedom of imagination, however free they imagine themselves to be. The tendency in this model is to consider those targeted by persuasive communication as

an essentially passive audience to be manipulated into compliance with the expectations or prescriptions of those who know best. People are treated as patients cuing up at a hospital to be injected by expert doctors and nurses who have diagnosed and determined their disease and its cure. The mechanics of communication are overly emphasised, as the role of the expert and the initiator of communicative content is dramatized to the detriment of specific audiences.

Indeed, those targeted by such highly centralised persuasive communication are supposed to posture themselves as passive receptacles of representations and gazes by the mightily powerful and not presume or purport to have counter-gazes and representations of their own. Nothing worthwhile – not even inconsequential rumour and babble (never mind the famous 1984 speech of “*la vérité vient d'en haut, la rumeur vient d'en bas*” by Paul Biya, who has been president of Cameroon since November 1982 – i.e. for over 33 years) – is expected to originate from those debased to the lowest rungs of humanity or human society; those we have the habit of fondly, patronisingly or condescendingly calling ‘the grassroots and the laymen’, ‘ordinary people’, ‘the masses’ and ‘the working classes’.

Within these types of communication models (be they in politics, institutions or within scholarly circles), there is much *talking at, talking on, talking past, talking around and talking to, but little talking with* those targeted by the persuasive communication in question, regardless of the purportedly inherent democratic potentialities of the technology involved. Similarly, there is much acting at, acting on, acting past, acting around and acting on behalf of but little acting with those of interest and of whom much adaptation is expected by the prescriptive authorities and gazes. *Action on* is privileged to the detriment of *interaction with* those one considers and relates to as if they were inferior and dependent. If the inferior stubbornly exude a capacity to act or react in unpredictable ways – a tendency all too common in the age of social media –, it is upon themselves that they should exercise their sterile agency, because it is considered, a priori, out of the question – indeed an aberration – that such creative imagination should be directed upwards, to their superiors. Anger, contestation and the contemplation of alternatives are inimical to social reproduction. Superiors use communication to establish independence for themselves and confer dependence upon their inferiors. Any communication model that remotely suggests interdependence beyond rhetoric or lip service is savagely resisted. Little wonder that many a celebration of the power of social media (be this Facebook or Twitter or a combination of both and others) – such as the Arab Spring for example – has often proven to be premature, as the forces of dictatorship and dominance have sooner or later closed ranks and resumed command.

Within this frame of interconnecting global and local hierarchies of communicative power and relationships, technologies of communication, however promising and democratic in principle and in abstraction, tend to work to reproduce patterns of inequalities and inequities. It is true that humans and technologies are increasingly interdependent, and that the capacity of humans and technology to act on each other

shapes society and social relations significantly. However, the agency of communication technologies is dependent on human enablers. Even our drones and robots depend on human programming and remote control to activate them to the level of potency required for efficacious action. Technologies are only as powerful as human volition allows them to be. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) enhance one's toolkit, allowing one to develop new initiatives and responses. They become an extra layer of armour in the uncertainties of negotiated hierarchies. While they can be used to enhance dominance, they may also be used to resist or reject, if only temporarily, marginalisation in society.

Reconfiguration of the social does not imply its overhaul, but a mobility of its structures and agents, guided and limited by a reconstitution of the political economy of information exchange. In some cases and under extreme relationships of inequality (such as slavery, colonialism and apartheid), certain humans have been reduced to things, subhumans, machines or technologies of production by and for the gratification of others who consider them commodities to be acquired, used and abused at will. This possibility cautions against an *a priori* confinement of technologies to machines or things, as people are not disinclined to enhance themselves by debasing others through institutions and values systems that at face value might appear to be at the service of all and sundry. Such institutions and values are not dissimilar from machines in how they are able to extent human volition to dominate.

What is anthropology?

Anthropology brings intellectual and academic curiosity to bear on human beings as socially cultivated and cultivating agents. Its primary focus as a discipline is on the processes of creative innovation of humans as social beings. A central assumption in anthropology is that relationships are central to human action and interaction, and that society or the social would not be possible if every person were to live their lives in splendid isolation. Indeed, anthropologists would argue that without relationships and sociality, there is no humanity. John Donne must have spoken for anthropologists when he wrote:

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. [...] any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.¹

A basic tenet of anthropology is that it takes more than biology to make human life possible, sustainable and meaningful. Nature matters as nurture in human matters and for the human to matter. It is in this sense that many an anthropologist makes an extra effort to qualify themselves with prefixes such as social or cultural, to emphasise the point that while nature is important, nurture is critically significant in the production and reproduction of the social, and indeed of nature. Culture would not be possible

without the capacity in humans to embrace and transcend nature simultaneously. Similarly, nature would perish without nurture. In his seminal essay, *Idea of Culture*, Bernard Fonlon defines culture as that which brings the growth of humans “under the control of right reason” and guides that growth “according to sound knowledge” in the interest of the perfection sought by humans (Fonlon 1965: 10). He argues that human beings are not simply contented with being, as they must exercise their power of becoming. “Driven by... need, and helped by observation and experiment, the human mind – the supreme architect of culture – elaborates a system of thought laying down a method of using the external world to satisfy that need” (Ibid.: 13). Fonlon likens culture to cultivation, and uses the analogy of tillage in agriculture to explain tillage in human culture. Both in terms of cultivation in culture and in agriculture Fonlon writes:

Thanks to tillage, therefore, thanks to the purpose, the knowledge, the labour and the skill of man, that which would have been wild becomes *tame*, that which would have been scattered at haphazard is set *in order*, that which would have been stunted attains its *plenitude* and a yield that would have been lean becomes *rich* both in quality and in quantity (Ibid.: 6).

While cultivation of plants is limited to agriculture, the cultivation of humans is the exclusive preserve of culture where the human being is both tiller and tilled in that “each human being cultivates himself, cultivates his faculties, takes an active and essential part in his own education,” and just as “some human beings cultivate others, the generation that goes before educates that which follows after” (Ibid.: 8). The ultimate purpose of culture, Fonlon argues, is to procure for the human being a “happiness of a higher nature, first by a thorough, deep and balanced development of his faculties, that is, his senses, his feelings, his mind and his will, and next by supplying each faculty with the nourishment for which it hungers: truth for the mind, goodness for the will and beauty for sense and feeling” (Ibid.). Human beings actively participate in their own cultivation. Human culture grows from age to age, as each generation draws on “the cultural legacy that it has inherited from the past, and enriches this legacy further with new discoveries of its own in science and philosophy, new creations in art” (Ibid.: 9) and through encounters with other cultures.

Culture and cultivation in the Fonlon sense is central to anthropology as a discipline anchored on the social shaping of nature. Over the history of anthropology, various metaphors have been used to describe this process of culture and cultivation of nature. We have become accustomed to terms such as enculturation, socialisation, habituation, assimilation, collectivisation, indoctrination, and civilisation, as processes aimed at producing culture (through the internalisation and embodiment of certain representations and practices consecrated as legitimate within a given context informed by particular relationships).

The economic minded among us would be right to consider culture and the identities that cultures make possible as the stock in trade of social and cultural anthropologists. And among anthropologists thinking on culture has come a long way.

There used to be a time when it was common currency for anthropologists to think, relate to and research culture as if culture were a birthmark or something frozen at the state of nature. Culture was like a sort of imprisonment for life in a maximum security prison with barbed wire and electric fences so tall and so dangerous that no prisoner, however desirous or daring could want or be allowed to covet the world and attractions of life beyond their solitary confinement. Such an idea of culture created victims, not accomplices. Societies, large or small, were treated as bounded, self-contained, inward looking and navel gazing entities or organisms, where history and progress were possible only as internally induced and utterly autonomous processes. Every culture, every people, according to this idea of culture, lived their lives in splendid isolation, like Friday did. Robinson Crusoe could do very little to convert and domesticate him into the English language, Christianity and the Civilisation he mediated. There was no mobility across cultural boundaries, which were purportedly heavily policed, to discourage traffic in contraband ideas, values and the things of others. Purity was the aspiration or expectation, and anthropologists often conducted themselves and their studies as if such aspirations or expectations were reality. Even when slavery and colonialism were common currency, these perceptions and discourses on culture continued to proliferate in contradiction of claims and ambitions of *mission civilisatrice*.

Anthropology as communication through mobility

Culture or cultivation is impossible without communication, and communication entails mobility – physical and social, individual and collective, of people, things and ideas. To transmit is to mobilise and activate through relationships. Factoring mobility or immobility into our thinking on collective identities (be these articulated as “tribalism,” “ethnicity,” “nationalism,” “cosmopolitanism,” “transnationalism” or otherwise) helps us understand the rise and fall of certain currents in anthropological thought and the suffrage enjoyed by certain communication models within those systems of thought. It is fascinating the extent to which mobility is at the heart of anthropology – starting from the early days of Edward Tylor, when cultures were perceived to evolve from one stage to another, and difference in culture was seen to be much more due to the different stages of a linear progression than an attribute of the race, place or biological configuration of the various peoples living particular cultures.

Mobility of humans, ideas and material things entails encounters and the production or reproduction of similarities and difference, as those who move or are moved tend to position themselves or be positioned in relation to those they meet and to one another. While every cultural community is dynamic or mobile within itself, technologies of mobility make possible movement between places and spaces where particular cultural configurations predominate. Thanks to mobility, cultural encounters informed by interconnecting hierarchies are possible, and have been throughout the histories of encounters. It is also thanks to mobility that anthropology as a discipline is pos-

sible. Even armchair anthropologists depended on accounts harnessed by some kind of mobility to make possible their representation of those they sought to understand (Nyamnjoh 2013).

Anthropology in many regards is about privileged and underprivileged mobility. Who gets to move or whose mobility is privileged shall determine whose version of what encounters is documented, disseminated, consumed and reproduced as ideas and in the form of symbolic and material representations. According to a popular African saying, until the lion has the opportunity to tell its own story, the history of the hunt shall always favour the hunter. Applied to communication and anthropology, until the dominated or subaltern, sometimes referred to as the voiceless, have the opportunity to document anthropologically and communicate their own experiences and relationships, the anthropology and communication of their realities, however sophisticated and purportedly democratically and empathetically rendered, shall always favour the (in)sensitivities and interests of the dominant forces in their lives.

We anthropologists have for long been more mobile than those we study. Or rather, we have tended to foreground, in our scholarly communications, our own mobility much more than the mobility of those we study. We carry on about our “fieldwork trips,” so central to anthropology. We carry on about the people (others) we study, assumed to be “immobilised” by frozen traditions and customs and confined to particular geographies and spaces. Because our mobility as anthropologists is privileged over and above the mobility of those we study, we arrogate to ourselves the status of omniscient mediators of cultural identities and encounters. We anthropologists enjoy the prerogative and luxury of freezing the subjects and objects of our study outside the local and global historical contexts that give them meaning and relevance. Many of us also underplay the power dynamics that favours our perspectives or interpretations of our encounters with our immobilised or frozen subjects.

The emphasis in many an anthropological circle on the “ethnographic present” means many anthropologists study culture outside historical perspective, which leads to easy associations and problematic correlations. Without a historical perspective, it might not be possible to fathom the full extent to which the ethnographic encounters of the present are productive of culture. Certain manners of doing and communicating anthropological research could be productive of culture – that is, giving birth to what is not, from how the anthropologist re-presents what is. In this regard, we anthropologists are far more powerful than we imagine or present ourselves. The fact that the ethnographies we produce can have limited circulation makes it possible for us as anthropologists to *talk at* and *talk on* – at exclusive conferences for example – but hardly *talk to* or *talk with* those we study. If our anthropological representations are endorsed by our peers or other instances of legitimation, a new cultural baby is born, baptised and confirmed. The people re-presented shall be known as this or that – not so much according to how they define and relate to themselves but according to what the anthropologist as an authoritative voice has successfully sold at the marketplace of ideas (Nyamnjoh 2012b).

There is much more to the identities of people, places and spaces than anthropologists document or have to say about them. There is such a thing as Who, What, Where, When, Why and How the people, places and spaces are, with or without an interpreter, intermediary or interlocutor for the outside world. It is unfortunate that anthropology seems better known as a handmaiden of colonialism and for producing or reproducing radical alterity than for its contribution to the study of identities as contested, flexible and fluid. Anthropology's uncritical reproduction of the hierarchized and differentiated world of those with ambitions of dominance has left it with little suffrage in Africa as a discipline (Nyamnjoh 2012b, 2015b).

Persistent negative perceptions of anthropology mean that exciting new developments within its ranks are going unnoticed by its critics outside the discipline. For example, the idea of "mobile natives" (with some degree of freedom, as opposed to bounded mobility as slaves and indentured labour) is very recent in anthropology, and with it, the idea that field trips need not necessarily imply going away from home. One needs not leave the metropolis to study ethnic identities and cultural differences in a truly interconnected and entangled world, just as one does not have to be an outsider in the classic anthropological sense to study a given community or sets of relationships. Indeed, outsider and insider perspectives are expected to enter conversations with one another, with the aim of enriching one another the way intimate strangers are expected to. This calls for an approach to doing and communicating anthropological research that is increasingly subtle, contextual and nuanced in how people, places and spaces relate and interrelate, an approach that is as curious about what is *apparently* familiar as it is about the *obviously* strange. Such positive developments are yet to be better communicated and promoted within anthropology as well as among its critics who continue to think of its excesses under colonialism and as a foot soldier for neoliberalism and the penetration and domination of the rest of the world by the West and its violent cacophonies of monologues.

The mobility of cultures does not immediately translate into *mutual* cultural influence as such influence is often dependent on power relations that characterise encounters and shape whose perceptions, however problematic and contested, shall carry the day. Given the much touted participant observation method of cross cultural conversations and meaning making, one might imagine anthropologists among the most culturally adaptable, flexible and nimble of creatures – in the manner of a salesman who uses his own product, or a preacher who practices his preaching. But alas, we, like other humans, are very much cultural leopards. We hardly change our spots. Paradoxically, we expect those we study to make sense to us on our own terms! Wittingly or not, we are itinerant evangelists or salesmen and women for certain forms of rationality even when we preach cultural relativism. It is not enough to argue in favour of place and space for all cultures, without making an effort to go native in a real way, to understand the thrills and challenges of living the life of another in a context of skewed and unfavourable power relations (Nyamnjoh 2012b, 2013, 2015b).

Fonlon reminds us that “the world of things gives rise to the world of thought and the world of thought engenders the world of verbal expression,” adding that “[n]ext to thought, language is the first cultural necessity, the first cultural invention” of humankind. To Fonlon, “[t]here can be no culture without language, no language without culture. Culture and language, or expression, are one” (Fonlon 1965: 12). Herein lies the intimate interconnection or inextricable entanglement between anthropology and communication. A good anthropologist is difficult to envisage without the attributes of a skilled communicator. Anthropology and communication are like Siamese twins. Paradoxically, interest in communication studies is yet to become mainstream in anthropological circles, just as interest in anthropology is yet to have a commanding presence in communication studies circles.

Clifford Geertz is one of the anthropologists who recognise the centrality of communication and cultural context of knowledge production in anthropology. He argues that culture as socially established structures of meaning is public because meaning is public (Geertz 1973: 12). He advocates an approach to anthropology where interpretation of symbolic action is privileged over explanation. To him, the study of rules and regulations in abstraction is hardly enough to understand the workings of any particular society or cultural system. In his words, “[b]ehaviour must be attended to, and with some exactness, because it is through the flow of behaviour – or, more precisely, social action – that cultural forms find articulation” (Ibid.: 17). The ethnographer, he maintains, inscribes social discourse by writing it down. Such inscription turns social discourse “from a passing event, which exists only in its own moment of occurrence, into an account, which exists in its inscriptions and can be consulted” (Ibid.: 19).

Interpretive or symbolic anthropology, as Geertz’s approach has come to be known, focuses on meaning and understanding within a particular cultural context – a sort of cultural logic. Interpretive anthropology assumes research is an intersubjective process of meaning making and calls for the researcher to be aware of meaning not only as contextually specific but also as open to constant negotiation and renegotiation. It is an anthropology that privileges events and social action and the different layers of meaning they assume and, therefore, rigorous and systematic observation of how things unfold on the ground in a layered and nuanced manner. Interpretive anthropology calls for a distinct style of fieldwork involving copious field notes detailing events and interactions and use of all the five senses. Geertz uses the metaphor of “Thick Description” for interpretive ethnographic writing. Thick Description is “interpretive of [...] the flow of social discourse; and the interpreting involved consists in trying to rescue the ‘said’ of such discourse from its perishing occasions and fix it in perusable terms” (Ibid.: 20), such that a practice or phenomenon might pass away or be altered, but its ethnography as a document remains. To him, Thick Description has to be “microscopic” which “is not to say that there are no large-scale anthropological interpretations of whole societies, civilisations, world events, and so on” (Ibid.: 21).

Through the example of his Balinese Cock Fight, we are invited to contemplate the possibilities implicit in avoiding the obvious when we do fieldwork, both in the

questions we ask, and where and how we look for answers to these questions. To settle on cock fights – something rendered illegal, by a ban by Dutch colonial authorities, and therefore largely invisible – is not exactly obvious for a researcher who sets off with a clear research project informed by a definite conceptual framework and a set of questions around well-defined hypotheses. Yet, it is that unintended encounter with cock fighting that led Geertz to open the world of anthropology up not only to cock fighting as a metaphor for masculinity, status and prestige among Balinese men, but also, through engaging Jeremy Bentham's notion of "deep play," to introduce the idea that apparently irrational behaviour is best appreciated through a deep understanding of the cultural logic that underpins it, not through a rationality of universal enlightenment and its utilitarian values. In other words, there is much more to irrationality than meets the eye – one person's cultural meat is another's cultural poison. There is sense in madness and nonsense, just as there may well be madness and nonsense in a veneer of rationality and logic. This is cultural relativism as understood in anthropological circles.

Geertz's interpretive anthropology is useful for studying specific cultural systems with dominant cultural logics. Given increasingly flexible mobility for people, ideas and material culture and the imperative of constantly renegotiating meaning, how do we creatively and critically re-appraise and re-orientate the assumptions of culturally specific logics central to interpretive anthropology? How does one reconcile the need to contest essentialisms with the critical recognition that cultural contexts and logics matter in the production of meaning? Anthropology has progressed from functionalist models of evolutionary change through binary oppositions of structuralism, to an understanding of culture and the social as dynamic and constantly renegotiated with everyday social interactions, equal and unequal encounters at local and global levels. What new configuration do such flexibilities and fluidities bring to interpretive anthropology as an approach that privileges cultural particularism and its logic to universalism and its euro-centric modernisation epistemologies? To what extent are current flexibilities and fluidities a reflection of more horizontal forms of power among differently and differentially located cultures and anthropologists in their encounters?

There is a lot more to claims of mobility and encounters than meets the eye. The culture with the power to enforce its ambitions of dominance defines itself and the less empowered cultures it encounters. And participant observation is seldom engaging enough or with adequate equality in encounters for anthropologists to confront and contextualise the rhetoric of cultural relativism. Unequal power dynamics continue to reinvent themselves, which means that even when cross cultural influences are evident in the lives of people, the tendency remains to want to define and confine such influences in very narrow terms – calling them melting pot, multiculturalism, hybridity, or rainbow nation. Such resilience of bounded notions of culture, which are clearly socially and politically produced, are at the service of vested interests in defining and confining.

Communicating cultural intelligibilities: Translation dilemmas

Without translation and interpretation, communication between two languages and cultures by extension is virtually impossible. Investing in translation does not imply that these translations are going to be well done, because it is difficult to come by accomplished and competent translators. Body language and other nonverbal forms of communication may have their merits, but learning to understand, speak, write and read a common language with those one encounters provides a solid basis for lasting relationships. Equal or unequal, interpretation and translation are critical in promoting linguistic and cultural intelligibility.

Translation, however, is a tricky business. The problems and difficulties of translation, as well as possible solutions to them are well known to students and professionals of translation (Venuti 2004; Ndi 2008). They understand only too well the limitations of a decontextualized and dehistoricised word-for-word rendering of the original, and advocate privileging the spirit over the letter of the text. Indeed, the concomitant issue of understanding context comes to the fore, as meaning is so composite that relaying information proves tricky when the understanding of concepts in one language cannot necessarily be transposed onto another.

In his article “Language Imperialism, Concepts and Civilization: China versus The West” (2012), Thorsten Pattberg uses his estimate of “over 35,000 Chinese words or phrases that cannot properly be translated into the English language,” and the fact that the histories and traditions specific to European languages mean that “they cannot sufficiently render Chinese concepts,” and should therefore not seek to translate the most important foreign concepts at all” (Ibid.). Instead, they should adopt them. Pattberg’s point finds comfort in the argument that “the idiosyncratic use of language makes it difficult for linguistic concepts to be universalised” (Ndi 2008: 113). Such caution notwithstanding, translation continues to take place, sometimes as a form of credentialism or crave for legitimation. As Pattberg argues, claiming a word such as “philosophy” in a context where it does not quite apply, “involuntarily supports Western sovereignty over the interpretation of Chinese thought” (Pattberg 2012b). Such efforts at translation by local Chinese scholars that caricature, mimic or reproduce in the image of the West, voluntarily or otherwise, often results in the legitimation of “the Western onslaught on Chinese terminology and, without giving too much thought to it, enabling the Western hold for power over the history of thought” (Ibid.). Given the lesser of the two evils – bad translation for the sake of surface-level understanding as opposed to no translation at all – the power and stature of such local scholars desperately seeking to be relevant to the West grows at the expense of the “thousands of Chinese scholars who still fight for Chinese terminologies, but who will not be given a voice in Western mainstream media” and are hence “virtually unemployable globally, as they do not conform to Western standard” (Ibid.).

A similar argument can be made of the myriad indigenous African languages, many of which, unlike Chinese, are yet to develop into written languages. Organisa-

tions such as the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) has played a significant role in promoting African scholarship since 1973, by encouraging conversations among scholars across four different language divides – French, English, Portuguese and Arabic – through translation and interpretation. Many scholars are frustrated by the failure by CODESRIA to adopt major indigenous African languages for its activities, knowledge production and dissemination. Given such problems of translation as those highlighted by Thorsten Pattberg with regard to Chinese, it is all the more urgent for CODESRIA and related organisations to develop and commit to a vision of popularising the research and scholarship it supports in African indigenous languages. Leading by example, Ngugi wa Thiong'o writes and publishes his novels in Gikuyu, his mother tongue, and only then has them translated into English. He speaks metaphorically of colonial languages as a third leg and compares Africans' adoption of them as having to 'borrow a third leg' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o 2005). This concern is not to deny the fact that many Africans beyond the elite are like octopi in their facility with language and the cohabitation of the multiple worldviews they reflect.

Notwithstanding the challenges and shortcomings of translation, verbal communication between two linguistically different individuals and communities – or even different dialects within the same language – is absolutely necessary. Important though sign, body and other symbolic forms of communication are, they are not totally satisfactory to our communicative needs and aspirations. There might be much truth in the claim that to translate is to betray, misrepresent, distort or assimilate (*traduire c'est trahir*), few of us would want to give up entirely. We would rather be betrayed or misrepresented than give up entirely on developing our multilingual skills and on translation. As I prepared this chapter, I stumbled on "Found in Translation" by Hamid Dabashi in which I found much comfort. Using philosophy and literature as examples, Dabashi argues that philosophical and literary works "gain far more than they lose in translation". He writes:

Works of philosophy – and their readers – gain in translation not just because their authors begin to breathe in a new language but because the text signals a world alien to its initial composition. Above all they gain because these authors and their texts have to face a new audience (Dabashi 2013)².

Dabashi argues that in some instances translations, however poorly done, bring a work, a philosopher or a literary figure, into the limelight, thereby saving it or him/her from the obscurity that would otherwise be its or his/her fate. To illustrate how translation has a collaborate effect which could be seen as valuable for its own sake, he chooses Heidegger:

Had it not been for his French translators and commentators, German philosophy of his time would have remained an obscure metaphysical thicket. And it was not until Derrida's own take on Heidegger found an English readership in the United States and Britain that the whole Heidegger-Derridian undermining of metaphysics began to shake the foundations of the Greek philosophical heritage. (Ibid.)

Drawing on this to understand African scholarship, what would our knowledge of the most misrepresented continent be without the capacity to access (mis)representations of our own, even if only in one colonial language or the other? Works by leading African scholars and classics such as *The Meanings of Timbuktu* (Jeppie and Bachir 2008) have been translated into French or English, and in some instances into Arabic and Portuguese, thereby making it possible for students and scholars of Africa to access and claim knowledge of other parts of Africa than their own. Similarly, by encouraging research and publications in its four working languages, CODESRIA is able to promote intellectual networking, collaboration and conversation among Africans who would otherwise dramatize the hurdles of cross-language interaction in their research and scholarship. Translation makes it possible to be truly pan-African in African scholarship, by enabling access to knowledge without the *a priori* consideration of whether or not one belongs in primary or primordial terms, to the linguistic community of origin of the text in question. Although peppered by unintended misinterpretation or mistranslation, the contribution of translated text should not be underestimated. The philosophical debate over understanding language leads one to accept that translation is always a process of negotiation, re-evaluation and revalorisation of meaning. Humans being fundamentally dissimilar in what informs their understanding, no translation is perfect even in its imperfection. From this (albeit optimistic) perspective, translation does more good than harm. While still recognisably trapped in colonial geographies and languages, African scholars are able at the same time to defy the confines of these languages and geographies, and to make possible, at the end of the day, the beginnings of more democratic intelligibility between the Robinson Crusoes and the Fridays of this world.

Communicating anthropology in the age of technologies of freedom

My intention in this chapter is not to perpetuate doom and gloom. It is not to complicate things either. There is much to be optimistic about. Advances in information and communication technologies have made a significant difference as to how we go about the business of doing and communicating anthropology in the 21st century. Gone are the Malinowski days of fieldwork, which involved arranging one perilous form of transportation after another to a “remote” locality and transporting stationery, a typewriter (if one could afford one) and enough subsistence and medication for months away from kin and kith.

With the proliferation of possibilities through internet and social media, the pressures of “publish or perish” and/or “publish and perish” (Nyamnjuh 2004) have abated, as anthropologists (including those at the periphery) can now explore blogging and other dissemination channels, which include self-publishing and print on demand publications. The cell phone has revolutionised communication in the field and be-

tween the field and the outside world. With the availability of internet connectivity and the cell phone, no village seems too remote to be accessed or to stay in touch with the rest of the world. The digitally enhanced possibilities of networking have multiplied beyond contemplation, not only for anthropologists in and out of the field, but also for those they study. The native is no longer as acutely technologically disadvantaged or inferior as was the case when Malinowski conjured up and instituted fieldwork as an approach to knowledge production. Certainly, these developments and their impact on scholarship and scholarly relationships cannot be ignored. In my own research, I have documented aspects of these technological transformations and how they have transformed anthropological communication (Nyamnjoh 2013).

Recognising these transformations is important provided we are measured and realistic about their possibilities and limitations. Anthropology and communication scholars alike would do well to avoid modernisation pretensions – or assumptions that those they study need social change – and that they and their disciplines are best placed to bring about that change (Nyamnjoh 2015b). Research driven by such evangelical zeal seems to focus on the *effectiveness* of the techniques of persuasion, diffusion and adoption of innovations à la Rogers (1962; 1973). I know just how eager some of us are to indict the social structures and traditions of those cultural beliefs and practices we consider desperately need abandonment in the interest of what we extravagantly love to call “development” or “modernisation”. Those of us who are disciples of this current of thought tend to see tradition in terms of impediment to development and the traditional power elite as gatekeepers against modernisation. When we seek to understand the social structures of the societies we study, it is to determine how best these structures could be replaced by so-called “modern” ones.

Reluctant to part with the logic of teleologies, dichotomies and binary oppositions, we have convinced ourselves that tradition has little or nothing to offer, while modernity has everything to offer. The one is an eternal hell of darkness, the other an eternal paradise of enlightenment. We refuse to repent from an idea of anthropology and of communication where salvation comes from superior others (be these development experts or academics) situated (most preferably) outside the societies or social categories we pretend to study. We develop and force-feed our students and unsuspecting others what Peter Golding has aptly termed theories of “exogenously induced change,” which theories suggest that some societies are “static” or only reluctantly mobile and that such “static societies are brought to life by outside influences, technical aid, knowledge, resources and financial assistance and (in a slightly different form) by the diffusion of ideas” (Golding 1974: 43).

Such exogenously induced social change type of research often stresses efficiency and practicality, is mostly atheoretical and ahistorical in nature, hardly relies on well-formulated or tested hypotheses, and is usually aimed at resolving a precise policy or commercial problem or advocacy commitment. Hence, it tends to be more concerned with rapid appraisal or slash and burn surveys than with conceptualisation, and more with description than with analysis. It is piecemeal in approach, scarcely integrated,

and does not emphasize continuity. The researchers in this tradition hardly bother to redefine the research problem brought to them by governments and other agents of development, and their research tends to serve the interests of those who pay for it and who find it useful in maximising their economic, cultural, political or hegemonic interests (Halloran 1974, 1983).

An obvious way to proceed in our research is to disabuse ourselves of claims of expertise and superiority, which we often cannot demonstrate scientifically or objectively. If we proceed with the understanding that we do not know more than those we study and could be their students, very mediocre students at that, we would not be so averse to the idea or suggestion that we collaborate, co-produce and co-author with those we study. We would recommit ourselves to or be made to see the wisdom of perspectives of interconnections, interdependence, intricacies, nuance and complexities on the phenomena or realities we study. We would not be too averse to the suggestion that real life is often larger than logic and messier than the neat formulae and categories we deploy to understand it (Nyamnjuh 2015a).

What if we stopped treating research and knowledge production as zero sum games, where there can be only one winner – the professional researcher or academic? What if we consider knowledge production as a never-ending process of the negotiation of meaning? Such collaborative knowledge production calls for more decentralised and more representative anthropology and communication. And for the re-socialisation and reappraisal of approaches we have either ignored or simply never really thought of, overwhelmed as we are by our modernist pretensions. We must increasingly question basic assumptions, conventional wisdom, academic traditions and research practices, which we have uncritically and often unconsciously internalised, and which remain largely ill-adapted to the contexts and predicaments we seek to comprehend (Nyamnjuh 2012b, 2015a & b, Devisch 2002, 2007, 2011).

As anthropologists and communication scholars, can we see ourselves as instruments of quality social research, rather than as all powerful theatre or film directors and celebrity superstars working with “local actors” in philanthropic gear? Can we be bridges – bridging understandings of realities and power dynamics and linking the past and the present in the making of the future? How do we make these considerations and sensibilities about situation, dialogue, and participation rule of thumb in research and scholarly writing and thus in the debates that animate the work and representations brought to the marketplace of ideas?

I would like to end at this point, but that would be unfair to the reality of the world we live in. I cannot wish inequalities away, much as I would like to. As a writer of fiction I sometimes dream extravagantly. In social science we are required to dream with our feet firmly on the ground. So, let me conclude with where I started, the unequal encounter between Friday and Robinson, and the latter’s insistence on conversion en lieu of conversation. I would like to reiterate what I started off with. Power and privilege do not yield easily to blackmail, and extracting concessions from them is like squeezing tears from a dog. The challenge to bring about greater participation

in knowledge production and consumption processes is more easily stated than met, much as we would like to imagine our underdogs of society like stubborn rottweilers savaging their way out of invisibility, marginalisation and victimhood. *Why?* Partly because of the vertical and dogmatic power dynamics that characterise knowledge production and circulation, in a world of local and global interconnecting hierarchies informed, among other things, by race, place, culture, class, status, gender and age.

The fate of ideas and field research findings, however compelling, often boils down to the race, geography, culture, ethnicity, class, status, gender or age of the researcher involved, as these factors largely determine participation and attitudes at professional gatherings and in other scholarly processes in the not so democratic marketplaces of ideas. It is true that academics have to publish or perish. But an anthropologist can all too easily publish and perish, and not always because of the mediocrity of his or her ethnography. Sometimes the reception of exquisite ethnography is impaired by considerations such as the race, geography, culture, ethnicity, class, status, gender or age of the author, in addition to the status and location of the publisher (Nyamnjoh 2004, 2012b, 2015a & b).

Notes

1. www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/6791114-no-man-is-an-island. accessed 16 July 2014
2. *Hamid Dabashi* is the Hagop Kevorkian Professor of Iranian Studies and Comparative Literature at Columbia University in New York. <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/author/hamid-dabashi/>

The Language and Voice of the Oppressed

Linje Manyozo

Abstract

How should scholars approach study of the processes that characterize voice production among subaltern groups? The study builds on both Marxist and non-Marxist frameworks as theoretical trajectories for conducting class analyses that define how subaltern groups conceive, produce and consume their own voices. The discussion, a semiotics analysis in itself, aims to make significant contribution to communication studies, through demonstrating the fragile, slippery and class-based politics that are prevalent when marginalized groups use various art forms, even their bodies, as battlegrounds for contesting oppressive power relationships.

Keywords: voice, oppression, subaltern, politics, marginalized, power

*Ah don't mean to bother wid tellin' 'em nothin', Pheoby. 'Tain't worth de trouble. You can tell 'em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf. Janie Mae Crawford to Pheoby Watson, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Hurston 1998[1937]: 6).*

This chapter engages in a critical conversation with two thinkers who have been central to the marriage of postcolonial theory to feminism, that is, Frantz Fanon and Gayatri Spivak. It resurrects the discussion started by Frantz Fanon (1965) in *A Dying Colonialism* and picked up by Gayatri Spivak (1988) in 'Can the subaltern speak?' Principally, it examines the art and science of speaking by subaltern groups, within the context of the global south. To create a linkage between their works, the chapter analyses Janie Mae Crawford, a central character in US American anthropologist and writer Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1998 [1937]), which helps us understand subaltern speech and the politics that govern its production. It must be pointed out on the outset, that traditional feminism, previously a domain of western thinkers and scholars, has minimally articulated the needs and aspirations of minority groups.

The discussion sets out to achieve three objectives: (a) critically examine how Fanon unpacks the question of Algerian women as a case of a subaltern group; (b)

expose how Spivak deconstructs the case of individual oppressed women using their bodies to undermine structural violence; and, (c) reflexively explore the pedagogical practices in relation to the adult literacy program in a rural African village as a way of conscientizing and empowering an oppressed group. The chapter advances two significant arguments: Firstly, it posits that discursive and material violence has become a major mechanism for producing and exchanging subaltern voices. Secondly, it contends that oftentimes, the generation of subaltern voice does not necessarily lead to empirical transformation, because oppressing classes have tended to control and thus, depoliticize, the instruments of signification with which subaltern voices are produced and appropriated.

The political act of speaking: Fanon and Spivak

Unlike his other previous attempts (*Wretched of the Earth*, *Black Skin White Masks*, *Toward The African Revolution*), in which he described how colonialism and oppressors operate, in *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon presents a manifesto for the production and consumption of subaltern voices as a response to colonial oppression. Fanon recognizes that the battle against colonialism is not just fought with military hardware – rather he acknowledges that as a consequence of intellectual, cultural and empirical forms of colonial violence, the battlefield shifts from the front into the villages, into people's homes, into their ways of life, especially with regards to how they are seen and represented. As if foretelling the extant signification contestations of the place of Islam within western modernity, he observes:

In the Arab Maghreb, the veil belongs to the clothing traditions of the Tunisian, Algerian, Moroccan and Libyan national societies. For the tourist and the foreigner, the veil demarcates both Algerian society and its feminine component. [...] We shall see that this veil, one of the elements of the traditional Algerian garb, was to become the bone of contention in a grandiose battle, on account of which the occupation forces were to mobilize their most powerful and most varied resources, and in the course of which the colonized were to display a surprising force of inertia (Fanon 1965: 35-36).

When Fanon described this 'bone of contention in a grandiose battle' in the 1960s, little did he know that such a confrontation would remain unresolved for a long time. What is essential for our discussion today is that the Arab veil, a traditional clothing in many of the communities of North Africa and Middle East, has become a cultural battleground and feature of colonial intervention in the global south. More recently, the place of Islam in modernity is currently a hot debate in European polity.

In *Orientalism* (1978), Edward Said observes that colonialism was preceded by an orientalist body of literature that supported direct colonial intervention. Fanon likewise observes that the 'decisive' colonization of Algeria took place long before the Algerian civil war, when the French administration, constructed and defined a 'precise

political doctrine' of civilizing Algeria, a doctrine that would be made possible by the expertise of sociologists and ethnologists. To do this, the French administrators would concentrate their efforts in the rescuing of the Algerian woman from wearing the veil, a sign of oppression.

As such, representation became a key feature of Algerian colonization and the subsequent liberation war. The Algerian society was represented as 'medieval and barbaric' and the woman was represented as 'humiliated, sequestered, and cloistered' (Fanon 1965: 38). It was the responsibility of the colonial administration therefore, to 'defend' the 'inert, demonetized, indeed dehumanized' Algerian woman and to help her discover the 'immense possibilities' that awaited her (Ibid.).

As if to agree with Said and Fanon, Mahmood Mamdani (2007) argues that defining and naming historical phenomena in the global south has produced justifications for certain development and military interventions. However, the representations by western/international media and NGOs regarding crises such as the Darfur conflict have, as Mamdani points out, covert imperial and ideological motivations. Compared to almost similar political conflicts elsewhere (such as Iraq), that have seen western media institutions and human rights organizations calling for a withdrawal of foreign troops, the conflict in Darfur has yielded overwhelming support for military intervention. This is largely due to what Mamdani describes as the 'politics of naming' – which is determined by who does the naming, who is being named, and the implications of such naming. In the case of Darfur, the regime of 'naming' has seen the emergence of international campaigns to 'Save Darfur' that suffer from politicization and naturalization and demonization of the conflicts and its key protagonists (Ibid.). The implication of such humanitarian communication is not to list global and public pity and compassion, but rather global/public anger and of course humanitarian intervention.

As if conversing with Mamdani, Fanon lays out the immediate consequence of the orientalist feminist literature that was produced by the French administration in colonized Algeria. He notes the proliferation of the establishment of 'mutual aid societies and societies to promote solidarity with Algerian women'. Other advocacy initiatives included public communication campaigns, charities to provide relief and safety net items to Algerian women. He then observes that in this 'combat',

[e]very kilo of semolina distributed was accompanied by a dose of indignation against the veil and the cloister. The indignation was followed up by practical advice. Algerian women were invited to play 'a functional, capital role' in the transformation of their lot. They were pressed to say no to a centuries old subjection. The immense role they were called upon to play was described to them. The colonial administration invested great sums in this combat (Fanon 1965: 38).

The 'indignation' that Fanon is referring to here could be considered the equivalent of Louis Althusser's ideological state apparatuses (2008 [1971]). This indignation comprised programmatic interventions to free the oppressed Algerian woman from the domestic and cultural aggression of patriarchal institutions within which she had

found herself trapped. From Fanon's perspective, the colonial institutions decided, upon scholarly advice based on orientalist expositions, to unchain the woman first, as it would provide the dominating powers with a trusted ally who would be in a better position to transform the Algerian man. These ideological apparatuses encompass workplace customs such as dressing requirements, the educational content and philosophies, and other forms of "the traps set by the European in order to bring the Algerian to expose himself" (Fanon 1965: 40).

Through these various forms of modernising interventions, the colonised responded in two ways. First, there were moments in which women would indeed become psychologically and empirically converted, and to prove a point, would abandon the veil, and thus become, "symbolically unveiled" (Ibid.: 42). It seemed, as Fanon observes, that with more and more Algerian women becoming unveiled, the colonial occupiers strengthened their resolve and believed that the defense mechanisms of the oppressive Algerian society had been breached, and was thus "in the process of dislocation" (Ibid.).

Likewise Daniel Lerner (1958) observes that the western model is the only way towards achieving realistic development. He argues that for modernization to complete achieving sustainable economic growth, the individuals themselves have to be modernized and, consequently, the traditional societies have to abandon their native lifestyles and adopt modern living practices. These were processes that had already taken place in western cultures, when "ordinary men found themselves unbound from their native soil" and moved "from farms to flats and from fields to factories" (Ibid.: 47). Nevertheless, there is also a second reaction emerging from the occupiers' attempt at transforming local traditions. This is the reaction that the colonising forces are responsible for creating but are not in full control of.

Fanon contends that "the colonized, in the face of the emphasis given by the colonialist to this or that aspect of his traditions, reacts very violently" (1965: 47). The violent reaction that Fanon discusses is played out in scholarship, in art and of course empirically. What is important to note is that when the struggle for liberation begins, and Fanon makes this point very clear, the cultural struggle, in this case the centrality of the veil, is not of much significance. Yet as the struggle undergoes what he describes as 'important modifications', the critical issues of representation become central in defining the past and future of an oppressed society (Ibid.).

As a result of these modifications, women began to take centre stage in the Algerian revolution, in order to mitigate the growing colonial violence and ferocity, which were being recreated to inflict maximum oppression on the whole society. It is very clear from Fanon that involving the women was a strategic military decision, a 'wholly revolutionary step' and not just a rationale for mass mobilization. The strategic reason to involve women in the liberation was because their daily routine capacitated them to act with military astuteness.

It must be constantly borne in mind that the committed Algerian woman learns both her role as "a woman alone in the street" and her revolutionary mission instinctively.

The Algerian woman is not a secret agent. It is without apprenticeship, without briefing, without fuss, that she goes out into the street with three grenades in her handbag or the activity report of an area in her bodice. [...] It is an authentic birth in a pure state, without preliminary instruction. There is no character to imitate. On the contrary, there is an intense dramatization, a continuity between the woman and the revolutionary (Ibid.: 50)

In the course of carrying out their revolutionary responsibilities and tasks, the women proved to be creative, and would not be held back by cultural or colonial taboos that had governed their representation. For the Algerian woman, the act of going to war therefore, was preceded by a battle and a victory over fears against the occupier; the image of the occupier in her mind and in her body. By the time she carries out revolutionary acts, she has already breached colonialism and 'devaluated' it. It is through the efforts of the Algerian woman that messages were carried from one point to another, to stand watch over a location or transport financial and hardware resources to various revolutionary cells. In many cases therefore, the Algerian woman functioned as the 'lighthouse and barometer' to military battalions which they would lead into battle. And there were moments when the Algerian woman would become a combatant herself, and she was enabled by her unveiling. With the veil "removed and reassumed", the dressing became "manipulated, transformed into a technique of camouflage, into a means of struggle" (Ibid.: 59). Without the veil, the Algerian woman would move about and penetrate European cities and places without raising suspicion.

Carrying revolvers, grenades, hundreds of false identity cards or bombs, the unveiled Algerian woman moves like a fish in the Western waters. The soldiers, the French patrols, smile to her as she passes, compliments on her looks are heard here and there, but no one suspects that her suitcases contain the automatic pistol which will presently mow down four or five members of one of the patrols. We must come back to that young girl, unveiled only yesterday, who walks with sure steps down the streets of the European city teeming with policemen, parachutists, militiamen. [...] The shoulders of the unveiled Algerian woman are thrust back with easy freedom. She walks with a graceful, measured stride, neither too fast nor too slow. Her legs are bare, not confined by the veil, given back to themselves, and her hips are free (Ibid.: 58).

Over time, as the colonial authorities learnt of the participation of the women who appeared Europeanized in the revolution, stop and search tactics were employed. The Algerian woman had to change tactics. Instead of unveiling, she began to veil herself again. Fanon observes that "whereas in the previous period the body had to be made slim and disciplined to make it attractive and seductive, it now had to be squashed, made shapeless and even ridiculous" (Ibid.: 62). As such the veil which used to be a traditional wear that marked separation of sexes, became a critical component of the struggle for liberation.

In the process, the body became mutated, was briefly abandoned, but eventually, "it helped the Algerian woman to meet the new problems created by the struggle"

(Ibid.: 63). In the end, her active participation in military combat, enabled the Algerian woman to reject the description made of her by western and eastern scholarship and traditions. Through participation in military combat, the Algerian woman destroyed the colonial institutions and traditions that resided within herself, and went as far as to “knock down all the pseudo-truths that years of “field studies” were believed to have amply confirmed” (Ibid.: 65).

Just like the Algerian woman who, thanks to the Algerian war of independence, defiantly resurrects and reasserts her identity and individuality, from the dehumanized and oppressed object in orientalist scholarship and representations, another subjugated woman, in the early 21st century India, Bubaneswari, similarly uses her body to reject the dominant representations. In a seminal piece, Spivak (1988) traces the orientalism history of the women in development scholarship and practice as it emerged under British occupation of the subcontinent of India, and how all this influenced the way the Indian woman was mutilated, dismembered and spoken for by the development industry. As was the case in Fanon’s exposition of the Algerian woman in *A Dying Colonialism*, Spivak’s Bubaneswari seems to have been an object of dominant representations, academic and feminist programs, until she commits suicide. It is the exploration of the politics surrounding this suicide that Spivak’s article explores.

Spivak’s subaltern

We are not sure of the extent to which Spivak interacted with the works of Freire and Fanon. But there is certainly a great similarity in how all three of them conceive liberation, oppression and colonialism. In fact all of them root their understanding of these concepts in anti-colonial theory and praxis. For both Freire and Spivak, the theoretical springboard lies in Marx, but we cannot say likewise for Fanon, who throughout his writings did not demonstrate any references to Marxist thinking. What is critical is that all three understand the violent nature of colonization and its ideology in perpetuating a western *weltanschauung* that is rooted in injustice and inequality.

What we want to emphasize however, is that Freire’s oppressed comprise a group of poor, vulnerable, marginalized, disgruntled individuals and groups. These are people who have either not discovered the power of their collectivity to ‘unspeak their world’, or who are in the process of discovery. Thus the oppressed are those groups who are in the process of acquiring a holistic understanding of their world. This critical education is what Freire’s horizontal critical pedagogy is all about – or what Edward Thompson (1963) describes as the ‘diffusion of effective literacy’.

The subaltern on the other hand, described by Spivak as those without access to lines of social mobility, refer to oppressed peoples who have acquired a political consciousness that eventually enables them to begin to deconstruct imperialism and other forms of oppression that prevent them from realising their full potential. Spivak’s

concept of the subaltern, clearly expounded in the historical essay 'Can the subaltern speak' builds on a quotation from *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in which Marx (2005 [1852]), referring to oppressed peoples without political consciousness, observes, that "they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented." What Spivak actually argues is that the politics of representation is fraught with controversies over power – its use and misuse in society. In her essay, she raises three fundamental issues: (a) how western development institutions understand (or misunderstand) power and empowerment; (b) the ideological positionality of the western expert in reading subaltern voices; (c) the politics, nature and forms of subaltern voices.

Spivak is very scathing in her criticism against what she perceives as naïve western approaches that conceive of the subaltern in the global south as helpless victims that rely on western pity, sympathy and salvation. It must be specified that 'western' for Spivak does not solely refer to intellectual ideas coming from the west, but also to theories and concepts by scholars and liberation practitioners in the global south who uncritically build on western and westernised perspectives that are oftentimes off-context. As such, Spivak's 'westerners' comprise external or internal experts that are culturally, spiritually and morally alienated from the socio-cultural context in which they function – hence she refers to both the perspective and the content of that thinking.

Bubaneswari was a young Indian woman who self-immolated during the height of British colonialism in India in the 1920s. By placing menstruation at the centre of the suicide, both Bubaneswari and Spivak demonstrate that the deconstruction and undermining of oppression does not necessarily have to always be collective – as propounded by Freire's critical pedagogy or Fanon's radical decolonization program. It is actually individuals, acting in their own capacity, who search for and find what Achille Mbembe (2001) describes as the liminal spaces, within which to undermine oppressive ideologies and structures. These forms and formats of voice acts usually employ popular art genres such as jokes, music, theatre and non-verbal forms of speech. Sometimes, these speech acts can be violent, in fact they oftentimes are: The self-immolation by monks and other civilians protesting against oppressive institutions and dictatorships being some cases in example.

Such violence can be meted out against other subalterns, a phenomenon described as horizontal violence by Fanon. An example would be the violent reaction by male street vendors against women dressing in a certain 'fashionable' way. Women wearing miniskirts have been objects of verbal and physical violence by largely male vendors in certain cities in Sub-Saharan Africa¹. These acts of violence generated public anger, resulting in many demonstrations across the continent in show of support for the harassed women but also to emphasize that these countries are signatories to various international human rights charters that celebrate freedom of expression. It must be pointed out however, that in most of these criticisms, a narrow angle of human rights was employed to analyze this sort of violence.

Serious questions can be raised to the intellectual relevance of examining this issue from the perspective of western humanism. Some African politicians and public

intellectuals have viewed this story as an example of increasing cases of human rights abuse vis a vis gender based violence in the region. Nevertheless, this sort of violence requires the integration of class as a key historical phenomenon in analyses of subaltern speech. Spivak was primarily concerned with how exogenous discourses and interventions misrepresent subaltern voices and politics in the global south.

This chapter deliberately undermines the total reduction of vendors' acts into a single human rights story – that of 'violence by men against women'. Human rights activists and commentators have narrowly framed such issues as a manifestation of the 'savagery' of these vendors for undressing the 'innocent' women, 'who have the right to dress as they like'. Such public commentaries have failed to problematize the 'undressing' of the women as a political act, in which marginalized groups use violence as a form of communication. Subaltern speech, for most postcolonial thinkers, is often banal and vulgar, and is imbued with sporadic but politicized forms of violence, even against comrade subalterns. The 'vendors' who have been stigmatized semantically and empirically, are mere objects of most public discourse: they are being spoken of, spoken for, and spoken about – reminding us of the objective of Spivak's 'Can the subaltern speak' – to recover the politics in the speech of the subaltern; otherwise, Marx already warned back in the 1850s, they could end up 'being represented'.

What happened in Sub-Saharan Africa was much deeper than just men's violence against women. It is not just about viewing women as mothers, as originators of life. Women are much more than their physiological organs or socially-constructed traditional roles. Understanding gender politics among subaltern groups is not necessarily about deterministically perceiving the role and place of girls and women in society. It is about carefully examining how power flows and is contested within the politics of marginalization. Economic marginalization is a ticking time-bomb in the global south. The rising poverty and unemployment, or the lack of vocational and higher education opportunities for the youth stand in stark contrast to the opulent lifestyles of many of our leaders. As such, it is critical that careful analyses be paid to the structural factors that force subaltern groups to embrace violence as a communicative action.

One characteristic of the politics of subaltern speech is that, in its violent form, the body is elevated into a battlefield for symbolically contesting economic and political power. For instance, the Tunisian Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in protest against corrupt city officials, sparking the Tunisian and Arab 'revolutions'. Similarly, Bubaneswari, in Spivak's article, used menstruation to politicise what would have passed off as a simple self-immolation. In Fanon's exposition, the Algerian woman used her body as a reliable vehicle for advancing the struggle against French colonialism. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Janie's journey of self-discovery is undertaken against the social expectations of how a woman of her age is viewed. Likewise, around 2011, Mummy Sarkar, a 12 year-old Indian girl, committed suicide in order to donate her organs to family members who urgently needed a donor, but was not being helped by a corrupt and inefficient health system – her instruction note only being discovered after her body had been cremated.

To borrow Edward Thomson's notion of 'history from below', subaltern speech may be considered vulgar or violent; the associated actions, barbaric or deplorable. Yet these subaltern groups live in abject marginalization, in which their life is a form of death in itself, to borrow Mbembe's imagination. To study the language and voice of the subaltern requires that we stand in solidarity with their perspective. Likewise, in the seminal work *A Theology of Liberation* (1971), Gustavo Gutiérrez observes that friendship with oppressed groups is the only firm demonstration of a critical pedagogue's *authentic commitment* to liberation, equality and social justice.

Speaking alongside the subaltern: *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

It must be emphasized outright that the subaltern continue to speak in various contexts; and often, their speech is not understood or remains unheard. It is when subaltern voice becomes critical to policy formulation and implementation that critical analysis has to be paid to the politics and economics of voice. Marx is therefore right to raise the concern that subaltern classes end up being represented if they cannot represent themselves. He is referring to the lack of concrete political consciousness on the part of the subaltern, which opens an avenue for dominant classes to speak on their part. What is a critical issue here is the question of authority, in that the dominant classes have not been granted the authority to speak on behalf of the subaltern.

The question of authority is important, because there are many cases within development contexts when subaltern classes exercise their relevant human rights by making informed requests to be represented. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the main character, Janie returns home to Eatonville from a tragic sojourn. In the town, news has spread that she eloped with a younger lover and the society finds her behaviour totally unacceptable for a woman, especially a woman of her age – she is 40.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is written by Zora Neal Hurston in the 1930s. The central character in the story is Janie who returns home to Eatonville, an African-American only town, from a journey of self-discovery that began in this city where she was married to Joe Sparks, the mayor. She has been away for about one and a half years, on a journey that she undertook with Tea Cake, the love of her life, who she ended up shooting dead in self-defense. Sitting down with her best friend Phoeby Watson, she narrates her story. This is a novel about a black woman who assumes authority over how she sees herself, and rises above the narrow and deterministic prejudices of her society, from escaping an arranged marriage to escaping with a younger lover, and returning to the town where her behaviour is frowned upon. Even though Hurston was criticized for her portrayal of Janie in her time, a re-reading of the novel from the 1960s ensured that it became a significant feature of African American studies, literature and postcolonial theory.

In the opening conversation of the novel, Janie acknowledges that people have already started asking questions about her moral behaviour. As can be gleaned from the excerpt below, this conversation raises three issues around the question of authority and the methodological pathway that enables individuals and groups to speak on behalf of subaltern groups. Notice how the dialogue takes place:

Ah don't mean to bother wid tellin' 'em nothin', Pheoby. 'Tain't worth de trouble. You can tell 'em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf.

If you so desire Ah'll tell 'em what you tell me to tell 'em.

To start off wid, people like dem wastes up too much time puttin' they mouf on things they don't know nothin' about. Now they got to look into me loving Tea Cake and see whether it was done right or not! They don't know if life is a mess of corn-meal dumplings, and if love is a bed-quilt!

So long as they get a name to gnaw on they don't care whose it is, and what about, 'specially if they can make it sound like evil.

If they wants to see and know, why they don't come kiss and be kissed? Ah could then sit down and tell 'em things. Ah been a delegate to de big 'ssociation of life. Yessuh! De Grand Lodge, de big convention of livin' is just where Ah been dis year and a half y'all ain't seen me (Hurston 1998 [1937]: 6)

Firstly, from this excerpt, it is clear that Janie has so much trust in Phoeby as a friend. She recognizes that there is already a huge social demand for information on what has transpired between her and Tea Cake. Janie then gives her friend the permission to speak on her behalf: "You can tell 'em what Ah say if you wants to. Dat's just de same as me 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf" (Ibid.). What is clear here is that Phoeby has been granted permission to speak on behalf of Janie because she knows all the facts, and more importantly, she is sympathetic to her case. The 'cause' here is the understanding that a black woman's place is not just in the home, where she will just have children and live in the comfort provided by her husband. This is what generations of black women, represented by Janie's grandmother (Nanny) have been brought up to believe. A black woman aspires not just to material comfort but also abstract ideals such as independence, freedom, self-discovery and spiritual enlightenment. The ruthlessness with which Janie undertakes the journey of her life is what shocked the contemporary critics when the book was published, and shocked Eatonville too.

Secondly, the dialogue between these two friends reveals something that has a huge implication for development theory and practice today. Janie challenges the society at large: "If they wants to see and know, why they don't come kiss and be kissed? Ah could then sit down and tell 'em things" (Ibid.). The notion of 'come kiss and be kissed' implies establishing a relationship with subaltern groups as a precursor to speaking for or on their behalf. The criticism that Spivak is raising against the reductionist

approaches of dominant strands of western feminism operative in the global south largely revolves around concerns with lack of moral and intellectual legitimacy for external organizations to speak on behalf of subaltern groups they claim to represent. If individuals and groups fail to come to 'kiss and be kissed' by subaltern groups, the resultant representations are often full of factual inaccuracies.

Thirdly, the excerpt of this conversation, and the novel as a whole, reveals that in order to speak on behalf of subaltern groups, researchers or change agents are required to become sympathetic to the life and cause of the groups they seek to represent. Phoeby cautions Janie that there are some people who do not care about the truth, nor are they sympathetic to Janie's tragedy; she has just lost the love of her life, Tea Cake. Phoeby cautions Janie: "So long as they get a name to gnaw on they don't care whose it is, and what about, 'specially if they can make it sound like evil." Being sympathetic to subaltern groups or their causes is critical if individuals are interested in representing them. As if to agree with Hurston's Phoeby, in a new introduction to *Orientalism* written in light of the aftermath of September 11/2001, Said distinguishes between orientalist writing that is arrogant and uninformed on the one hand, and a kind of empathetic and understanding scholarship on the other.

Subaltern and oppressed

Freire's critical analysis of the notion of the oppressed has been a subject of numerous intellectual debates as well as reflections by community development practitioners. His work is central in understanding the deconstruction of power within various forms of development partnerships and engagements. The theme of power itself is however footnoted in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, even though the student-teacher relationship is discursively fractured along the lines of power. The power that we are referring to here draws on Steven Luke's three dimension view of power or what Manuel Castells describes as the ability to influence the mind, or what Althusser calls as the ideological state apparatuses. Perhaps realizing this important omission, Freire himself would years later, in conversing with Myles Horton, confess that he wished he had read Gramsci before writing the book (Horton and Freire 1990).

What is important however, is that in his later works, Freire used his experiences to explain how ideology as a form of power conditioned him to behave and think the way he did. In practice, Freire attempted to show how oppression works at the level of ideology, and that the first responsibility of a catalyzing educator would be to empower oppressed peoples to challenge dominant discourses, ideologies and practices. But this can only happen if oppressed people understand how ideology functions to oppress both the oppressors and the oppressed. Such reflexive analyses show that for many oppressed peoples, they live through their oppression without recognizing their situation, cannot recognize its sources, and as such, cannot participate in its deconstruction. Critical pedagogy therefore becomes that avenue, an active methodology for

providing the tools and the skills to oppressed groups, empowering them to understand and deconstruct their own oppression. This has been the essence of Freire's critical pedagogy, to 'kiss and be kissed' by oppressed groups, as an enlightenment process of collectively understanding oppression and then engaging in empirical struggles to dismantle its discourses and structures.

Freire's pedagogy, like Fanon's radical political education, problematises the future. For Freire and Fanon, and of course for Hurston, the future remains unknown, therefore it can become unspoken or deconstructed. To unspeak is to deconstruct and also reconstruct. In this case, the future becomes unknown, but through the actions of the educational catalyzer and the oppressed people it becomes revealed so long as the oppressed begin to understand their position in society. As such, critical pedagogy, Janie's 'big association of life' or 'the convention of living' becomes a journey of self-discovery by oppressed groups, and thus empowers them to ask and answer three critical questions: (a) who are we now? (b) why are we what we are now? (c) how can we change our future? This third question is significant as it places agency in their hands, and it is in that process the oppressed ends up transforming into a subaltern, a politically conscious class of oppressed people who want to speak and unspeak their future.

'Kiss and be kissed': The development school as subaltern voice

The following sections reflexively explore our active participation and the participation of local people in a development school in a rural African village in Malawi. The group decided to term its practice a development school (*Sukulu ya Chitukuko*) because we have gone beyond mere adult literacy and have included a community savings initiative. In this case, literacy is just a means towards achieving certain development goals. The discussion will reflexively reveal the challenges of community organizing for groups that were formed to meet specific sectoral goals.

I returned from the United Kingdom around July 2012, where I had lived and taught at the London School of Economics and Political Science from July 2008. This was soon after a one year stint at the University of Fort Hare, Nelson Mandela's alma mater. I had just finished reading for my PhD in Australia in 2007. By 2012, I was somehow homesick after such a long absence. But a key reason had to do with rethinking of university teaching, especially when it comes to critical pedagogy. Teaching and researching communication for development take on a different form, especially when one is based in a metropolis such as London.

I began to re-read Freire and Gustavo Gutierrez in the context of Mbembe, Escobar, Spivak and Marx. The good thing about London is that this is where a host of development organizations are headquartered. I therefore had opportunities to talk to various experts and attend the many workshops and seminars organized in the name of development. This was the time I came across Harry Frankfurt's book, *The Importance of What We Care About* (1988) and the timeless chapter, 'On Bullshit',

which threw me off the intellectual laurels that I venerated. Alongside the classical and postcolonial works I have just mentioned, I began to question our understanding of enlightenment, which is a key praxis in critical pedagogy. I began to realize the growing distance, the aesthetic distance between what I and other communication and development scholars in the western and African universities were teaching. It became necessary therefore, as Janie did in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, or Nora in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, to undertake an intellectual journey of self-discovery, to relearn and re-educate oneself.

On a flight from a teaching exercise in Budapest, I started questioning the notion of enlightenment and came to the conclusion that critical pedagogy is a living praxis. That the mark of excellence for a real public intellectual revolves around, not just discursive criticisms of developments in the empirical and material world, nor in the discursive and syntactical illumination offered towards policy directions, but rather, in the empirical demonstration of the relevance, feasibility and realism of the propagated ideals. Enlightenment is a liberatory praxis, and thus, it can only be made alive by our active involvement in lived reality. This was the Janie moment, the Nora rapture.

This would later lead to the realization that enlightenment is not exclusive to the creation of new ideas and innovations, but just as much to the translation of these ideals into real practice, whether it is in pure life or social sciences. Before I left Malawi for my graduate studies back in 2001, I had been involved in the creation of community communication projects that used participatory village theatre or development radio approaches. I remember one frustrating experience in which we led a team of researchers to pre-test radio stories we had collected in the community. The dramas we had created with community input were rejected by the communities themselves. It would be years later that I would realize that the praxis of enlightenment is fraught with concerns over power relations. I also realized that the fantasy world of manuals, templates and models could over time become empirically irrelevant if a practitioner does not test and re-test these models and approaches regularly.

Organizing the oppressed to find their voice

So in a way, we have come a full circle, back to where it all began. By August 2013, I contacted a very good friend who was working as a programme officer for a national organization of people living with HIV and AIDS. We were looking for a rural group which we would teach adult literacy. The prescribed textbook we were going to use to teach was produced by the Ministry of Gender and Community Development in the 1990s. It combines language literacy and functional numeracy. The book's approach is rooted in the agrarian policy orientation of the independence government. The topics are oriented towards subsistence agricultural production, including nutrition.

As we have progressed in our learning, we have started to explore other methods of teaching and learning, involving the use of radio programmes, and participatory map-

ping approaches. It has been during these experiments that the group has opened up and accommodated others who were not living with the virus but wanted to learn how to read and write. We have also begun to explore ways of tackling the growing poverty, especially the narrow domestic income base. We would draft in the assistance of an expert in small medium enterprise development, especially when, as a group, we managed to raise about US\$2000. Mirriam's coming in, for that's the expert's name, has allowed us to explore various forms of income generating activities. This time, we discovered we could add commercial farming to the portfolio. A huge farm was identified for rent, and we agreed to grow the crops that would yield us good income at the various markets. Again, this process has involved doing participatory baseline research on market opportunities. Everything is not rosy, however; it never is, in an imperfect world of development theory and practice. Some members have not paid back the money they borrowed from our savings pot. There are cases of conflicts between certain individuals. We have had periods of hiatus. We soldier on nevertheless, sometimes through limping.

An important element in our 'development school' has been village mapping. We have toured the village in order to 're-learn' it. About 25 of us have usually walked as a herd, talking to other villagers about their understanding of their village, and how they see its future. The school participants have suddenly taken over the process, and instead of just asking questions to other villagers, have started engaging in heated debates over development interventions in the village and how they could improve it. This reminds us of a scene in Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's novel *Petals of Blood* (1977), during which the teacher and the students go out to learn about plant biology but end up discussing political questions on the unidirectional worm's feeding of the flower. Likewise, the conversations during our village tours have revolved around power, politics, sex and gender itself. We have argued over the question of domestic violence; we have questioned the social welfare system of our country when we found lots of elderly people lying sick without any help; we have wondered about the absent fathers when we see many kids playing unattended to; importantly, we noticed that the three boreholes in the village were constructed in one side, marginalizing the other sections.

Participatory baselines and mapping offer a better and more effective way of teaching students than any formal lectures or seminars. The eyes begin to see differently the very things that used to exist before; the mind begins to question the banal, the usual, the everyday; the ear begins to hear the same songs or the same sound very differently. Life takes on a new rhythm, a new tune and a new ambience, as doubts creep in over what we have regarded as normal, as the centre, as the tradition. When doubts begin, when questions emerge, when the tradition gives way to critique, education begins. As such, education is no longer about the acquisition of new knowledge or techniques. It is a gradual process of allowing doubt to be part of our epistemological identity. When doubt is allowed to unsettle our intellectual comfort zones, education transforms into a site of conflict between ignorance and tradition (the norm) and critical reality.

Recently, our class read an article about a Malawian woman whose incarcerated husband had broken her arms during a domestic altercation, but she pleaded with

the magistrate not to sentence her husband heavily as he was the breadwinner, whilst acknowledging that she realized that what he did was wrong. In simple, reductionist feminist talk, the woman might seem insanely disempowered. But our development class noticed that the woman understood that what her husband did was wrong, even when it was common occurrence in her community. The problem in this case is that the woman is economically disempowered. The solution in simple feminist development approaches, is for the woman to acquire a business so that she will get rid of the man. Our class noted however, that the stability of social systems largely depends on stable relationships and institutions, including marriage. Empowering women economically is just one facet of this challenge. For the class, a key component of any interventions would depend on improving the way women negotiate and contest power within such relationships, not getting out of them. This is why our group of development school thinks a lot of ideologically off-site interventions lose the plot when it comes to the issue of women empowerment.

Concluding thoughts

The development school that is being implemented in a rural African village is one of the many models that empower subaltern and oppressed groups to use language and voice to challenge and question dominant development discourses. In the language of Janie Mae Crawford in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the school has enabled us to 'kiss and be kissed' by the villagers. Such interventions provide spaces for marginalized communities to enter into a dialogue with dominant syntaxes, thereby allowing oppressed peoples to create and find the ideological politics within which to question top-down and colonial development interventions and their associated discourses.

The voices of marginalized communities are not just products that can be packaged anyhow. Such voices comprise communicative acts, in which marginalized groups learn, understand and appreciate the depth and width of their oppression. In this case, voice is lived, a form of lived reality, a critical actuality, a conversational and dialogical pathway through which the oppressed question their socio-political and economic reality. In the excerpt from Hurston's novel, Janie talks about having been a "delegate to the big association of life, a big convention of living". This is Janie's acknowledgement that she has discovered herself through an empirical educational process that has seen her with different men. To tell this story requires someone who is sympathetic to her journey of self-discovery. To produce a voice that tells this story requires that we join Janie on this journey, and the resultant narration will represent Janie's interests and perspectives, to an extent it will seem like Janie has borrowed us her tongue. Subaltern voice therefore has to become alive if it has to make sense. It has to be made alive. That is the essence of development interventions that build on subaltern speech, as is the case with the development school.

On the other hand, there are moments, as in the case of the Algerian woman in Fanon's *A Dying Colonialism* and that of Bubaneswari in Spivak's 'Can the Subaltern Speak', where the subaltern themselves assume authority over the production of their speech. In that case they refuse to be represented, but decide to represent themselves. What is important is that the production of this speech is not carried out to answer back at any dominant or orientalist discourse. What it shows is that the subaltern are constantly engaged in socio-cultural and political struggles, and they are often exploring ways of undermining and defeating these oppressive power structures. There are moments when they do, and there are moments when they don't.

Subaltern speech in these contexts should not thus be viewed as single events isolated from the politics that produced them. Rather successful development interventions should view and be sympathetic to subaltern speech as a process of political engagement. The role of a liberating educator is to understand this political process, and provide the subaltern with creative tools and skills, so that they can produce better and more politically conscious voices and speech acts. The speech of the subaltern is an authentic platform for constructing effective development interventions, especially when it comes to eradicating structural violence, because just like Janie Mae Crawford, they have been to "de big convention of livin'" and we have not.

Note

1. For further reports, see Malm, S. (2014). 'Woman is stripped and beaten by group of men because she was 'tempting them' by wearing a miniskirt in Kenya'. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2837884/Kenyans-march-against-attacks-women-mini-skirts.html>. See also *BBC Online* (2012). "Malawian women protest over 'trouser attacks'" <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-16645594>; *Mail and Guardian* (2008). 'Outrage over attack on mini skirt-wearing woman'. <http://mg.co.za/article/2008-02-19-outrage-over-attack-on-miniskirtwearing-woman>.

Stealing the Fire

Communication for Development from the Margins of Cyberspace

Stefania Milan

Abstract

Over the years, countless social movements have created their own digital media to advance social change. Like the mythological Prometheus, these activists appropriate technology in order to breach the monopoly of states and media and technology conglomerates over people's voices. These activists remind us of two things: that the everyday means of communications are not neutral but embed power inequalities and unfair relationships between producers and users; and that technology should ultimately embody a moral dimension, and mirror the values of justice, equality and transparency. This chapter connects grassroots technology creation to the realm of communication for development. Moving from the ethics of technology that informs grassroots activist practices, I reflect on what we can learn from tech activists to re-contextualize "voice & matter" in relation to the opportunities and the challenges of digital technology. In particular, I focus on the following amongst the activist values: access & sharing, openness & transparency, self-determination, collectivism, the "hands-on" and "do not harm" imperatives.

Keywords: tech activism, emancipatory communication practices, prefigurative realities, deconstruction of technology, hacker ethics

Over the years, countless social movements across the world have created their own analogue or digital media to advance social change. Think of the myriad of community-owned low-power radio (see, among others, Dunbar-Hester 2014a; Halleck 2002; Hollander, Stappers, and Jankowski 2002; Rennie 2006; Rodriguez 2001), but also of the manifold pamphlets, posters and radical publications that have popped up at the four corners of the world (Atton 2002; Downing 2001 & 2011). With the advent of the internet, then, the possibilities for creatively engaging with self-organized communication have multiplied, giving rise to an array of platforms, software, and infrastructure created, owned and operated by nonprofessionals (see, for example, Atton 2004; Gordon & Mihailidis 2015). Similarly to the mythological Prometheus, who stole the fire from the deities of Mount Olympus in order to share it with his fellow humans, these activists appropriate technology in view of breaking the monopoly of states and media and technology conglomerates over people's voices. Rather than

merely appropriate off-the-shelf technology, these variably tech-savvy activists put their skills at the service of social movements and engage in the creation of self-organized platforms as part of their struggle for human development, equity and social change. They take the “voice” imperative one step forward, enabling individuals and social groups to convey their own messages bypassing the filters of commercial gatekeepers and state monitoring and surveillance. They decode the connection between “voice” and “matter” by creating prefigurative realities of alternative communications, translating into practice *here and now* their political values, and disseminating new narratives on technology, society and change.

This instance of self-organized technology that bypasses the dynamics of control of states and corporations represents a *specific form of empowerment through technology* that I term tech activism. Tech activism concerns itself with the creation and shaping of digital technology infrastructure and tools to facilitate communication and networking of social change activists, and free like-minded individuals and groups from the constraints and threats of commercial communications. Examples of tech activism include self-organized internet service providers offering privacy-minded email services and blogging platforms; community wireless networks; customized open-source software and hardware (i.e., whose source code and functioning are accessible to and modifiable by the final user, as opposed to proprietary); noncommercial low-power community stations, and encryption or re-routing services that protect users’ privacy and exchanges. These activists teach us two things: on the one hand, that technology and other everyday means of communication ultimately embody a moral dimension, and on the other, that they should mirror the values of justice and equality progressive activists and development practitioners stand for.

This chapter straddles critical technology studies and social movement studies, in view of re-contextualizing “voice & matter” in relation to the opportunities and the challenges of grassroots digital technology.¹ In what follows, we track the activists in their exercise of *everyday deconstruction of media and technology*: in order words, with their help we critically look inside the “black-box” of old and new communication technology to uncover power inequalities and the unfair relationships between producers and users that commercial technology typically sustains and promotes. Second, we explore the strategies of emancipatory communication enacted by tech activists. Third, we delve into their values and into the norms and ethics of technology that inform their activism, focusing on the moral dimension of technology. Finally, we reflect on what we can learn from tech activism to rethink “voice & matter” in the contemporary *technoscape*.

The emancipatory practices of tech activists

Focusing on infrastructure might appear of minor importance in times of “free” social media and apps enabling people from all over the world and walks of life to voice their

opinions and share self-generated content at virtually no cost. But ultimately these services are owned and controlled by corporations whose profit-oriented agenda is at odds with the principles of participation, empowerment, and social justice advocated by the progressive civil society sector. As a result, activist groups keep challenging corporations on their own terrain, bringing to life “infrastructures of resistance” to the neoliberal order that permeates our *technoscape* (Halleck 2002: 191).

These groups and individuals, like mythological Prometheus, “steal the fire”. Fire is a metaphor for technology; stealing means reclaiming and re-appropriating, but also repurposing and customizing technology to fit the needs and values of progressive activists, as illustrated by a US-based low-power radio practitioner: “‘Stealing the fire’: we think it is a metaphor for the democratization of technology, for technology that is the servant of the political and social process of making decisions about our future. Not technology in the hands and at the service of elites” (Milan 2013: 1). By “stealing the fire” these novel Prometheuses seek to breach the monopoly of the private sector and the state over the use and control of communication tools and infrastructure.

Tech activism typically stays under the radar of scholarly investigation and media attention, and certainly it does not represent a mainstream approach to development activism, or to communication for development. One might argue that tech activism denotes some sort of “first world activism”, as it presumes the availability and access to technology – but it is an increasingly global phenomenon. By way of example, not only has Latin America historically been the cradle of community radio (see, e.g., Gumucio-Dagron 2001; Rodriguez 2011); today it is at the forefront of the critical engagement with digital technologies, with a myriad of open source software projects, maker labs and hacker spaces. For instance, the first community-owned cellular network in the world was created in 2013 in the Mexican southern region of Oaxaca. It uses the so-called “wasteband”, a portion of the spectrum not used by other providers, to create a private non-commercial network operated according to the communal lifestyle typical of the area (Magallanes-Blanco & Lozano-Maurer 2015). Although the primary role of tech activists is to operate the crucial tech backbone of communities and movements, they are not merely service providers – they are deeply engrained in grassroots activism, including environmentalism, community activism, and transparency movements. Most importantly, they embody specific narratives of technology and social change – and this is precisely why they can contribute valuable “lessons learnt” to both the study and the practice of communication for development.

Tech activists engage in what I have termed *emancipatory communication practices*. “Practice” evokes the hands-on approach of these individuals and groups in promoting reform from below of the contemporary *technoscape*. “Emancipatory” refers to their knowledge sharing and redistribution ethos, which embodies a message of liberation. By redistributing access to technology and promoting critical engagement with it, these activists encourage public participation and critical thinking, and oppose the consumption and privacy-threatening approach promoted by commercial platforms. Thanks

to their work, non-expert users are given the possibility to control their own communicative processes without having to rely on commercial tools and infrastructure.

Emancipatory communication practices represent a challenge to dominant powers in the technology and media field. Far from being considered only as neutral tools, communication technologies have become a site of struggle in its own right. The power at stake is communicative power, that is to say the ability of deciding who should speak and which messages should be transmitted, but also of controlling at what conditions content is exchanged, as exposed by the whistle-blower Edward Snowden (American Civil Liberties Union 2014). But at stake too is the power of participation, which refers to the possibility of accessing the unrestricted internet, and the power of making informed contributions to democratic decision-making and public life, and of engaging in unfiltered online deliberation. At the micro level, challenging power entails defending the right of disadvantaged communities and individuals to have their voices heard. It includes disrupting the data collection machine by means of encryption and other forms of resistance and subversion. It implies protecting local content and independent producers, and finding always-new ways and platforms for sharing knowledge. At the macro level, it means resisting the aggressive commercialisation and monopolization of the *technoscape* by a handful of powerful corporations, most notably Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon, also known as GAFA (Doctor 2015), which have extended their tentacles over the content and platform industry as well as the collective imaginary. It includes opposing the multifaceted information ecology of the “surveillance hegemony” (Keiber 2015), and countering services like Project Loom or Internet.org, which targets less developed countries and grants access to selected internet services only (J. Levy 2015). It involves pressuring national regulators to licence not-for-profit media and self-organized ethical telecom infrastructure, or to protect privacy and user data.

Three notions, often evoked in communication for development but relatively underspecified in the literature, may help us to understand emancipatory communication practices. First, of course, the notion of emancipation, indicating the efforts of disempowered groups and individuals to obtain equality and/or freedom in the technology sphere, both for themselves and for other social groups and individuals. Emancipation is often associated with media and technologies that “take sides” and have partisan values embedded deep in their structure. For example, Shah’s notion of “emancipatory journalism”, a radical philosophy of journalism that seeks to “promote and contribute to human development” (Shah 1996: 146), conceives of media practice as a way to engage in social movements in order to support their social change efforts. Second, self-determination, that is to say the free choice of individuals and groups with regards to their communicative futures. Self-determination finds correspondence in notions of negative liberty, and in particular in the idea of “freedom from” the commercial and the surveillance logics. Third, the concept of empowerment, that is to say the process through which individuals and groups take active part in the actions that reshape their communicative processes, in so doing exercising control over their

communication messages and resources. It is in this *active exercise of control over* technologies that people, including non-experts, are empowered. A similar process has been observed by Rodriguez (2001) in her analysis of citizens' media as a space for people to enact their democratic agency. Drawing on radical democracy and feminist theories, she refers to "a collectivity [...] enacting its citizenship by actively intervening and transforming the established technoscape; second, that these media are contesting social codes, legitimized identities, and institutionalized social relations; and third, that these communication practices are empowering the community involved, to the point where these transformation and changes are possible" (Rodriguez 2001: 20). However, notwithstanding its emancipatory and empowerment ethos, tech activism is fundamentally oppositional in nature: emanating from the lifeworld and centred on lifeworld change, it seeks to cultivate alternative public spheres (Carroll and Hackett 2006). By their very nature, tech activists "express an alternative vision to hegemonic politics, priorities, and perspectives", and in doing so often "break somebody's rules, although rarely all of them in every aspect" (Downing 2001: v-ix).

But the revolutionary potential of these practices of creativity and resistance is to be found in their ability to "constitute the politics of the quotidian" (Rodriguez 2001: 21). Repurposing, adapting, shaping, resisting and subverting technology that is deeply engrained in our everyday, they expand and multiply spaces for political action, which is no longer confined to institutional arenas but embedded in social life. So what does this continuous effort to criticize, take apart and create technology consist of?

The everyday deconstruction

We can identify four main strategies in tech activism, namely the creation of alternative infrastructure; the appropriation of enclosed spaces; hacking and the tinkering of software, hardware and social norms, and the recourse to technical fixes in order to bypass the bottlenecks enacted by states and corporations.

Tech activists engage primarily in the *creation of alternative technology and infrastructure*. In other words, they operate at the level of the "plumbing", or the technology architecture, both hardware and software. They do so on the ground that "resistance to power programmed in the networks also takes place through and by networks" (Castells 2009: 49). They seek to establish control over the conditions under which messages and content can be shared, and online connections and exchanges take place. Examples include noncommercial, privacy-minded Internet Service Providers such as the Italian Autistici/Inventati (autistici.org), which operates the NoBlog platform, and the US-based Riseup (riseup.net), which has recently launched Crabgrass, a web application designed to "meet the needs of bottom up grassroots organizing" and enable activists to "work together on projects in a democratic manner". But tech activists might engage in setting up radio stations, perhaps assembling radio transmitters from a toolkit jointly with the community (Dunbar-Hester 2014a). Research has shown

how demystifying technology through the creation of alternatives is a liberating and empowering experience for both tech activists and lay users (see, for example, Dunbar-Hester 2012; Dunbar-Hester 2014b; Milan 2013).

Tech activists also engage in the *appropriation of enclosed spaces* as an ethics of liberation. In other words, they take advantage of unregulated spaces, for example in the airwaves, as exemplified by the Oaxaca self-organized cellular network. Along similar lines, the Telestreet movement, which emerged in Italy in the early 2000s, set up pirate micro-TV stations in metropolitan areas. The self-produced transmitting hardware consisted of slightly modified receiver electronics that allowed the stations to broadcast within a range of a few hundred meters. Similar experiences popped up in other European countries, including the Netherlands (Pelizza 2006). But tech activists do not hesitate to deliberately engage in pirate actions that take over space previously appropriated by other, typically commercial, players, as pirate radio stations have consistently done over the decades (see, for example, Chapman 1992; D'Arcy 1996).

The action repertoires of tech activism comprises also *hacking and tinkering*, which addresses software and hardware but also social norms (see, for example, Coleman 2013; Hintz 2013; Maxigas 2012; Nissenbaum 2004). These tactics are to be seen as attempts to adapt and repurpose the existent and the available to meet one's own needs and values. On the one hand, activists tear apart, adapt and rebuild tools and software, while on the other they might also circumvent or subvert original intended usages. For instance, they might engage in the so-called penetration tests, deliberately attacking a computer system with the intention of identifying security weaknesses, gaining access to it, or testing its functionality. Hacking and tinkering are not creation of technology as much as they are re-creation, and as such they intersect practices of remediation typical of other instances of alternative media in the digital realm (Lievrouw 2006).

Last but not least, activists embark in exploits intended to *bypass legislation and surveillance through technical fixes* (Milan & Hintz 2013). They envision different working rules and implement them "by design" in their daily practices and in the tools and networks they built for their communities. This approach is in line with the "engineering philosophy to 'make things work' " as it encounters an "insistence on adopting a technocratic approach to solving societal problems and to bypassing ('hacking') legislative approaches" (Berry 2008: 102). But it also intersects the ethos of resistance to the hegemonic forces in the technoscape, no matter of nature. Examples of technical fixes adopted by tech activists include encrypting data against traffic analysis and network surveillance such as Tor (torproject.org), an anonymity software and network of virtual tunnels that improves privacy and security online.

Creation and self-organization are constant presences in tech activism, regardless of what specific technological support activists mobilize around. By engaging in these practices, they try to influence the socio-political at two levels. On the one hand, they resist the hegemonic practices enacted by the complex ecosystem of states and corporations. Resistance takes place primarily at the material/technological and at the cultural level; marginally and often indirectly, also at the level of institutions. On the other

hand, activists seek to create prefigurative realities, that is to say they try to translate their political values into practice into the present, rather than lobbying for systemic change down the line. We can imagine these prefigurative realities as “little islands” in the sea of commercial technology and infrastructure (Downing 2001: 72). The little islands of diversity and counter-hegemonic practice contribute to shape the present and to frame possible futures. Feminist thinker Sheila Rowbotham explained how the vision of a more just society cannot be detached from the process of its making. Politics “must provide staging posts along the way, moments of transformation, however small” (Downing 2001: 72). These staging posts serve the purpose of developing and disseminating new narratives on technology, society and change, and new cultural codes. This well captures the role of these usually small projects for social change and development activism. Not only are these liberated technologies a crucial backbone for much of civil society’s political activities; they represent a critical voice that reminds people of the constraints and the dangers that characterize our “tethered devices” (i.e., that can be modified exclusively by the manufacturer – Zittrain 2008) in the post-Snowden era. Technology, tech activists remind us, encodes specific design and policy choices that are diametrically opposed to the values and practices of social change activists – and their use endangers activist practices across the board. In this sense, the innovation of tech activism is at the same time technical and political, and as such embodies a message to society that goes well beyond the scope of technology as a tool to political action. Next, we look at the norms of technology through the eyes of tech activists.

Norms and ethics of technology from the ground up

When rethinking “voice & matter” it is useful to examine the norms that inform the emancipatory practices of tech activism, on account of two other lessons activists offer us. They remind us that “the way is the goal”, that is to say that the way in which action unfolds and groups organize to pursue change is a goal in itself, and that process is not second in importance to outcomes (Milan 2013). But they also tell us that technology and communicative action embody a moral dimension, and the tools people so much rely upon should ideally mirror the society they strive for. To extend this argument to one of the central concerns for the contemporary articulation of “voice & matter”, there is a fundamental contradiction in promoting development and social change by means of centralized, top-down, opaque social networking services.

The ethics of tech activism can be approached from two distinct but interrelated perspectives. We can dip into the values regulating the daily operations, the interpersonal and group dynamics of activists, and we can delve into the norms and ethics of technology that inform this activism, focusing on the moral dimension of technology. The two mirror and strengthen each other in a continuous dialectic exchange. They merge in the moment of technology design, which is simultaneously a process and an outcome, where both are deeply permeated by moral values. Table 1 illustrates the

two ethical codes of tech activism: the internal code, regulating interpersonal relations and intra-group dynamics, and the technology code, which polices how technology should look.

Table 1. Ethical codes of tech activists

Internal code – regulating interpersonal relations & group dynamics	Technology code – regulating how technology (hardware and software) should look like
Equality: no hierarchies, direct democracy, consensus, ‘dictatorship of action’	Equality of information and code, but also in access to and engagement with hardware (e.g., net neutrality)
Autonomy: hands-on, do-it-yourself, self-organization, self-determination	Autonomy & self-determination as inscribing moral values in software and hardware; no state interference
Participation: first-person engagement and individual responsibility, shared ownership, collective improvement	Openness: accessibility, malleability, transparency of standards and architecture; knowledge sharing, collective improvement
Collectivism: communitarianism above and apart individualism	Freedom(s) of access, to dissent, of expression, to share, to ‘hack’; “do not harm”

The internal code of groups revolves around the four tenets of equality, participation, autonomy, and collectivism. Equality refers to the preference for flat hierarchies and decision-making mechanisms rooted in direct democracy and consensus. Notwithstanding the commitment to horizontality, however, potential distortions are always around the corner. By admission of the same activists, the small size of groups and the urgency of taking action might occasionally result in the “dictatorship of action”, a dynamic by which whoever intends to take action can do so, but is responsible for its development (Milan 2013). This mechanism speaks to the centrality of action in tech activism, and individual action and reputation in particular. It is made possible by the fact that activists tend to share the same political values prior to action, to the point that discussion and negotiation become seemingly redundant in the face of the urgency of the action. Next, participation refers to first-person engagement and the individual responsibility that comes with it, but also to the emphasis on shared ownership of projects and collective improvement of society as a whole. In turn, autonomy concerns the hands-on and do-it-yourself attitude so widespread in the field. But it relates also to the autonomy of the various agents involved in the process: users on the one hand, and activists on the other. Further, it evokes self-organization and self-determination as driving forces behind the engagement of tech activists. Finally, collectivism entails a commitment to communitarianism that is above and apart from much of the individualism typical of internet-related activism.

The technology code mirrors closely the internal code, declined to specifically fit technology in its hardware and software forms. Equality is understood in terms of bits and code, which cannot be subjected to content-based discrimination or discrimination in transit (hence, the notions of e-commons and net neutrality). But it speaks also to

the equality of users in the access to technology, and translates into a commitment to support open source software against proprietary services. Autonomy, in turn, evokes self-determination in the design, adoption and engagement with technology. In practice, it translates into initiatives to inscribe moral values in software (e.g., privacy by design, encryption tools), but also in the belief that institutions, and the state and security agencies above all, should not interfere with grassroots initiatives or police user behavior. Next, openness refers to the accessibility, malleability and transparency of code, standards and architecture, which translates into support for open source software development and adoption. Knowledge sharing and openness are believed to create the conditions for overall collective improvement of people and societies. Finally, the multifaceted notion of “freedom” concerns not only access to information and the practice of dissent, but has to do with the realm of self-expression, sharing and hacking, that is to say the freedom to modify software and hardware in view of adapting it to the users’ needs, preferences, and wages. Freedom can be interpreted in at least three ways: freedom from the monetary exchanges typical of capitalism, freedom from restrictions to, for example, movement, and freedom from the exclusive control by groups or individuals. It is important to note that one’s freedom should not limit the freedom of others, at least on intent – hence the injunction not to harm that derives from the so-called hacker ethics, a set of core principles that allegedly guide the activity of hackers.²

The margins speak up

What can we learn from the emancipatory practices of tech activism to re-contextualize “voice & matter” in relation to the opportunities and challenges of technology, and digital technology in particular? The ethics of liberation and self-organization that inform these practices bear strong linkages with the aims and approaches of communication for development scholars and practitioners. Here I draw lessons learnt from the margins of cyberspace, focusing in particular on the alternative narrative of technology and change that emerges from the fringes. This alternative narrative can be grouped in six clusters: access and sharing, openness and transparency, self-determination, collectivism, the hands-on and do-not-harm imperatives. In what follows, I explore each set of values from the perspective of tech activism, and then hook them up with the practice of communication for development, offering suggestions for engagement with communities and projects alike.

i. *Access & sharing* indicate that access to information, technology and knowledge in general should be free, on account that access, sharing and shared ownership equal collective improvement. If we transition these ideas to the realm of communication for development, access and sharing mean to give people ownership over information that is key to their development, but also ownership over the design of policies and projects that concern their future. It entails sharing knowledge within the field, and

promoting the exchange of best practices as a means to collective improvement, and the flywheel of human and social development.

ii. *Openness & transparency* speak to the malleability of technologies, but also to the freedom to hack, adapt, and modify tools and processes, for example in the policy realm. In the field of communication for development, it means freedom to own one's own development process, but also the possibility of accessing, dissecting and understanding policies, empirical data, and decision-making processes that concern the future of people and communities.

iii. *Self-determination* evokes autonomy of individuals and communities, and respect for their privacy and decisions. It speaks to information ownership, but also consensus and horizontality in decision-making processes. In the development arena, it means respecting the individual and the community, but also defending privacy as well as individual and collective stories and data. Individuals and communities should be granted the right to be listened to, and to be effectively engaged as stakeholders in the design, implementation and evaluation of development projects.

iv. *Collectivism*. Collectivism and communitarianism above and apart from the individual evoke the cooperative approach that contemplates individuals-within-the group, rather than spokespersons, leaders and chiefs. Communication for development has to hold as a point of reference a collectivist approach that emphasizes communities over mini-groups, communities of interest, or invested individuals. Projects and policies should not counter, disrupt or break the collective dimension of communities, but value, respect, and leverage their internal dynamics.

v. *Hands-on*. The first-hand engagement with technology and the do-it-yourself approach are liberating because they are at the same time playful and empowering. It is practiced by individuals and groups who "believe that essential lessons can be learned about the systems – about the world from taking things apart, seeing how they work, and using this knowledge to create new and more interesting things" (S. Levy 1984: 36). Similarly, communication for development programs should trigger first-person engagement and foster individual responsibility, as ways to instill a sense of ownership over the development process. Experimental practices are prime demystification tools, and encourage people and communities to take responsibility for change without being overly dependent from donors or foreign aid. In other words, the hands-on imperative gives agency back to the individual.

vi. *Do not harm*, which is a central pillar of the so-called hacker ethics, typically translates into the injunction not to deliberately damage machines and data if at all possible. If applied to the context of communication for development, it calls for thinking about the consequences of any given action, project or decision on the system as a whole, but also on the broad context in which one operates. Do not harm calls for taking a holistic approach to development of people, communities and nations – one able to balance costs and benefits, but also counter-balance or offset the risks in the long-term.

In conclusion

This chapter explored the ethics of liberation and self-determination that support the emancipatory practices of tech activists. It offered six principles – access & sharing, openness & transparency, self-determination, collectivism, hands-on imperative, do not harm – as heuristic devices to rethink “voice and matter” in the post-Snowden era.

Focusing on the technological level of the interventions in the field of communication for development exposes that technologies are not neutral. Rather, they are designed to fit certain values, programs, and priorities as opposed to others; they embed forms of capitalist power and exploitation, and contribute to perpetuate inequalities (see Fuchs 2014 & 2015). More often than not, this power is well hidden, and people find it increasingly difficult to enact “antiprograms” (Bijker & Law 1992) able to resist, jeopardize, appropriate or take advantage of technology – in other words, to enact “line[s] of escape from the determinism” of code and algorithms (Cox 2013).

Critically engaging with the power within technology we so much rely upon is fundamental to any empowerment and liberation process, and even more so after the Snowden revelations. We live in an increasingly commercialized and securitized cyberspace, under attack by draconian data retention legislations and blanket surveillance programs, as well as threats to net neutrality and to the integrity of the internet as we know it. If Snowden’s revelations have made many indignant, most still continue using those very same services that are well known to collaborate with the likes of the National Security Agency – but especially the commercial platforms and devices we use are typically not designed to serve the purposes of development, social change, or a better world. If increasing the engagement with the “plumbing” and the “tech” of technology as well as with its ethics is a moral imperative for every citizen after Snowden, it is even more so for scholars and practitioners of communication for development, tasked with shaping the future of communities and nations and with educating the citizens of tomorrow.

Notes

1. This chapter is based on extended fieldwork with tech activists and community radio practitioners, which resulted in a number of other publications (Milan 2008, e.g.; Milan 2013; Milan and Hintz 2013; Milan and Padovani 2014). The analysis here refers to platforms, software, and projects as if they were stripped of content. Focusing on the tech level, although reductionist, is functional to exposing the notion, particularly ignored by the latest occurrences in communication for development, that technologies are not neutral.
2. The hacker ethics includes references to sharing, openness, decentralization, free access to computers, and world improvement (see S. Levy 1984). However, the “do not harm” imperative is not equally shared within the activist community. For instance, while some might not hesitate to “deface” a website temporarily changing its visual appearance, others would consider it a fundamental breach of freedom of speech.

The Political Economy of the Development Industry

Karin Gwinn Wilkins & Kyung Sun Lee

Abstract

Communication and Development constitute two critical fields united in strategic intervention for social change. Much of the field has been devoted to understanding communication as a tool for development (C4D), though emerging critical traditions also work to highlight how development as an enterprise communicates about social change (C@D). Moving this critical approach more squarely into political economy means foregrounding how global development works as an industry. The questions guiding our analysis in this chapter include: what constitutes a development industry?; How do political and economic conditions structure the potential for social change?; what is the relationship of the development industry to military intervention? To neoliberal empire?; and how can our research help to engage and challenge institutional norms and practices, particularly in relation to ethics and accountability? We consider the national and political interests of donors in structuring their financing and development targets. In particular, bilateral donors concerned with terrorism may be overly emphasizing military intervention in connection with development, whereas private donors and partnerships may over-emphasize market-based approaches to social change. Understanding the political economy of development as an industry including multiple and varied donors and recipients is imperative if we are to consider how best to effect social change.

Keywords: development industry, ethics, accountability, bilateral, multilateral and private agencies

Development programs are intended to promote positive social change through strategic intervention. We argue that instead of focusing on projects and their effectiveness as singular interventions, we need to consider the parameters through which development missions and financing are structured. Working to address a lack of attention to context and structure, attention to political economy helps us improve our analysis of development as a field of scholarship and as an institutional project (Engel 2015). Integrating our critical approach through the lens of political economy means foregrounding how global development works as an industry, and the potential implications of development as practice devoted to the public good.

The questions guiding our analysis in this chapter include: what constitutes a global development industry?; how do political and economic conditions of funding sources structure development?; and what are the potential implications of this structure to development practice?.

Development as a global industry

Initiatives for global change include a broad range of social movements and organizations with varied strategies, from those working with and through public agencies, to those either protesting directly against or working separately from government agencies. Development organizations are not only diverse in terms of funding sources, but also extremely varied within types of agencies. Private donors might include corporations or wealthy individuals motivated by profit, either directly or indirectly through capitalist exchanges, or other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations (CSOs) and social movements focusing primarily on public welfare. Bilateral and multilateral donors also include public sources with distinct political histories and agendas. Within this fluid and broad landscape of agencies involved in conceptualizing, funding, and implementing development programs, in this chapter we focus on global trends across types of agencies constituting what we describe as a development industry.

For the purposes of this analysis, we consider the development industry as a network of dominant agencies engaging in cross-national strategic programs with development as explicitly central to their organizational missions. These include bilateral, multilateral, and private development agencies that dominate an industry with the shared vision that global problems can be resolved through planned intervention. Although the global development industry is supported through both public and private financing, through grants, loans, direct investments and other structures, our interest here is in foregrounding dominant development agencies working across countries in global context.

Official development assistance (ODA) itself represents a strong financial industry, most recently documented at US\$ 134.4 billion in 2014.¹ ODA is defined by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) as “those flows to countries and territories on the DAC list of ODA recipients and to multilateral institutions which are provided by official agencies administered with the promotion of the economic development and welfare of developing countries as its main objective”². The types of financing available to governments of developing countries include this official ODA as well as other public and private investments, grants and loans from foreign individuals and organizations as well as through their own taxes and remittances sent by citizens working overseas (OECD 2014). From 2000 to 2012 the overall amount across these types of funding had doubled. While the proportion financed through classic ODA and loans has remained relatively steady over time, it is the private sources, from foreign direct investments,

private grants, bonds and securities, and migrant workers that have increased, making up this difference. As a dominant mechanism for development assistance, this official aid is more often allocated as direct grants than through loans, though loans need to be understood as part of World Bank and other approaches that are based in public agencies but benefitting from profit raised through interest. How the political and economic conditions of these agencies structure development will be explored next.

The development industry in political-economic context

In this section we map the structure of development funding across donors, considering the political agendas incorporated into resource allocation and development agendas. We begin with bilateral agencies, still the most dominant group, noting the importance of emerging bilateral actors from countries with growing national economies. Following attention to multilateral agencies, we explore the emergence of private agencies in the development industry.

Bilateral agencies

Although responsible for the highest proportion of global development assistance, when considering the total amount of external financing distributed to developing countries, development assistance from bilateral donors actually represents a much smaller proportion in more recent years than in the early 2000s. The possibilities for citizens and governments to receive money directly from private contributions, through families, foundations, corporations and other non-public sources, have been steadily increasing with more integrated economic globalization (OECD 2014). Still, bilateral assistance remains central to the global development industry.

The Development Cooperation Directorate (DAC) represents 29 wealthy bilateral donors.³ This group articulated the formal phrasing “overseas development assistance.” The DAC has taken on the task of establishing norms and standards of aid giving. It sets the parameters of what should be counted as aid and the proportion of aid that goes to least developed countries (LDCs) over middle-income countries. Focusing on DAC donor contributions to development assistance, overall ODA has been steadily increasing over the last five decades, propelled by increased funding to bilateral and to multilateral programs. In 1960, ODA was registered at US\$ 37.6 billion in allocations. Twenty years later, this amount had increased by 70 per cent (US\$ 63.7 billion in 1980), and even more by 1990 (US\$ 85.4 billion). Although the total volume of aid went through a sharp decline then throughout the 1990s with a 20 per cent decrease to US\$ 70.5 billion by 1997, in our more recent decades we are witnessing the highest amounts ever documented for development assistance: in 2005 development funding reached US\$ 128.1 billion, and by 2010 US\$ 134.8 billion.⁴

Humanitarian aid

Humanitarian funding has been more consistent within formal ODA, commanding about 10 per cent of ODA since 2008 (Tomlinson 2014: 163). Most of the US\$ 22 billion (64 per cent) devoted to humanitarian assistance in 2013 was initiated by DAC donors; Turkey administered much of the aid from other donors on behalf of Syrian refugees.⁵ But, according to the *Reality of Aid Report*, there has been an “alarming increase in humanitarian assistance delivered through defense agencies... (such that) US humanitarian space has become dangerous space, with 152 aid workers killed in 2013” (Tomlinson 2014: 165). Moreover, bilateral participation in humanitarian aid has been subsiding relative to the dramatic increase in funding through private individuals, from US\$ 4.1 billion in 2012 to US\$ 5.6 billion the following year, resulting in one-quarter of all humanitarian aid being dedicated from individuals.⁶

Funding for debt relief varies considerably as events, their mediated presence, and elite recognition change over time. For example, a dramatic increase in debt relief grants from US\$ four billion in 2004 to US\$ 23 billion the very next year was enabled through the elite group of Paris Club creditors, government delegates meeting unofficially and regularly since 1956, who decided to allocate US\$ 14 billion to Iraq and just over US\$ five billion to Nigeria.⁷

Bilateral development financing

In charting the bilateral agencies’ presence in global development, we could consider the overall amounts dedicated to foreign aid, or the proportions of their government funding allocated for this purpose. If listing donor countries in terms of the absolute amounts given, the top five include the US (US\$ 31.5 billion), the UK (US\$ 17.9 billion), Germany (US\$ 14.1 billion), Japan (US\$ 11.8 billion), and France (US\$ 11.4 billion). Together, these five countries contributed US\$ 86.7 billion, or 65 per cent of total DAC assistance in 2013.⁸ But when considering how much a country donates in relation to their available resources, as per cent of their Gross National Income (GNI), different countries lead, starting with Norway (1.07 per cent), followed by Sweden (1.02 per cent), Luxembourg (1 per cent), Denmark (0.85 per cent) and the Netherlands (0.67 per cent; 2014a). While the US may be the largest donor in terms of absolute amount given, its percentage of resources devoted to development is only 0.19 per cent, placing it at 19th in rank among all DAC members.⁸

Financing of global development projects tends to be thought of as direct foreign aid, in programs such as those in the fields of health or agriculture. But spending on development infrastructure in foreign countries also includes substantial spending by military institutions, estimated at US\$ 1747 billion in 2013, with additional funds through UN peacekeeping operations, estimated at US\$ 8.47 billion in 2014.⁹ The US government has channeled its human and financial resources through military pro-

grams, exceeding US\$ 5.6 billion in 2015, mostly targeting Israel, Pakistan and Egypt.¹⁰ Military financing includes capital expenditures on military (including peacekeeping) forces, foreign government agencies collaborating with military, as well as programs and projects deemed relevant to military operations (Perlo-Freeman & Solmirano 2014). Other governments with high military expenditures in 2013 include China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, France, the UK, Germany, Japan, India, South Korea, Italy, Brazil, Australia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (Perlo-Freeman & Solmirano 2014). Many of these countries also contribute to bilateral aid with other countries, thus engaging in international development in multiple capacities.

The abilities of national governments to perform as development donors reflect not only their available surplus wealth but also their position within geopolitical context. Post WWII Cold-War politics forced many governments to align themselves along east-west axes, in accordance with US and Soviet Union agendas. As Japanese and German economies began to recover post WWII, bolstered by serious reductions in military expenses, these nations began to emerge as donors. And as other countries in the global South accumulated more comparative wealth and as regional dynamics gained in strength, these geopolitical conditions fostered more diverse development donors.

Norway as bilateral donor

Norway is one of the few countries whose volume of aid meets the UN target of 0.7 per cent share of GNI (Gross National Income). In 2013, the country provided \$US 5.6 billion, outstripping all DAC members measured in per cent of GNI. In volume, Norway is still among the top 10 donors with \$US 5 billion in total disbursed in ODA.¹¹ All of Norway's ODA in 2012 was untied, and 100 per cent of its aid was comprised of grants. This means that Norway's aid money is provided without any obligation for repayment and without any conditionality that the money only be spent on goods or services from the donor country or from a select group of countries.

Norway's development activities have historically been both progressive and innovative, with a longstanding and strong focus on gender¹² (Gulrajani 2010). In 2012, it channeled \$US 777 million to gender equality. About one-third of its development programs (31 per cent) had gender equality as a principal or significant objective compared to the DAC average of 28 per cent.¹¹

Norway's development policy emerges from its Christian missionary tradition, humanitarian relief tradition, and welfare state ideology. These historical contexts have shaped the dominant sociopolitical norm toward development that values development goals and international common good rather than self-driven interest (Stokke 1989). Simultaneously, Norway's development policy is driven by the country's "reliance on good external relations as a small country. Its trade interests, its lack of former colonies upon which to project a legacy, a history of missionary work and the need for an international identity as a non-member of the European Union, all make

foreign policy a salient domestic concern” (Guljarani 2010: 31-32). Along with other Northern European donors, Norway exhibits a more humanitarian and less political agenda than many of its DAC peers.

Emerging donors

In 2013, up to 20 per cent of total development assistance (\$US 135 billion) was dedicated by countries outside of the dominant DAC^{xi}, representing a significant shift in the development industry to include an emerging group of donors previously part of this industry.¹³ This new emerging group of donors comprises nation states across geographical regions, with divergent political systems, as well as disparate economic resources. These non-DAC members exemplify an alternative to the current dominant institution of development aid through what is being called South-South cooperation.

This model of cooperation is posed as an alternative to the conventional DAC approach given assumptions that this form of development will be “based on solidarity, horizontality – as opposed to the perceived vertical nature of traditional DAC aid – non-interference in domestic affairs, and mutual benefit” (De Renzio & Seifert 2014: 1861). The volume of South-South development cooperation is growing at a rapid pace, an annual average of 21 per cent (Atwood 2012). This South-South cooperation, while including many donors, does appear to be dominated though by the governments of Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and China, together accounting for 90 per cent of the “South” initiated development aid (Tomlinson 2014:176).

Many of these emerging donors work primarily within specified regions, connected through linguistic, cultural and religious associations. For example, while Brazil’s ODA flows are allocated across the globe, its technical cooperation projects are launched specifically in Portuguese-speaking countries (Center for Global Prosperity 2013). Saudi Arabia, which has been the largest donor in volume of foreign aid after the U.S. over the past four decades,¹⁴ focuses its funding to Muslim countries. Between 2003 and 2012, Yemen was the largest recipient of Saudi foreign aid.¹⁵ Turkey is another regional donor whose increasing role in humanitarian assistance is directed toward preserving Islamic solidarity and historic ties within the region. In 2011, Turkey pledged US\$ 250 million in humanitarian relief assistance to Somalia (Aynte 2012). More recently, the country provided 70 per cent of non-DAC global humanitarian aid (US\$ 2.3 billion), most of which was directed at Syrian refugees displaced along its border region.¹⁶ Although technically a member of OECD if not formally of DAC, Turkey has continued to identify its development activities as South-South cooperation, leading some scholars to conclude that “Turkish development cooperation ... seems to be aimed at fulfilling the function of a mediator between Northern and Southern positions and players by placing itself in neither camp” (Renzio & Seifert 2014: 1868).

The four countries comprising the majority of non-DAC funding have their own particular senses of mission, some of them using their wealth to leverage status and some building potential markets. While development funding from varied countries in

the global South may date back as far as the 1950s, it is not until the early 2000s, with the rise of BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and from 2010, South Africa) that we see these national actors leveraging their economic growth to strengthen their geopolitical stature (O'Neill 2001). Dominant particularly in their own regions, these countries differ dramatically in their political systems, economic conditions, and cultural histories. As a group these five countries represent 20 per cent of the world's GDP, as well as 26 per cent of global military expenditures (Armijo 2007). China leads this group in total allocations for overseas development (US\$ 2.47 billion in 2011), followed by India (US\$ 0.73 billion), Russia (US\$ 0.50 billion), Brazil (US\$ 0.36 billion) and South Africa (US\$ 0.10 billion; Center for Global Prosperity 2013). It should be noted that there is some question as to the degree to which this documented funding fits operational definitions of official development assistance. More direct comparative research needs to be done to consider the ways in which their approaches to development differ, contingent upon their own internal conditions and geopolitical positions, as well as the degree to which there is evidence to support a shared alternative development model, juxtaposed with a dominant "west to rest" approach.

Such multiple trajectories of foreign aid delivery have led some scholars to believe that different models of development aid are possible (Walz & Ramachandran 2010). However, whether BRICS are able to sustain a shared, alternative approach with significantly different consequences remain an open question. Some foresee a truly alternative model of development that will decenter the hegemonic influence of Western conception of development embodied by the OECD DAC (Khanna 2014). Others are less optimistic that the model of South-South cooperation will alter global relationships in any significant way, seeing the rise of these emerging powers as being "firmly located within the Western global hegemony" (See Gray & Murphy, 2013: 185). Nonetheless, both sides agree that emerging donors in South-South cooperation advocate for increased representation of non-Western nation states in principles and interests shaping the discourse of international development. Brazil's role as a "norm entrepreneur" exemplifies such effort to bring about an alternative dominant discourse of aid and development.

Part of Brazil's discomfort with aligning with DAC members arises out of resistance to being pigeonholed into categories associated with Northern aid. Brazilian diplomats bristle at the suggestion that Brazil is an 'emerging donor' because they claim that the country is not a provider of aid but rather a solidarity partner in horizontal cooperation (Abdenur 2014: 1883).

As an illustration of the complexities within regions, we next consider the development industry actively engaged within East Asia. Japan, China and South Korea each perform as significant development donors within this region, with distinct geopolitical relationships as well as divergent internal economic systems, political interests and cultural histories. Recognizing their considerable differences internally, to what extent then do these nation states share strategic development approaches?

Bilateral donors in East Asia

Although most known actors within DAC represent northern and western governments, Japan is itself a wealthy, active donor within the dominant DAC community. Japan is not only one of the longest serving donors, but also one of the largest investors when considering absolute and not proportional allocation toward foreign aid. Japan is the only country to have surpassed the US in volume of aid, emerging as the largest bilateral donor in the world in the late 1990s (US\$ 13.4 billion in 2000). However, Japan is also clearly distinguished in its aid policy from the rest of the DAC. First, although Japan's presence as a donor spans over 140 countries, its aid allocation has historically been concentrated regionally with almost two-thirds (63 per cent) of its aid devoted to Asia. This bias in aid allocation is, first, due to the transition of the country's aid program from its postwar reparations (Potter 2012). Second, the large volume of disbursement to Asian countries, most of which are middle-income¹⁷ reflects Japan's commercial and economic interests. The top five recipients of Japanese aid include Vietnam, India, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and China (Takayanagi 2014). Only about one-fifth of Japanese aid (22 per cent) targets the poorest of developing countries.

Second, Japan's distribution by sector further reflects its close ties with its private sector interests more than most DAC donors. Much higher than the DAC average of its peer institutions in DAC (16 per cent), Japan channels 41 per cent of its aid funds toward economic infrastructure; conversely Japan channels less proportionately to social infrastructure (25 per cent) than its DAC counterparts (41 per cent; Tomlinson 2014). In addition to privileging economic over social interests, the rhetorical emphasis framing their foreign aid adopts the phrase "development cooperation" in place of "development assistance," indicating their inclusion of other private, commercial and nonprofit, agencies in their development approach. Recent revisions to their country's ODA Charter, which lays out Japan's aid policy framework, place greater emphasis on political, commercial, and security interests.¹⁸ Japan's revised ODA priorities that seek to project its "muscle power" reflect such geopolitical competition in the region.

Another significant shift in Japanese foreign aid then is its quite recent funding of foreign military programs. Post WWII, given external pressure as well as internal concerns, Japan had avoided military investments, attempting to move away from its regional identification as a violent aggressor. The first ODA charter in 1992 placed strict limitations on military spending and production and sales of weapons of mass destruction (Potter 2012). This enforcement has been increasingly loosened especially following September 11, 2001, when Japan's aid policy has aligned closely with national security (Potter 2012). Further, its commitment to bilateral alliance with the US is reflected in countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq rising as top recipients of Japanese aid. Now, the Japanese government has decided to provide aid to foreign militaries engaged in non-combat operations, as part of a US\$ 15.5 million "counter-terrorism" program in the Middle East and Africa.¹⁹

While Korea and Japan seek to expand their standing within the dominant development apparatus, China has maintained its distance from DAC, aligning itself with South-South cooperation. As one of the identified emerging BRICS, China invests considerable resources in overseas development programs. Given that China does not report its annual amount of aid to DAC, their exact contribution to development is difficult to document in clear comparative terms. From 2010 to 2012, China has distributed US\$ 14.41 billion in bilateral aid,²⁰ and its bilateral aid in 2013 is estimated at US\$ 7.1 billion.²¹ In addition to its bilateral aid, China is the third largest shareholder in the World Bank, after the US and Japan. The Chinese government also contributed US\$ 45 million to the Asian Development Bank, and is planning to further expand its role in Asian development by establishing an Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Santos 2015). As with other wealthy governments, China's role then needs to be understood both in terms of its bilateral work and its multilateral contributions.

Although the way China and Japan engage in development differs, their priorities actually bear great resemblance. Both China and Japan prioritize economic infrastructure and energy, comparatively more than other DAC members (Renzio & Seifert 2014). Similar to Japan's allocations, China provided 45 per cent to economic infrastructure and 28 per cent to social infrastructure. And like Japan, aid is distributed as a way of asserting geopolitical status: "The Chinese government has been eager to promote in order to combat perceptions of the country as an aggressive, even exploitative, emerging power" (Abdenur 1887).

In comparison with Japan and China, South Korea allocates substantially less in foreign aid, but as a DAC member since 2010 it has status as a development donor particularly given the comparatively higher proportion of available resources devoted to development. In 2014, South Korea's provided US\$ 1.85 billion in ODA, ranking 16th in volume of aid and 23rd in ODA as per cent of GNI (0.13 per cent) among national agencies. In the past five years South Korea's ODA investment has been consistently increasing from US\$ 1.3 billion in 2010 to US\$ 1.8 billion in 2014. Similar to Japan's emphasis, this foreign aid mostly benefits the region (South Korea channels 68 per cent of its aid to Asia, compared with 63 per cent by Japan).²² For both Japan and South Korea, Vietnam is the largest recipient of aid. In 2012, South Korea targeted 16 per cent of its bilateral funding to Vietnam, slightly more than the combined bilateral aid, which is allocated to the entire Sub-Saharan African region (15 per cent). The top five recipients of South Korea's aid following Vietnam include Afghanistan, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania. This donor gives comparatively more to the poorest countries (36.5 per cent) than many of its bilateral peers. However, South Korea's aid by sector diverges from that of China and Japan: its allocation is comparably more evenly distributed among education, health, and population (24.9 per cent), other social infrastructure (27.3 per cent), and economic infrastructure (26.3 per cent).

Despite the comparably smaller volume of aid, South Korea has sought to amplify its voice and representation within the institutional framework of OECD DAC. For

example, the country hosted the G20 2010 summit in Seoul from which the ‘Seoul Development Consensus for Shared Growth’ was generated, which was intended to replace the Washington Consensus (Marx & Soares 2013). The following year in 2011, Korea hosted the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF4) in Busan, which resulted in the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. Furthermore, the government has proposed to enact a “uniquely Korean model of development” based on its experience as the country to transition from recipient to donor in the shortest period of time (Watson 2012).

Bilateral aid recipients

Overall the countries receiving most of the bilateral ODA in 2013 include Egypt, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Syria, Tanzania, Kenya, Turkey and Bangladesh. This distribution does not neatly fit categorizations that classify countries in terms of needs: among the top 10 recipients only three (Afghanistan, Ethiopia and Myanmar) are classified as “fragile, least developed countries,” and Turkey is considered an “upper middle-income country,”²³ representing a particularly complicated case of a country serving as both donor and recipient with the development schemes. Patterns in aid suggest that foreign aid dedicated to the poorest countries has been decreasing, while aid to middle-income countries has instead been increasing. ODA does appear to be structured according to the political interests of donor countries rather than the economic needs of recipient countries.

National agencies devoted to foreign aid seek to articulate their image and position themselves through their foreign aid policy on a geopolitical stage. Foreign assistance is said to comprise an instrumental tool of soft power, or the ability to attract others by promoting a positive image and values toward which others aspire (Nye 2004). Compared with donors of bilateral aid, multilateral donor agencies are less constrained by the strategic interests of single governments.

Multilateral agencies

Formally multilateral development agencies receive national government contributions that they then aggregate and allocate through specific agencies. Multilateral agencies though may also be collaborating with bilateral and private agencies on specific programs. Moreover, the internal influence of bilateral contributors to multilateral agencies suggests that at times some strong donors attempt to exert their influence internally. Multilateral donors then may be constrained by the politics of dominant donor countries who may be negligent in paying committed contributions, as in historical struggles UNESCO has had with the US. But because they are not dependent on a single donor, these multilateral agencies have the potential to be more responsive than bilateral agencies to diverse development recipients and concerns (Maizels & Nissanke

1984; Neumayer 2003). When multilateral donors do target specific countries they are much more likely than bilateral donors to focus their funding in fragile, low-income and conflict-affected countries. While multilateral donors may have more flexibility in selecting their program sites, their strength within the broader development industry may be weakening given the emergence of other donors.

Today, there are over 210 sources of multilateral organizations and funds²⁴. Multilateral aid has been free from the volatility demonstrated by bilateral aid, growing steadily over the past five decades. However, against the current of rising private development assistance, multilateral aid has been falling proportionately to the total development assistance calculated across different sources of funding. Accounting for about one-third of all development funding in 2001, by 2007 this proportion fell to 28 per cent. The growth rate has decreased from nine per cent in 2008 to five per cent in 2010, and to just one per cent in 2011 (OECD 2013). In 2011, aid delivered by multilateral organizations reached close to \$US 55 billion, which was equivalent to 40 per cent of ODA from DAC members. Out of the \$US 55 billion, \$US 38 billion was provided to fund core activities while \$US 17 billion was allocated as non-core funding. While core funding represents general contributions to multilateral organization operations, non-core funding is earmarked for specific purposes or targeted countries or regions, and thus more susceptible to external influence outside of multilateral agencies.

The last decade has witnessed a sustained increase in the proportion of earmarked aid, from eight per cent of total ODA in 2007 to twelve per cent in 2010. Such increase in earmarked aid over time reflects an international climate that is highly skeptical of aid effectiveness. As the global development industry is increasingly being subjected to public scrutiny over effectiveness while facing financial constraints, there has been more pressure for accountability. As a response, bilateral donors have increasingly steered their allocations toward earmarked budgets that give them greater control over where and how funds are channeled. For multilateral agencies, however, growth in earmarked aid is said to have led to the deterioration of the multilateral system, in favor of systemic 'bilateralization' (Jenks 2014).

The growth in earmarked aid is also attributed to reportedly declining coherence within UN organizations, loss of control over overall budgets, and weakening influence of poorer countries. How such a trend of growing earmarked aid affects recipient nation states or development issues, particularly those that have not been attractive to bilateral donors, has received less attention. It may be likely that an intended purpose of multilateral aid, to serve sectors or regions that are less privileged by bilateral donors, may come under considerable challenge. Similarly, with increasing proportional development aid tied to private sources, the potential for multilateral aid may be constrained when programs operate through collaborations across donor agencies.

Private agencies

Bilateral agencies have been increasingly leveraging private financing in global development in support of their missions. While some appreciate private donations in support of development projects, others raise concerns over the conditioning of funding toward particular approaches. Recognizing the dominant rhetoric in favor of “public-private partnerships,” Enghel (2015) reminds us that these collaborations obscure that “the ability to initiate and terminate actions lies with the funders at the expense of the citizens named as beneficiaries of initiatives, at times bypassing the governance structures of recipient countries.”¹⁵

Private contributions can be initiated through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, or corporations through loans, grants, in-kind services, volunteers, or material products (Henón 2013). Estimates of the total private contribution vary, from an annual estimate of US\$ 32 to 58.9 billion depending on the source²⁵ (Center for Global Prosperity 2013). Most of this funding is initiated through NGOs and CSOs (about 58 per cent), but corporations (18 per cent) and foundations (16 per cent) also play central roles (Henón 2013). Private contributions from individuals for humanitarian aid have been increasing proportionate to total contributions, totaling US\$ 5.6 billion, contributing one-quarter of all humanitarian aid in 2013.²⁶

It is worth noting that the US dominates not only in bilateral funding but also in private development assistance relative to citizens and governments in other countries. Two-thirds of private funding for development originates in the US (US\$39.4 billion in 2011), followed by the UK (11 per cent), Germany (2 per cent), Canada (1 per cent), Australia (1 per cent), and France (1 per cent; Henón 2013). While most of the US\$ 680 billion within privately funded development assistance originates within formal DAC countries (85 per cent), about US\$ 103 billion comes from citizens and organizations in emerging economies (Center for Global Prosperity 2013). When considering the types of private contributions to development, most of these countries are relying on NGOs and CSOs, along with foundation support. Notably, corporate support figures more prominently in private assistance from the US, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Japan and France (Henón 2013). Cautious estimates of private assistance from emerging economies point to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, India, Turkey, China, South Africa and Brazil as key sites through which development funding is acquired.

Private aid is characterized by its flexibility but, simultaneously, its volatility as well as its selectivity in regions and areas of aid. From 1991 to 2002, private flows to sub-Saharan Africa totaled 12 per cent, with the remaining majority from ODA. Private aid to the Pacific was even less prevalent, at four per cent during the same period of time (McGillivray 2004). The nature of development support differs in that ODA channels resources to government agencies whereas private funding is more likely to fund particular programs, given institutional missions and personal interests. According to *Development Initiatives* (2014), private donors are more likely to respond quickly

to natural disasters, funding crisis response in areas such as Haiti 2012. While there is more diversity and flexibility within private development initiatives, some studies suggest that the NGOs within this category “tend to replicate bilateral allocations of other NGOs and aid organizations from their respective” countries (Koch et al. 2008).

Private funding is partly enabled through attracting wealthy donors working and residing in countries with taxing policies that allow those accruing global profit to keep higher percentages of what they earn. With relatively lower federal taxes and more liberal policies supporting private business, the US dominates as home to two-thirds of private assistance allocated for global development (US\$ 39.4 billion in 2011), followed by private funding originating in the UK, Germany, Canada, Australia, France, Netherlands, Switzerland, Japan, and Italy in descending order (Henón 2013). The Hudson Institute reports that in 2011, private development assistance from the members of the DAC amounted to US\$ 577 billion, four times the size of the official flows. This indicates that over 80 per cent of foreign aid activities by the DAC was channeled through private financial flows (Adelman et al. 2013).

Private development assistance is growing as well among organizations outside of North America and Europe particularly by private sources in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, India, Turkey, China, South Africa and Brazil, though the *Development Initiative Report* admits that it is difficult to make accurate estimates given partial data. But it is estimated that US\$ 103 billion in private aid flows from these emerging economies (Adelman et al. 2013).

Recognizing that our mapping of development aid is based on potentially suspect documentation that does not lend itself to reliable comparisons across countries and agencies, we suggest that the broad patterns identified do matter. The emergence of private sources of funding and of bilateral agencies outside of the formal DAC sphere characterize an increasingly diverse set of donor countries and agencies, that yet may be sharing similar resonance with global neoliberal interests. Next we consider the potential implications guided by the structure of this global development industry.

Implications for development

Political and economic conditions of global development structure the possibilities channeling how institutions engage in strategic intervention. The implications for development include how aid is structured, to whom and for what purposes. We sympathize with Enghel’s (2015) concern that through our research we not only engage in mapping structures and networks, but also consider implications for process. Li’s (2007) ethnographic research on the implementation of a World Bank project illustrates the strength of case study analysis that explores the processes through which project rules and monitoring guide particular operationalizations of key concepts, such as participation and empowerment. In her conclusion, connecting these implementation processes to broader neoliberal strategies of development, Li suggests that

these strategies bear “a striking echo of colonial interventions a century ago” (267). Broadening our scope of inquiry to include historical and global contexts works well in guiding analysis of the potential as well as the challenges structuring the work of the development industry.

Military interests

While we have strong documentation connecting the work of bilateral development to national agendas of donor countries, we encourage more scholarship connecting human and economic development programs to national military interests. Since September 11, 2001, some bilateral donors have prioritized reducing terrorism as key national interests, which then contribute to allocations of funding for humanitarian and other types of aid in particular ways. Moreover, humanitarian aid work has become more dangerous for development professionals. Krahenbuhl (2011) argues that “when humanitarian action becomes part of strategies aimed at defeating an enemy, the risks for aid agencies in the field grow exponentially”²⁷, while security concerns constrain access to populations that may be in the greatest need of humanitarian assistance. The direction of development aid and experience of aid professionals are connected with the violence and conflicts across communities and nations.

National interests

Another implication for development assistance is that recipient countries are not necessarily engaged on the basis of need, but rather in terms of the national interests, whether in military or economic terms, of donor countries. Bilateral donors tend to give more aid to recipient countries that import greater volume of goods produced by the donor country (Neumayer 2003). An analysis of U.S. bilateral aid flows from 1960 to 1997 found that when the recipient government is perceived as liberal, bilateral aid tends to reflect “development-oriented and humanitarian approach to aid” (Fleck & Kilby 2005: 21). But when the government is assumed to be conservative, commercial interests were given greater weight than under liberal regimes (Fleck & Kilby 2005). Despite international recognition of human rights, bilateral donors seem less concerned whether recipient countries respect civil and political rights of their citizens.

Multilateral UN agencies, however, appear more likely to restrict levels of aid contingent upon national records of human rights violations (Neumayer 2003). But when the World Bank and other multilateral networks demand structural adjustment programs from recipient countries, along with asserting those dedicated to micro-enterprise schemes, they import banking models into social development visions, in ways that suggest profit-driven frameworks for development. Understanding the unintended consequences, such as the devastating experiences of people as a result of structural adjustment programs, is crucial to our investigation of development potential.

Neoliberal interests

Although private donations may be valued for attention to and flexibility in funding humanitarian and crisis events, some relevant concerns have been raised regarding the types of agendas promoted as well as unintended consequences inspired. Private funding for development often resonates with a neoliberal approach, channeling funding to programs that target individuals and avoiding recognition of structural barriers to social change. An analysis of the World Trade Organization's Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) suggests that more people may be hurt than actually helped, given that African governments are prevented from purchasing medicine for HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis at cheaper prices.²⁸ The Gates Foundation, cited as benefitting from TRADES, also raises concerns given its collaborations with corporations that exploit child labor and pollute local environments.²⁹

Donor interests, whether public or private, structure not only the target of aid but also the focus of development assistance. In 2013, bilateral agencies focused the greatest proportion of its aid on social infrastructure and services (\$US 71 billion)³⁰, asserted as less political and more humanitarian than other potential subjects. Social development includes, among other foci, attention to civil society (\$US 19 billion), health (\$US 13 billion), education (\$US 12 billion), and population and reproductive health (\$US 10 billion; OECD 2015c). Economic infrastructure and services follows that of social development in prominence among bilateral donors (\$US 40 billion).³¹ When multilateral donors focus on particular sectors, humanitarian aid attracts the highest proportion (\$US 5.1 billion). In order of contributions, these multilateral agencies also fund civil society (\$US 2.7 billion), economic (\$US 1.6 billion), health and education (\$US 2.3 billion), and population and reproductive health (\$US 61 million) programs.³²

Political interests

Given the clear directions guided by the political interests of bilateral donors and governments contributing to multilateral institutions, existing documentation illustrates how types of aid and recipients are favored and avoided given political agendas. The emerging presence of private donors, recognizing their diversity and complexity, also contributes to the structuring of the development industry. While this mapping of funding structures may assert parameters guiding the direction of development work, we need more attention to processes and implications given peoples' experiences with development programs. We remain particularly concerned with the unintended consequences to peoples' lives, opportunities, and rights.

Despite growing attention to development in geopolitical contexts, more theoretical and analytic work would improve our scholarship (Hermanns 2013). We hope to strengthen our ability to understand the degree to which development programs for the public good might build from and respond to the interests of citizens and serve the principles of global justice.

Notes

1. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/aid-architecture/multilateralaid.htm#latestdocuments>. (accessed May 15, 2015)
2. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/officialdevelopmentassistance/definitionandcoverage.htm>. (accessed May 15, 2015)
3. The members of DAC are comprised of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, European Union, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, and the United States.
4. The dollar amounts are in constant dollars in 2013 prices and exchange rates.
5. <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/report/gha-report-2014>. (accessed May 15, 2015)
6. <http://www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Humanitarian-assistance-from-non-state-donors-2014.pdf>. (accessed May 15, 2014)
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International Volunteering in Development Assistance

Partnership, Public Diplomacy, or Communication for Development?

Susanne Schech

Abstract

This chapter explores the tensions between ‘voice’ and ‘matter’ in international development volunteering (IDV). By providing spaces for cross-cultural understanding and two-way communication, IDV can challenge existing institutional norms and hierarchies in the development industry and contribute to public diplomacy. However, donor countries increasingly subject their IDV programs to the same neoliberal management structures that govern aid more broadly. They also seek to align IDV with their national and foreign policy interests. Using the government-funded Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program as a case study, this chapter first provides a critical assessment of the development partnership discourse and whether IDV offers spaces for real partnership building. It then examines IDV’s role as a tool of public diplomacy and the extent to which it enables actors to question foreign policies and international politics. The final section discusses the circumstances under which IDV can serve as a vehicle for communication for development.

Keywords: international development, volunteering, diplomacy, foreign policy, partnership, communication

International volunteering has seen significant growth in the 21st century in response to the rising demand for international experience among young people of the Global North (Sherraden, Lough & Moore McBride 2008, Tiessen & Heron 2012, Smith & Laurie 2011, Jones 2011, McBride & Sherraden 2007). Volunteers usually spend a period of time for no or only modest remuneration in another country on development projects broadly aligned with that country’s development priorities. Many are motivated by the desire for a fairer and more equal world. They are encouraged by millennial development discourses that propose the end of global poverty as a goal which is achievable within their lifetime, and construct the individual as a member of global civil society empowered to directly contribute to this goal (Roy 2010). International volunteering also provides opportunities for participants to gain the skills and sensibilities required for global citizenship and for promoting inter-cultural understanding. Many Northern countries, and increasingly also Southern donor coun-

tries, fund international development volunteer (IDV) programs as a way of building people-to-people linkages that are conducive to public diplomacy and foreign relations. Thus, IDV can be portrayed as ordinary citizens' 'voice' in two ways: on the one hand, by defining problems, formulating solutions and acting on them, they contribute to positive social change; and on the other, by communicating with global Others, they contribute to peace and security.

However, IDV is also an integral part of the development industry. Its post-WW2 birth is intertwined with the rise of the 'development project', both built on colonial versions of development mission. Even though many IDV programs were started, and are often still run, by non-government organisations, they have been increasingly subjected in recent years to the foreign policy interests and neoliberal management structures of the governments that fund them (Georgeou & Engel 2011). In a policy shift seen by some as ensuring value-for-money for the aid dollar and by others as neoliberal co-option, IDV program providers are expected to compete with other providers for government funding, work more closely with the private sector, and document measurable contributions to conventionally defined development goals (Lough & Allum 2013: 915). Rather than building cross-cultural and participatory relationships, IDV programs are asked to focus on developing the skills of volunteers to make them better and more employable citizens, or to promote foreign policy goals that are in turn closely aligned with the national interest. Being part of the political economy of aid arguably undermines claims that volunteering is different from other kinds of development interventions by virtue of being a non-market activity (Palmer 2002), and that it offers an alternative to the neoliberal consensus around the power of the market (Devereux 2008: 358). The motivations of volunteers have also come under scrutiny, with questions being asked about the recent growth in IDV. Is it mainly due to altruistic citizens in the Global North wanting to take an active role in millennial development, or to their desire to acquire professional skills for the global labour market (Noxolo 2011)?

This chapter explores the tensions between 'voice' and 'matter' in international development volunteering. It begins by contextualising IDV in contemporary debates about the effectiveness of development assistance. This is followed by a critical assessment of the partnership discourse and the spaces it offers for IDV programs to build genuine partnerships: how do volunteers and host organisations perceive and shape IDV programs and the relationships involved? The chapter then examines IDV's role in public diplomacy, and the extent to which volunteering facilitates cross-cultural understanding and two-way communication for development. This discussion draws on the Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID) program as a case study of a government-funded program that has recently become more closely aligned with national and foreign policy interests. The Australian IDV movement started in the early 1950s as a civil society initiative which won government funding in the following decade (Brown 2011). By the 2010s the program had grown to 1000 skilled volunteers per year doing placements of twelve months in average, mainly in the

Asia-Pacific region where Australia's economic and security interests lie. In 2011 the Australian government consolidated several government-funded volunteer programs under a single program, AVID, thus aligning it more closely with the aid program administered by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). The alignment with foreign affairs was tightened in 2013 when a new government abolished AusAID and brought the aid program under the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

Official Development Assistance and development practitioners

In development assistance the interplay between voice and matter has been subject to much debate. On the one hand, development assistance is portrayed as a response to the voices of the poor in the Global South calling for social justice, solidarity and human rights. In 2000, world leaders committed to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which aimed to improve the lives of poor people around the world in the course of a generation (1990-2015). Millennium Development Goal Eight, 'a global partnership for development', calls on richer countries to increase their development assistance so that poorer countries can attain the promises of poverty reduction, universal primary education, and other basic human rights articulated in the MDGs (United Nations 2014). The MDG project has contributed to establishing as international norm the view that poverty in an affluent world is morally unacceptable (Hulme and Scott 2010). It revived the notion of development assistance as an act of solidarity involving not only governments and multilateral development institutions, but also global civil society. Principles and expectations of equality have spread across the globe, and human rights have become de-linked from citizenship as social distance between different parts of the world has shrunk with the rapid diffusion of ICTs and transnational ways of life (Beck & Gernsheim-Beck 2009). Young people in particular have variously mobilised against globalisation and for global justice and a kinder 'millennial development', and in this context the growth of international volunteering can be seen as an expression of global citizenship (Roy 2010: 10). But the appeal of development among young people is also due to the marketization of international aid through pop music celebrities and commercial brands, which present it as "young, chic and possible" (Richey & Ponte 2008: 725, see also Biccum 2011, Roy 2010).

However, official development assistance has been subject to an array of criticism by both neoliberal and critical development scholars and practitioners. They share an argument that aid is an industry that serves mainly the interests of the powerful, principally corrupt southern elites and northern private sectors, and those of bi-lateral and multilateral aid agencies and development professionals. Neoliberal critics of aid argue that it prevents the poor from participating in the global economy and fulfil their own needs and aspirations (Moyo 2009) and mistakenly assumes that bureaucracies can predict and guide development interventions that work (Easterly 2007). Instead,

neoliberals argue that development should be left to individuals and the market. This solution has in turn be criticised as attributing to capitalism a messianic capacity to transform the lives of the marginalized and disempowered (Comaroff & Comaroff 2000).

Critical development scholars are also sceptical about development assistance but for different reasons. They see aid as increasingly conforming to a neoliberal reform agenda which international development institutions regard as pivotal in the eradication of poverty. Aid partnerships with the private sector (Mawdsley, Savage, & Kim 2014) and with the growing ranks of private aid initiatives and philanthro-capitalists (Wilkins & Enghel 2013: 168) are argued to be part and parcel of this neoliberal agenda promoted by the OECD and its group of Northern donor countries. Critical development scholars and practitioners thus argue that instead of empowering poor people in the Global South, aid has become a means of controlling them and turning them into neoliberal subjects (Manji & O’Coill 2002: 157). Thus, official development assistance is unresponsive to the voices of the poor by both sides of the aid critique. However, these voices are interpreted by one side as seeking the individual’s right to participate unencumbered in the market-based economy, and by the other as demanding an active role for citizens in transforming unequal social, economic and political structures and relationships.

Development practitioners have also scrutinised their own role in what development anthropologist Raymond Apthorpe has called “Aidland”. This term describes the development industry as a “parallel universe” with its own “mental topographies, languages of discourse, lore and custom, and approaches to organizational knowledge and learning” (Apthorpe 2011: 199). Apthorpe’s most important point is that aid interventions frequently assume a *terra nullius*, an empty land where every new development fad can be mapped out and implemented without serious geographical, sociological or historical analysis. Even when development workers attempt to inject a social perspective into development programs, they end up using the mainstream aid language and tools to describe “how the world should be rather than to show how we found it to be” (Eyben 2014: 98). This self-reflexive development literature also highlights the role of relationships in aid, how relationships are shaped by hierarchy and inequality, and how they can hinder or improve aid practice (Eyben 2014, Roth 2015). Many authors writing in this vein have worked in development as government employees and consultants, as well as holding academic positions in development studies departments, which enables them to examine processes and relationships from an insider and outsider perspective (Harrison 2013). Volunteers are part of this aid landscape and workforce, but they arguably play a rather different role from that of development professionals working within the structures of development organisations. The defining features of long-term volunteer programs like AVID are that their main purpose is to develop the capacity of local organisations; that volunteers live and work under local conditions, engage in reciprocal exchange of skills and knowledge, and are accountable to their host organisations rather than to funding bodies. As volunteers have little power in aid structures and relationships, they may be in a

position to forge more equal and mutual relationships with local counterparts and thus contribute to transformative change. In the following section this potential of volunteering to forge equal partnerships is explored.

International Development Volunteering as partnership

Partnership has been on the development agenda for the last three decades but it was not until the 1990s that it entered the mainstream vocabulary of the development industry. In 1996 the OECD published a landmark policy statement on development co-operation in the 21st century, which aimed to restore the flagging enthusiasm for development assistance in both North and South. For Northern donors the end of the Cold War had diminished the role of development assistance as a political tool to secure anti-communist allies in the Global South. In the South, international development institutions were criticised for making aid conditional on meeting their agendas of structural change which had led to widespread poverty, public service collapse and political unrest. The OECD's policy statement proposed partnership as a new paradigm for development cooperation. It described the 'true spirit of partnership' as a process of dialogue and agreement between Northern and Southern partners that respects Southern ownership and diversity (OECD 1996: 9). Partnership would replace paternalistic relationships between 'donors' and 'beneficiaries' in favour of more egalitarian relationships between partners to support a more people-centred, participatory, sustainable development process. However, the Millennium Development Goals defined "a global partnership for development" more narrowly in terms of increased access for the South to global markets, new technologies and affordable medicines, and Northern commitments to debt relief and development aid increases.

The partnership discourse has its roots in participatory development approaches which see Southern individuals and communities as agents of development rather than merely its passive recipients. Speaking from a Southern perspective, Kajese (1987: 80) argued that the ownership and responsibility for development rested with the South, "however ill-managed or non-professional our indigenous NGOs are in the South". To empower Southern organisations and communities, a shift in aid relationships was required whereby Northern partners relinquish power to their Southern partners and focus on strengthening the organisational capacity of Southern NGOs. It was also argued that Northern NGOs needed to enhance their "relational capacity" and work towards authentic partnerships (Fowler 1998: 149). This ethical dimension of the partnership discourse continues to appeal to many development practitioners and scholars. This can be seen in calls for "effective and ethical relationships" capable of breaking down old hierarchies (Hinton and Groves 2004: 9), for "active partnerships" based on negotiation, sharing and learning (Lewis 1998: 506), and for aid to be conceived of as a "relational system" constituted by actors, social relations, history and context (Eyben 2010).

However, as soon as partnership was adopted into the mainstream by international development institutions, it began to lose this transformative meaning. Criticisms of the partnership discourse focus on two main points. One line of argument is that ‘partnership’, along with ‘participation’ and ‘empowerment’, became buzzwords that sound persuasive to those who want to transform aid relationships but leave power relations between donors and recipients essentially unchanged (Cornwall & Brock 2005). More important to donors are concerns about the effectiveness, transparency, and ultimately, legitimacy of aid, which have led to the meaning of partnership being reduced to a contractual arrangement between those who fund and those who implement aid programs (Overton & Storey 2004). In practice, it is Northern donors who determine the partnership agenda because they hold the “purse strings”, and it is their policy priorities that govern official development assistance (Hatton & Schroeder 2007: 159). Partnership thus is reduced to an “apolitical catchword” that enables donors to present their agendas as “inclusive liberalism” (Craig & Porter 2003: 54).

A second critique of the partnership discourse focuses on the claim that “the aid industry continues to rest on an assumption of inadequacy on the part of the institutional recipients in ‘poorer’ countries” (Crewe & Harrison 1998: 76). The images Northern donors have of themselves as “superior, active and innovative” developers and of their “inferior, passive and unreliable” Southern partners are moulded by imperial and colonial pasts and at odds with the partnership concept (Baaz 2005: 147). These identities, and the practices they legitimise, need to be challenged in order to make more equal partnerships possible. Although established hierarchies have proven difficult to shake up, the roles and identities of development actors are not necessarily determined by their economic relationship (Baaz 2005: 173). Northern donor countries that are less encumbered by colonial relationships have been able to construct more equal partnerships within official aid structures. The increasing diversity of development actors in the South also offers opportunities to challenge Northern control over aid.

At the same time, the portrayal of official development assistance as governed by a power-conscious and often dysfunctional elite does not sufficiently acknowledge the commitment many development workers have to aid as an ethical project (Harrison 2013: 272). It also fails to recognise their efforts in challenging “the invisible power that supports and sustains inequitable relationships” (Eyben 2014: 159). Being marginal players in the field of development assistance, volunteers may be able to forge more equitable partnerships (Devereux 2008, Impey & Overton 2014). The *State of the World's Volunteering Report* asserts that volunteering “is not just about transferring technical skills but also about relationship-building, global cooperation and the values of solidarity” (Leigh, Horton Smith & Giesing 2011: 32). By virtue of living and working alongside local people and being accountable to their local host organisations, volunteers can avoid the traps of paternalistic aid relationships, and foster a “radical and reciprocal people-centred relational development process” (Devereux 2010: 40). Arguments for the reciprocity of volunteer relationships are based on findings that

“capacity building occurs on an equal basis”, with volunteers gaining soft skills in cultural understanding and global awareness and valuable overseas work experience while building the capacity of their local counterparts (Fee and Gray 2011: 546).

Other studies challenge the notion that volunteering produces equitable partnerships by highlighting the institutional relations within which volunteer programs are embedded. Georgeou’s (2012) study argues that the Australian volunteer program constructs host organisations as needing the superior skills and knowledge possessed by volunteers which positions the latter as privileged actors. Georgeou explores a small group of Australian volunteers’ understanding of “mutually equitable relationships”, revealing that they felt being instrumentalised as a resource when they are asked to step outside of their anticipated capacity building role (Georgeou 2012: 158). Thus knowledge and power relationships “pose dilemmas for the volunteers who began their journey with egalitarian notions of human relations” (Georgeou 2012: 153). Asymmetrical power relationships come to dominate when volunteer programs are driven by supply-side factors such as the availability, aspirations and capabilities of volunteers rather than the priorities of host organisations, and when volunteers are made accountable to their Northern sending agency rather than to their host organisation (Impey & Overton 2014).

An Australian study on the impact of international volunteering provides some interesting insights into volunteer views on partnership. AVID volunteers were surveyed before and after undertaking a volunteer placement about a variety of issues including their view on volunteering. The overwhelming majority (81 %) of volunteers surveyed before their volunteer placement selected as ‘close’ or ‘very close’ to their opinion the statements that ‘volunteering is about working in equal partnership with local organisations’ (87 per cent) and ‘serving the needs’ of these organisations (Figure 1). About 75 per cent of the respondents also agreed with the statement that “volunteering is about passing on knowledge and experiences”, which reflects the mainstream view of capacity building as provided by the developer. Almost 50 per cent agreed with the statement that volunteering is about building their own skills. Volunteers who had completed their placements and returned to Australia were also surveyed (Figure 2). Their responses show that the statement about volunteering as equal partnership still resonated with 75 per cent of post-placement volunteer respondents. Some 60 per cent felt that volunteering is about serving the needs of host organisations. But only 50 per cent agreed with the view of volunteering as passing on knowledge, and only a third saw volunteering as building their own skills. These results indicate that although volunteers experience their placement as a ‘reality check’, this does not significantly affect their commitment to the idea of volunteering as an equal partnership. As volunteers are less powerful and less bound by the need to produce pre-determined outcomes than other development professionals, they are more willing to engage in reciprocal learning. The extended period of time working with Southern counterparts makes it possible to build relationships of mutual trust that can support transformational change (Wilson 2006).

Figure 1. Pre-placement volunteers rating of statements about volunteering on a 5-point scale from 'very close' to 'very far' from their opinion (N=310)

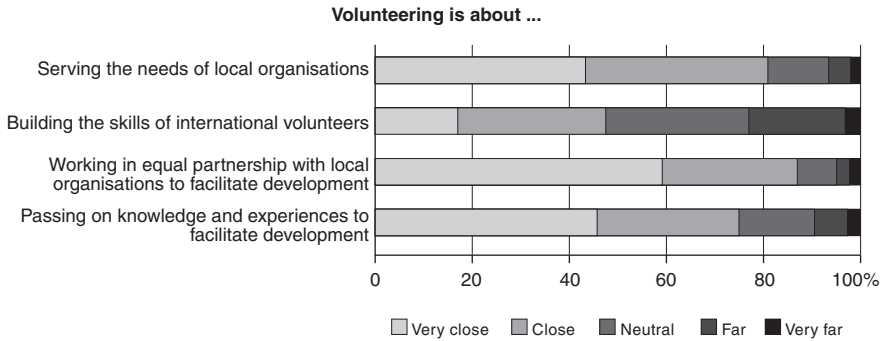
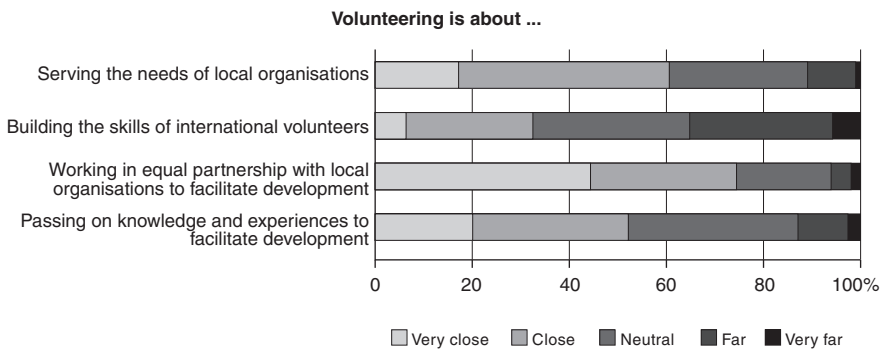


Figure 2. Post-placement volunteers rating of statements about volunteering on a 5-point scale from very close to very far from their opinion (N=103)



These findings, and the wider literature, suggest that IDV can provide spaces for more equitable partnerships. The space for voice however also depends on how Northern governments construct their volunteer programs as a public diplomacy tool.

International development volunteering as public diplomacy

In 2011, the Australian government amalgamated several IDV programmes under the brand of Australian Volunteers for International Development (AVID). In doing so it followed the recommendation by a program review conducted two years earlier that greater integration and streamlining of government funded volunteer programs would give it a clear identity as an Australian Government IDV program (Kwitko & McDonald 2009: 39). In his launch of AVID the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade referred to volunteers as “ambassadors of Australian compassion” who are “build-

ing bridges to the world at a very personal human level – right across the planet, in the good name of Australia” (Rudd 2011). Australia is not the only country which considers public diplomacy as an important role of its IDV program. A review of the Canadian volunteer program presented volunteers as ‘grassroots ambassadors’ and ‘human face’ of Canada’s ODA (Universalia, Jackson & Salasan 2005: 3), while the National Peace Corps Association and the Brookings Institution in the United States argued for a government funding increase on the grounds that Peace Corps volunteer placements are a smart and relatively cheap way to enhance American soft power (Quigley & Rieffel 2008: 4). In contrast, Ireland and Finland phased out their volunteer programs because they were judged to be insufficiently aligned with their foreign policy objectives (Devereux 2008).

Since the late 1990s there has been renewed academic interest in public diplomacy which reflects a dual concern of portraying a country as an attractive investment destination and extending its power and influence abroad by peaceful means. One influential discussion of public diplomacy took place in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* in 2008, where Joseph Nye describes public diplomacy as ‘soft power’ that gets ‘others to want the outcomes that you want’ through attraction rather than coercion (Nye 2008: 96). From his perspective, public diplomacy is an instrument governments use to communicate their national culture, political values, and foreign policy to the publics of other countries, rather than just to their governments. As developing countries around the globe have adopted increasingly democratic forms of government, public opinion is becoming more influential in shaping international relations, and communicating with foreign publics is more likely to occur in exchanges and relationship building rather than through “mere broadcasting”, as was common practice in the Cold War era (Nye 2008: 104). In the same debate, Manuel Castells maintains that public diplomacy is less about asserting soft power but rather “diplomacy of the public” whereby a “dialogue between different social collectives and their cultures” promotes shared understanding and mutual respect (Castells 2008: 92). According to his perspective, debates over public affairs have shifted from the national to the global sphere where they are conducted in global civil society through global communication networks. Therefore the concept of public diplomacy should be broadened from its narrow focus on national interests.

How to project a positive image of Australia and extend its influence abroad was the focus of a parliamentary inquiry into Australia’s public diplomacy in 2007. It defined the main purpose of public diplomacy as being “to influence in a positive way the public or elite opinion of another country in order to promote its own interests” (Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs 2007: 9). People-to-people links were identified as “the lynch pin” of effective public diplomacy as they are the means by which long-term mutually beneficial relationships are built and sustained (Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs 2007: 80). The inquiry listed a range of initiatives including student exchanges, bilateral business councils and IDV programs as examples of people-to-people linkages that contributed to mutual understanding between

Australia and other countries. More recently, a review of the AVID program reiterated that international volunteering played a role in promoting “cultural understanding through people-to-people linkages” and as a “means of promoting both public diplomacy and development outcomes” (Office for Development Effectiveness 2014: 1). However, the literature review commissioned for this review pointed out that insufficient data made it impossible to verify the link between an effective international volunteering program and a positive international perception of Australia (Hawkins, Verstege & Flood 2013: 26).

The role of diplomacy in Australian development assistance was reframed by the conservative coalition government which came to power in 2013. One of the first steps of the new government was to bring the development agency under the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). It formulated a new aid policy that more explicitly gears development assistance towards Australian national interests (DFAT 2014: 11):

The integration of Australia’s aid program into DFAT aligns Australia’s foreign, trade and development policy efforts with economic diplomacy at the forefront of Australia’s international engagement. The integrated Department brings together the range of expertise and resources required to work for Australia’s long-term economic prosperity and that of the region as a whole. Aid investments and diplomacy will be mutually reinforcing.

The government also issued a public diplomacy strategy which reinforces the closer links between aid, trade, and public diplomacy defined by national interest, rather than global public interest. According to this strategy, Australia’s development credentials are to be promoted through “effective development and humanitarian assistance”, with effectiveness defined in terms of economic growth and poverty reduction (DFAT, n.d.a). The strategy also identifies “enduring people-to-people links” as an important way of propagating Australia’s commitment to democracy, human rights, multiculturalism and freedom of speech. While volunteers are notably absent from the “audiences” of this strategy (Table 1), the AVID program is included on the DFAT “people-to-people” webpage. It states that the program’s goal is to “advance Australia’s reputation and relationships in the region”, as well as to promote economic development and poverty reduction (DFAT n.d.b).

The review of the AVID program in 2014 argued that developmental goals underpin public diplomacy impacts of the program, and that the high level of satisfaction (88 %) of host organisations with their Australian volunteers enhanced Australia’s reputation abroad. It found that

AVID volunteers are almost universally highly regarded by host organisations for their professionalism, experience, flexibility, adaptability, fresh ideas, approachability and ability to work as part of a team. Australian volunteers are often contrasted favourably with volunteers from other countries and with paid technical advisers (Office for Development Effectiveness 2014: 41)

Table 1. Australian government public diplomacy strategy 2014-2016

<i>Objective</i>	<i>Audience</i>
1. Promote Australia's economic credentials and support our economic diplomacy objectives	Government, business, science, medical and research institutions, commentators, NGOs, host countries, women's organisations
2. Underline Australia's deep engagement with the Indo-Pacific region	Government, business, commentators, partner countries, cultural and arts sector and sports sector
3. Advocate Australia's vision for the international policy agenda	Government, business, research institutions, commentators
4. Promote Australia's development credentials	Government, NGOs, business, local beneficiaries of Australian aid, commentators
5. Champion Australia as an open, democratic and diverse nation	Government, business, NGOs, research institutions, diaspora communities, commentators, cultural and arts sector

(DFAT n.d.a)

Surveys conducted for the review indicated that the AVID program fostered on-going relationships. Two-thirds of the volunteers and host organisations reported that their communication continued beyond the duration of the placement, and almost 60 per cent of volunteers reported that they provided ongoing financial assistance to their former host organisation (Office for Development Effectiveness 2014: 69).

Key to effective public diplomacy is two-way communication, and this is more easily achieved between parties that are positioned as equals. As discussed earlier in this chapter, Australian volunteers seek equitable partnerships with their Southern colleagues. This is facilitated by the fact that their income is modest compared to other foreign development workers (Watts 2010). In a study of international volunteering in Cambodia, “local workers in Cambodia reported that they could relate better to expatriate volunteers than to expatriate consultants or permanent workers” as they perceived volunteers to be positioned more similar to themselves in the development hierarchy (McWha 2011: 37). However, other studies found that local people did not distinguish between volunteers and foreign aid workers because the volunteers’ allowances were still considerably higher than local salaries for similar work, and afforded them a better lifestyle (Georgeou 2012: 165). Aside from socio-economic differences, volunteers are also perceived to be more approachable and flexible than other types of development workers. Volunteers tend to work in close collaboration with locals in the same organisation, are more likely to spend informal time with local colleagues, and make more effort to learn the local language and understand local culture (McWha 2011).

Willingness to learn about local cultures is an important aspect of people-to-people relations, and viewed by host organisations as an important contribution to solidarity, peace and understanding between people (Lough & Matthew 2013). This is confirmed by a case study conducted for the Australian volunteering research project in Peru, where the AVID program operated between 2012 and 2014. Nineteen staff

from twelve host organisations participated in semi-structured interviews and/or workshop discussions about the impact of development volunteering. Emerging from these host organisation accounts is an Australian volunteer with a laid-back attitude, self-motivation, multi-tasking capacity, flexibility and willingness beyond the confines of the position description. One NGO staff described their Australian volunteer as ‘a very open character’ who was very engaged with his work colleagues and enthusiastically immersed himself in the local language, culture and place (HO Interview Manuel 2014/01/17). Another NGO staff compared his Australian volunteer with American volunteers who had worked in his organisation: “they [US volunteers] are very serious, they have objectives which they have to achieve. But very rigid. With [the Australian volunteer], of course, he is very responsible, but he is more relaxed. He is not rigid. He talks with us, laughs” (HO Interview Rolando 2014/01/17).

These comments suggest that the AVID program succeeded in presenting Australia as an “open, democratic nation” able to engage with diversity. But being able to openly communicate about global policy issues is another important criterion for effective dialogue between different social collectives (Castells 2008). A significant proportion of AVID volunteers were placed with environmental organisations in Peru. The sharing of experience with common environmental issues, such as water management, reforestation, and mining on indigenous lands, was described by research participants in terms of joined knowledge creation where actors felt empowered to challenge each other and reflect critically on what they had assumed to be “best practice”. Rather than positioning themselves as capacity builders and developers with superior skills and knowledge, AVID volunteers commented that they had gained new perspectives on environmental and indigenous policy issues in their home country. Two-way communication may be easier to establish for middle powers like Australia because the power differential to other countries is not as great as with a superpower like the USA. Peru’s classification by the World Bank as a middle income country, albeit with serious poverty and inequality issues, helped volunteers and their Peruvian counterparts to find shared development interests and concerns, and start their relationship on an equal footing. This facilitates sharing critical perspectives which makes public diplomacy more effective because a more credible image and message is presented to foreign publics (Potter 2009: 52). To achieve a similar impact in bilateral relationships with countries classified as low-income countries, a more conscious effort is required to empower host organisations.

International development volunteering as communication for development

By way of summarising this chapter, it may be useful to think about international development volunteering as a multi-faceted example of communication for development. At one level, volunteering is about exchanging skills and knowledge, usually presented

as capacity building. But at another level, volunteering is an act of communication because it is, above all, a relationship, and any concrete development outcomes it may achieve depend on the nature of that relationship. The fact that the volunteering relationship involves mainly civil society individuals and organisations acting out of their own volition gives it a greater potential to become a genuine partnership than other relationships in the aid industry.

At the same time, volunteers and host organisations do not exist in a vacuum – the spaces of volunteering are shaped by discourses of development, unequal power relations between aid donors and recipients, and racialized assumptions of superiority (Perold et al. 2013: 193). They are also affected by shifts in policy and ideology, such as the current preoccupations in Australia and elsewhere with ‘aid effectiveness’ and ‘results-based management’, and with ‘economic diplomacy’ which constructs aid as an investment in the national interest. These terms belong to a managerial approach to development which values quantifiable outcomes, utility, and predictability over local ownership, mutuality and transformational change (Elbers 2012). Thus the growing influence of neoliberalism on government funded volunteer programs can undermine the intangible impacts of volunteering on local capacity, social capital, trust, innovation, and shared understanding (Lough & Allum 2013).

Tying volunteering programs too closely to foreign policy interests can also threaten their long-term developmental and public diplomacy impact. The AVID program in Peru, for example, was cut short despite its success with host organisations when the Australian government shifted its focus back to the Asia-Pacific region that it considers closer to Australian national interests. This is an example of matter winning over host organisation voice. On the other hand, IDV programs also suffer when the number of volunteers in a particular country is determined by the sending government’s desire to show its presence in that country, rather than by the quality of the placements and host-organisations. This would be a case of sending government voice over development matter.

When volunteer programs are driven by the interests of sending countries and demand-side factors, host organisations lose power and voice. Their active involvement in the design and management of volunteer placements according to their own strategic objectives is an unconditional prerequisite for volunteering being able to build social capital that is sustainable (Perold et al. 2013). This means that volunteer sending agencies and their funding bodies must challenge the images of powerful donors and compliant recipients, build long-term and respectful relationships with host organisations, and relinquish control over volunteers (Impey & Overton 2014). How compatible these requirements are with current aid and public diplomacy policies, and how much space there is for volunteer programs to pursue broader developmental agendas of empowerment and solidarity are questions that need further exploration.

Mediating Stuart Hall

Anders Høg Hansen, Faye Ginsburg & Lola Young

Abstract

This chapter re-envision the influence of Stuart Hall in British political and cultural history with an emphasis on two incidences of remediation; a screening of John Akomfrah's film *The Stuart Hall Project* followed by a conversation between Lola Young and Faye Ginsburg, moderated by Anders Høg Hansen at the *Voice & Matter* conference, Malmö, September 2014. Following Young and Ginsburg's discussion, the article reads as reflections on culture, identity and the movements and ideas Stuart Hall inspired or became inspired by. Notably, Akomfrah's film as well as the panel discussion reflects on significant years of Stuart Hall's academic and activist journey, the 1970s and 1980s, coinciding with increasing social tension in Britain. A general introduction (by Anders Høg Hansen) is followed by the edited conversation, which has been shortened slightly with a few changes to original chronology to fit into a thematic organization: *Voice and Sound*, *The Public Intellectual*, *Multiculturalism*, *The Dip into Feminism*, and finally; *Art, Heritage and Social Change*.¹

Keywords: voice, mediation, history, identity, memory

Seven months after the death of British cultural theorist Stuart Hall, Lola Young and Faye Ginsburg (together with moderator Anders Høg Hansen) gathered in Malmö, Sweden with an audience of students, to discuss John Akomfrah's documentary film *The Stuart Hall Project*, which had been released the year before, in 2013. The conversation, which was preceded by a screening of the film, came to reflect upon cultural changes and social and political movements central to Hall's life and academic and activist journey, as also portrayed in the film. The most significant years were perhaps the 1970s and 1980s, important years of *British cultural studies* and also a time of rising social tension in Britain.

Stuart Hall came to Britain from Jamaica when he was 19 while John Akomfrah, a filmmaker since the 1980s, immigrated from Ghana to Britain with his family as a boy. Akomfrah was one of the founders of the *Black Audio Film Collective*. Hall was director of the *Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies* at Birmingham University from 1968 to 1979 – earlier invited to join by first director Richard Hoggart. Lola

Young, today a member of the House of Lords (UK), is British born and has for long been engaged in arts, culture and social justice in Britain. She was also a professor at Middlesex University and has written about British cinema, notably on representations of race, gender and sexuality in British film¹. Faye Ginsburg is Director of the Center for Media, Culture and History at New York University where she is Professor of Anthropology, involved in a variety of projects around documentary film and moreover a longstanding scholar of the work of indigenous media makers.²

In 1986 John Akomfrah made his directorial debut with *Handsworth Songs* portraying upheaval and riots in the Birmingham-area of Handsworth. Margaret Thatcher had come to power in 1979 and hopes around black and white integration in Britain were low. In the documentary Akomfrah used past as well as present footage to depict postcolonial tension and working class dissatisfaction in Britain. His interest in using archival material and music in moving soundscapes and images has characterised his film-making up to this day.

Ironically, despite this political situation, the late 1970s were arguably some of the most influential years of *cultural studies* in Britain – which Stuart Hall helped to pioneer. From the mid 1960s up to the early 1990s, pivotal studies of popular texts, everyday life, and contemporary culture and conflict came out of the Birmingham center and elsewhere. Often with an emphasis on grassroot practices and subcultural changes. The approaches were innovative in their use of eclectic interdisciplinary formats, as well as collective work processes, posing new practices of knowledge production in the humanities that resembled those of activists in social movements.

In the years of intensified social upheaval signs of change in social and racial interaction however emerged in sports and music. Much of the UK's reggae and ska scene took off in Birmingham and the midlands at least bringing whites and blacks together in the clubs. As an example, but crucial to the view of race in particular cultural sectors, incidents on the football grounds displayed strong racism. But changes were in sight. A Birmingham based first division football club (close to Handsworth) had three excellent black players in their stripes at a time where few black or foreign-born players joined the teams. They were thrown bananas and often harassed at away grounds. However, within few years, more blacks made it into the teams and attitudes began to change.³

Stuart Hall pioneered critical studies of British ethnicity, identity, and heritage, at a time when most of Britain did not consider it had 'ethnicity'. British whiteness was naturalised, and 'heritage' (see e.g. Hall 1989 and 1999) was not believed to be something some would *not* agree with or feel excluded from, or which excluded non-white experiences. The complexity of heritage was interrogated, and so was the widespread articulation of new practices of sub-culture⁴ and the popular. Cultural studies engaged in details, differentiation and comparison; dissecting the popular as seriously as any other cultural text or social practice.⁵

Akomfrah, it can be argued, adopted the theoretical montage-based approach to social scrutiny in cultural studies to his artistic work with film. He searches for intrigu-

ing footage in archives and montages it into new subtle meanings. We are, as viewers, left to search for symbols, or a cunning shot, to figure out what kind of stories are told.

As a prologue to the conversation, Faye Ginsburg said that Hall had a huge impact on her work. “We invited Stuart Hall to help inaugurate our Center for Media, Culture and History in 1993, to have his spirit and blessings on our own work. I first became aware of him and the work of the Black Audio Film Collective in 1986”⁶ Later in the conversation Ginsburg noted she first saw Akomfrah’s work, after watching *Passion of Remembrance*⁷. Both impressed her as films by people who were “archiving their own experience, the experience of migration; and both groups made such beautiful work together in a way that call into question what we think realism is. The Stuart Hall film is in a certain way straightforward, mining the archive and creating a beautiful appreciation of Stuart Hall’s work, a wonderful examination of so many things that are not well-known, such as his Portuguese-Jewish heritage”. Returning to the issue of ‘realism’, Ginsburg said: “John’s work never allows you to just indulge and relax into realism, but he makes you think about the complexities, how the archive was created, where it comes from. Much of it is from John, from BBC work, British Film Institute archives, which are fantastic and much more available to filmmakers than many archives in the US. And one of the things that I appreciate so much about Stuart Hall – as a sociologist, as a social scientist he absolutely embraced the power of aesthetics, the sensory, the ways in which we inhabit history, space, culture.”

She ended on a note about the film’s use of music by Miles Davis: “it was a soundtrack of Stuart Hall’s life and so much of the aesthetic embodiment of much of his passion.”

Voice and sound

The moderator (AHH)⁸ tried to set things off with a broad thematic question that somehow was not far from Ginsburg’s introductory note on aesthetics and the experience of migration. Anders said that he was struck at first by Hall’s *voice* in the film and then when watching it again at the seminar, it was *sounds* that made an impression:

“Akomfrah is a man who likes to work with sounds. There is a certain restlessness in the film as well. We have this restless intellectual, always on the move, never arriving – like the figures in these French movies he refers to. And I wonder if we could start with voice and sounds. Do you want to say something about that?”

Lola Young (LY) then began: “I do think it is a good place to start – with sounds, around voice, in particular. If I may be slightly personal about this... When I first came across Stuart’s work, I was a mature student at university. I’d not gone to university when I left school, as was conventional but enrolled as a mature student at what was then Middlesex Polytechnic. And I came across this book, *Policing the Crisis*⁹, which was about mugging – he makes this reference to mugging, which, I think, is a very specifically English, maybe American, term too, which is a particular type

of street crime. And ‘mugging’ very quickly became like a code-word to say that a black young man had attacked an old white lady. That was basically what mugging came to mean. Reading this book, at that time I wasn’t aware that Stuart Hall, who was one of several authors of this book, was actually black. I thought it was a very interesting book and it helped me to think about some of the things that I’d been mulling around in my head, and some other works came out. And I saw Stuart Hall giving a keynote speech at London University”. Lola explains that this voice had a great impact on her “as slightly younger black person trying to grapple all of a sudden with these high academic theories and trying to incorporate them into my experience of racism, sexism and all the rest of it. And there was this man – this incredibly powerful speaker, saying all of this stuff. I was absolutely delighted for him, as it were to be my voice.” Lola notes that black people at that time were at best tolerated, and the colonial history was always there, if rarely explicitly invoked. “But there was this man who white people also revered.”

Faye Ginsburg (FG) continued. Amongst her points were some around movement and sound: “I paid a lot of attention today to the way that he uses trains, and storms, and sound effects that go with them. They are both common and odd. And you know the first time I thought it’s very weird... The trains I got, the cars I got, the ships I got, and then the storms – and, of course, the storms are very much marking these winds of change moments. In that way it quite directly shows how Stuart Hall insisted on the sensibilities shaping human’s life as something that we have to grapple with sociologically, and historically, and as citizens. Those sensibilities... Akomfrah tries to encode them into the film through the trains, the planes, the people, and the constant movement of people on and off these vehicles of passage.”

Ginsburg also tells the story about Hall visiting Akomfrah to see a rough cut of *Handsworth Songs* in 1985. Akomfrah, at that time was barely out of school and he was floored that Hall wanted to debate with him. And she continued: “what you realize is that Stuart Hall is constantly vibrating with the sense of historical moment and change, and, of course, he’d go and see what this next generation of amazing young, ambitious, black British artists are trying to put together. And it seems so clear that he’s on the move. Not only because he has this sense of migration and hybridity, but also because his appetite for absorbing what’s going on in the culture around him is just phenomenal.”

The public intellectual

Several threads in the conversation, as well as the debate with the audience at the end, touched upon Stuart Hall’s engagement not just in academic research and teaching, but in public mediations and activism outside the university walls; as educator on the BBC, public speaker and intellectual – “absorbing what’s going on in the culture around him”, as Faye said.

AHH: “Stuart Hall never wrote a proper monograph. I wonder if he was too busy doing things with people instead of sitting at his desk writing monographs as academics are supposed to do. What happens today with the vibrant and public intellectual? Is it that we somehow miss more figures like him?”

LY: “Absolutely. You say, ‘figures like him.’ I don’t think there was anybody else as engaged with practice in terms of critiquing what people were actually doing” Lola explained that on the one hand there were these “incredibly dense impenetrable essays”, but on the other also stuff that “people would find really accessible”. She mentions work for television and Open University. “He was an incredibly collaborative person in a way that does not surprise me, but also there is a kind of intellectually-informed restlessness, and, I think, the film does capture that and it has partly to do with movement and storms, which could be interpreted in a number of different ways, and the music as well, and it moves from one thing to another. I can’t think of any other people who have that same kind of engagement.”

Continuing the thread on the public intellectual Ginsburg later added: “Speaking as an American, public intellectuals are so much more part of life in Europe. I mean, if you turn on British or French TV, you still see them. But there are people in a number of reviews, I think, they picked up on some of John’s writing about Stuart being a rock-star of their generation and that status and that sense of someone who’s alert to these cultural changes rather than just dancing around them. I can’t think of a figure like that.”

LY: “But there were during Stuart’s time, I think, people like Cornel West, Louis Gates, and bell hooks – those African Americans that introduced to us the gateway to that body of thought as well. Because there was a very strong sense of connection with different kinds of struggles, that also had similarities.”

Multiculturalism

Much of the debate touched upon themes that broadly could carry the label ‘multiculturalism’, this peculiar and much abused concept, that has come to be associated with Stuart Hall’s work. Multiculturalism is a contentious term that has been used in several, and at times oppositional, contexts. On the one hand multicultural discourse tends to separate. It places someone over there (them), and others over here (us). Stuart Hall’s work recognises that we speak from particular positions and histories (see e.g. 1989), with identifications and identities on the move, an on-going meaning-making process, combining and developing. In this sense multiculturalism is radically different and unfinished and not easily graspable. Lola developed a point on black art and identity and the problem of special treatment and separation, which may work as a starting point.

LY “...we don’t always want special treatment – all of this interesting work was going on, but hardly anybody was really acknowledging the art form but instead focusing

on the ethnicity of those who made the work. John Akomfrah and the others that have been mentioned all had to negotiate this complexity that encompassed racism, tokenism, exclusion from mainstream outlets for art and so on. And I think the other thing to say is that Stuart's artistic and aesthetic choices were not easy ones. They were not ones that gave a kind of celebratory look or exposed a sort of linear notion of what constituted black identity – all of those things he says about identities being fractured and mobile and fluid are frequently demonstrated in the work of the artists with which he engaged. It was really difficult to say that when you had the National Front and other fascists knocking on your door, breaking your windows. So to be able to say that – look, it is a valid way of expressing black identity or black identities, – it was really quite important.”

FG: “I totally agree, but I have to say that in the American mediascape, there is not an equivalent to the BBC ... And, you know, speaking of those 1986 events [the Third Cinema conference], Spike Lee arrived with his first film, *She's Gotta Have It*, and the liveliness of the debate going on was definitely happening, but, I think, that idea of occupying such a prominent space of intellectual visibility at public stages, I feel like... although I completely agree with those, they are amazing, and I think they occupy similar locations in terms of intellectual conversations, but those are not always in the public sphere”.

Faye Ginsburg then invited the audience to give their view of Akomfrah's film, and she also added that critical points were welcome.

Ronald Stade (Professor in Anthropology at Malmö University, who is also contributing to this anthology): “I wonder what is the future of multiculturalism? The idea and concept itself, not so much the reality that it addresses or tries to describe, but rather: are we in a post-multicultural era where we are not really thinking in terms of origins so much anymore? I mean, in the very beginning of the film Stuart Hall addresses the very same question. He says our biographies, and when we tell where we are from, become increasingly longer, we have to talk more.”

LY: “Such an interesting question and very pertinent. A short answer is – I don't know, because it's such a huge question. But it's interesting, going back to Stuart Hall, on a number of occasions¹⁰ he was referred to – as ‘the godfather of multiculturalism’ – I don't understand what they mean by that and it's not something that I recognize. But I think what he was able to do was to peel the layers of what multiculturalism might mean and what it might be, and he talks about the multiculturalism as something we kind of drifted into. I think this resonates for quite a lot of young people, I'd say, we are all multicultural now and that kind of hyphenated cultural identity is quite common... That isn't to say that cultural diversity is necessarily more accepted. I don't think so, because sometimes there is an assumption that it's a matter of assimilation. You can blend in as long as you are like us, that's okay, but isn't it more complex than that? So, for example, in London – and London is a bit like a separate country within the UK – you hear all these different accents. You close your eyes and you have no idea who's speaking, what their ethnic or national origins may be. In some instances, it precisely

demonstrates that we are in state of flux, regarding identity and identification. Also, I would say that over the years in the British context and elsewhere a toxic atmosphere has developed and been directed towards the Muslim community that the nature of 'the problem' apparently ceased to be about colour and move towards faith, culture or religion. And that it is again a complex move on the part of certain establishment figures, which is slightly different to the precepts of old school multiculturalism and its critiques."

FG: "I just want to say that this is a thing that is kind of missing and I wanted to go back and see if he commented on this. Because this film was finished before he died in February of this year." (2014, ed).

LY: "I don't think he comments specifically on Islam..."

FG: "Multiculturalism, certainly in the US, in North America I should say, is associated with really mostly ineffective cultural policies, so it lost any verve that it once had as a political statement of diversity and, I think, it is a part of the changing role and clearly in the end when he said... 'Wow, this is a new world again', he was speaking about these transformations around..."

LY: "Feminism and sexuality"

FG: "And the return of religion, which took every committed secularist by surprise as a powerful social force, probably blindsided him as much as many people including myself."

Another speaker in the audience addressed a quote in the film about British society being broken in the post-Thatcher era. Lola elaborated: "A lot of things that Stuart Hall said and discussed became pervasive. So he coined the term *Thatcherism*; he identified what was going on – very early on with that particular political ideology and, I suppose, what I'd take from some of the things he said in the film and elsewhere is that there isn't one single moment from which you can assess this trajectory of becoming what's characterised as 'broken Britain' – a description popularised by Conservative ministers in the last government to mean something quite different, so I don't want to confuse the two usages. There are crossovers in the meaning of the term 'broken' in both the conservative view and Stuart's perhaps. But whatever social ills and disruptions there are today are on a continuum. You could go back 100 years before Thatcherism or 200 years and say it started when somebody brought the first slaves. You can go way-way back, so I don't know about that particular moment. I think, how I would respond to that point would be to say that there are fewer spaces in a big public way, perhaps. So much of what we think is public space in Britain has actually been privatised. I can't count television, but that is not necessarily the most important space for communicating with people today. We are having conversations with people we can't see and and which we don't know". We could be thousands of miles away from each other and you are able to have discussion. "So I think, you know, you can find spaces if you know how to do it. But in terms of that more conventional academic space I don't know. I'm not in the academic world anymore, but, maybe, some of you who are would say that there are certain spaces where dissenting positions are available for the taking. Not all spaces are

closed down. We have all kinds of assessing university's worth and individual researchers in them and the more single-authored books you bring out the more important you are judged to be, the more clever you are, apparently, the more grant money you get into your department the more valued you are. So there are some spaces that have closed down, but maybe there are thousands more that have opened up as well."

The dip into feminism

FG: "I just want to comment on one thing that kind of flew by, which is very striking now for me when reviewing the film. I thought the way gender was handled in the film was really disappointing. First of all, you just saw the evidence of how until mid '70s the intellectual world of the left was entirely male and it was completely unselfconscious about that. For example, what was that weird scene with strippers eating fire?"

LY: "I thought that was a kind of counterpoint to the idea that you might progress, you move from A to B, to C, to D, so now that we've got feminism, that's kind of sorted out? But actually we haven't, we still have those kinds of strange perceptions of what women are, what they should be doing. But I think, for me it is so personal, I love the Britishness of it, which is so interesting. John obviously has lived in Britain for many-many years, but Stuart came from elsewhere. Although I was born in London, my parents came from elsewhere, but the extracts from the BBC British archive are just amazing and there was something that was slightly strange – things when in the '50s and the '60s half of the conservative government was brought down by Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies¹¹ and a ring of prostitutes with all those very respectable men, government ministers and the like. These men and their fantasies of political potency were being played out through the Cold War spying and various scandals. Members of the establishment had to resign their positions. And they melted into the shadows. So for me it's just a part of that slightly strange British issues with repressed, contained and constricting sexuality. It is interesting what you said about the absence of woman in the film, which is true not only of left, of course, but also of black cultural politics. That critical, analytical cultural/political space was very much a male thing both in the UK and US. And hence people like bell hooks had to really actively insert women into that discussion."

FG: "I felt like it got really cut off – there was a quick dip into feminism. And I appreciate there was that contrasting view. I thought that was awkwardly positioned in the film. And I know with some, with Isaac Julien's work for example, his constant conversations with Stuart Hall about sexuality, and that was a struggle, and I felt like it was a bit erased in this. That's okay, there are certain silences that'd be there, that's okay. And I think in the end when you see them at the party and he is praising all this incredible vitality – he's embracing those things, I think, he had struggles with for a long time."

LY: "I think around sexuality – it's incredibly difficult to talk about in many communities, let's be honest. It is especially difficult to talk about in the context of the

Caribbean, in many African countries, black Britain and so on. In a way it is not surprising that it might be slightly in the shadows, on the edge of the film. Though I thought, I watched it around five or six times now and you know different bits come out each time, that when he talked about homosexuality he says it has made heterosexuals rethink what their sexual identity is about, what it means to be heterosexual and I thought that was quite interesting.”

Art, heritage and social change

Thomas Tufte and the moderator (AHH) both had questions addressing cultural studies today and its possible role as an intervening practice engaged in social and political processes. Below these two comments/questions are extracted in a slightly shortened form (followed by some of Ginsburg’s and Young’s responses):

Thomas Tufte: “The first quote of his in the film was about social change. And then it becomes very much about identity. Cultural studies for some periods of time was focused a lot on identity issues, maybe less on the matter of the material side of things. And he also towards the end of the film says that sexuality and the role of women will never be the same. He didn’t say gender, but he said, “The role of women will never be the same”. “... What about this polarized and unequal and unjust society in Britain, what has happened to the material side? Is there a role for cultural studies to play today in that?”

AHH: “I want to go back to Thomas’ point about cultural studies, maybe with some Scandinavian reflections. When I did cultural studies in Britain in the ‘90s, it became very textual. I met a professor (University of East London), who wondered why students and teachers did not go out and *work with* people; do interviews and ethnographic fieldwork? I think, we tried to incorporate it into our program here at Malmö University.¹² Maybe for cultural studies to be something, it has to commit itself to intervene”... “But maybe, you could also say that cultural studies has been absorbed into other disciplines?”¹³

FG: “There are really big differences between the way cultural studies has rolled out in those environments that I know, the US, the UK and Australia, for example. And in the US, with a few exceptions of people who came over from the UK, people like Andrew Ross,¹⁴ it has tended to take a much more semiotic approach that, I feel, longs for sociological grounding that gave the Birmingham School so much value and grit and groundedness. I feel like you see a bit more of that in the Australian cultural studies scene, which is very much oriented towards the material scene of the film industry or whatever, whereas you see much less of that in the US. I don’t have a good sense of where it is these days in Britain. Maybe, I can turn it over to you...”

LY: “I’m not in the academic world so deeply anymore, but my sense is that there was a kind of falling off of interest in it even when I was still teaching. We had to deceive students in a way and say: you should come to the University for media studies and we’d smuggle in a bit of cultural studies. It seemed that everybody wanted to be

a presenter on television. We were not teaching skills for that kind of media studies, what we are doing is the critique really and trying to contribute to producing agents of cultural change, which is absolutely about the real and about things, which happen around poverty, distribution of wealth and so on.”

Lola Young also addressed the issue of textual work in cultural studies: “Most of my professional work has been in the arts, and creative, and cultural sector, so for me all of that textual work, work around representation and identity was absolutely crucial, but by the same token now where I am, I am always berating this sector, not the academics cultural studies sector, but practitioners in the cultural sector. I am always berating them for not being political enough ... The political processes or thinking, somehow it’s divorced from what they do in the arts and cultural sector ... I am doing a bit of a caricature here – but there are some people in the arts who only speak up when they say, ‘I need more money from the government’; or ‘I need more money from philanthropists and corporate sponsors’. There are many exceptions to that, of course. For example, there have been loads of arts/cultural practice-based protests against sponsorship by BP in galleries and museums.”

Lola continues a bit later, thinking further around politics in cultural work: “There is some activity, but, to my mind, not quite enough. And again, going back to what Thomas was saying about poverty – why we can’t talk about that. I think for me a lot of arts and cultural and creative activity that I am interested in does speak to that. Acknowledging that that exists, and then what the position of the artist, the creator, the filmmaker etc. is within that context is quite important. But to me not quite enough people do that.”

FG: “That British arts movement in the ‘80s was very feisty and people were not sitting around waiting for the government to make a space for them – they went to these *polytechnics* and did amazing work, and insisted on space for themselves. And even when Greater London Council funding disappeared, by that time they were able to find their feet. I think, you reflect on that these things should be entitlements rather than people agitating for them and insisting on...”

LY: “It is a bit more complicated than that, because I do absolutely support public subsidy to the arts, but I think it is not the be all and end all, and it has its constraints, which can be restrictive for artists and creators, especially in terms of feeling dependent. I think what happened with quite a few black artists was that they felt they were too dependent on state funding – the kinds of hoops they had to jump through, and the boxes that they had to tick in order to gain state support were enervating. You might as well go for another type of funding, but that creates its own difficulties, because sometimes the work does not attract other kinds of funding, and those are really a complex mix of trying to fund your work, trying to source the funding for your work. Again, you have a few more options today, because you have a public arena, which is global potentially and there are other ways of getting money sometimes, but it is difficult.”

Temí Odumosu (PostDoc at Malmö University, Living Archives Project): “Stuart Hall did a keynote for a conference ‘Whose Heritage?’¹⁵ and in that he talked about

multiculturalism and exploring these floating identities, he was also very clear about ensuring that the cultural sector embedded the stories, histories, and presence of people of African descent, black people into the national story. So for me, I was connecting this with the conference theme of voice and matter, but also the film itself, because it's a collaboration of so many different archives that work against that idea of historical amnesia that he mentions in the film, so, I wonder, if you could both reflect on the importance of these archives and the archives that you work with and ensuring that those stories are not forgotten."

FG: "I was floored by the accessibility of that, those archives (BFI)¹⁶, for the artist who's trying to make a small film, but those kinds of public archives in the US they are locked up, they are much more difficult to get to, they are much more costly." "he (Akomfrah) takes archives in history and he disrupts it and makes you think so hard about where it comes from, why it is there."

LY: "Me and archives – I can go on about them for ages. Especially about us trying to claim black British history and embed it into the national consciousness. But regarding John's work, he does use the archive a lot – I mean, *Handsworth Songs* is exemplary in that respect, as is the Stuart Hall Project. At the 'Whose heritage?' conference, Stuart was there when we needed that voice. We can now trace back the presence of African descended people in Britain right back to Roman times and there are more findings emerging on a regular basis. Such histories have been swept aside by those iconic images of the mainly men stepping off the Windrush ship, that generation of migrants to Britain from the Caribbean known as the Windrush Generation. ...Black history goes back before 1948, and so trying to get this into people's heads is hard. It covers two wars, it covers the Crimean War, it covers virtually every major war fought by the British, so that intervention on his part was crucially important – speaking to funders in that way with his authority, knowledge and unsurpassed intellectual engagement. He had a way of making you feel that you could get up of your seat, follow him down to the archive and dig it out yourself with him, because he spoke so eloquently about those issues – not in a confrontational way, but in a way that made you rethink and realise that he was creating a very important moment. And one thing I'd like to say is that we all have archives and it is not just academics or intellectuals or whatever. We all have our archives. And I think, particularly for those people who feel they haven't had anybody to articulate their position or their experiences, it is doubly important to keep that material and somehow try and preserve it whether that's by digitizing... For people of my generation that is a big thing now. Just to keep that material, to put it into some form and order, which is more or less permanent and disseminate it and share it."

To end the chapter, I (AHH) have picked a particular comment from the debate with the audience, followed by Lola's answer. It somehow takes a view over Stuart Hall's life in full, interpreting the change of his voice and feeling of being content towards the end of his life:

Edlira Gjoni (ComDev graduate. Journalist, Albania): "I was thrilled to see how he has changed his way of thinking – from the time he landed in Britain to the last years

and his last appearances. When I was hearing him and his image came later, I could tell whether he was speaking whilst he was still young or towards the end of his career. He looked so calm and so in peace with his identity towards the end of his career in his talk and in his TV appearances. I would like to know from you, that have known him closer, what made him feel so good about his identity at the end?”

LY: “I don’t know, maybe, it’s partly to do with getting older, personal things – close loving family, grandchildren as well as, I guess, reaching a kind of settlement with yourself that says, well, I’ve been through this, this has happened, I’ve related to these people like this, this has been my experience and now, as I get older... You process that in a way that kind of makes sense. Or even, maybe, admitting that you can’t make sense of it and that’s okay – you just have to go with that. I suppose it also, perhaps, has to do with reaching that position – to me you go in the room where Stuart was and it is a room full of love even in the most highly academic circumstances...”

The conversation was transcribed by Yuliya Hudoshnyk. Introduction, editing and footnotes have been done by moderator Anders Høg Hansen.

Notes

1. In *Fear of the Dark* (1995) Lola Young engages with a range of popular movies depiction of race. Several of the cases also appear in discussions in Stuart Hall’s article *What is this black in black popular culture* (1992).
2. In 2002 Faye Ginsburg, Brian Larkin and Lila Abu-Lughod edited the anthology *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* which brought together a range of cases of citizen driven media practices and productions around the world, in various ways depicting how the local and the global is/were intertwined and changing.
3. Music journalist and critic Paul Rees book *The Three Degrees. The Faces that Changed British Football* (2013) addressed football culture in Britain, on music in Birmingham, and in particular the lives of the three footballers Laurie Cunningham, Cyrille Regis and Brendon Batson at West Bromwich (close to Handsworth in Birmingham). It weaves together a cultural history of despair and racism blowing through Britain in the late 1970s, but also reveals the seeds of change. In 2014 a memorial for the three players were unveiled in Birmingham. Cunningham was killed in a car accident in Spain after being sold by a record fee to Real Madrid. Regis has over longer periods continued to work with youth at West Bromwich. Batson has been active in the British Football Association where he continuously advocates for more black managers.
4. One of the aims of the compilation of working papers published as *Resistance Through Rituals* in 1975 was to replace the concept of Youth Culture with sub-culture and to engage more deeply in the relation between dominant and subordinated formations, as the authors explain (1975: 16). Among the prominent concepts was Gramsci’s *hegemony* as well as the notion of *appropriation*, especially ways of expropriating and incorporating from the market and from other cultural forms.
5. Cultural Studies also had its enemies. Some called it the Mickey Mouse subject (see e.g. Hall 1979). Much later Stuart Hall thought that the field had lost its dedication to political and social change (Jhally, 2012).
6. At the Third Cinema Conference held as part of the 40th Edinburgh International Film Festival.
7. *Passion of Remembrance* was a film by Isaac Julien and Maureen Blackwood produced by the Sankofa Film and Video collective in 1986 (same year as *Akomfrah* premiered with *Handsworth Songs*).
8. The author and moderator of the after-screening conversation, Anders Høg Hansen, has an MA and PhD in cultural studies from England. Today he is a senior lecturer at Malmö University, working

- primarily on the MA *Communication for Development*. His most recently published research is on music, cultural heritage and change.
9. *Policing the Crisis. Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* was edited by Stuart Hall, Chas Critchler, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, and Brian Robert. First edition came out in 1978.
 10. These occasions included some obituaries. In the UK newspapers as *The Guardian* and *The Independent* had obituaries. The *Journal Radical Philosophy* had three essays on Stuart Hall. Obituaries were also seen in the non-UK press, e.g. *Sydsvenska Dagbladet*, Sweden. Thomas Tufte and Anders Høg Hansen also wrote one for The Communication Initiative.
 11. Keeler was a former model who had been in an affair with married minister Profumo – and Rice-Davies was also a former model associated with Keeler.
 12. *Communication for Development*, a 2 year half time study program equivalent to a 1 year full time MA. It combines campus-teaching with online interaction and web-teaching. The students come from around the world creating a deliberate cross-border exchange to enrich the topic matter: cultural analysis of communication interventions into processes of local and global change.
 13. The work at CCCS in Birmingham in the 1960s and 1970s, as Stuart Hall himself noted (1979), was to a large extent also a break with key methods and approaches in Sociology at that time – although it still had 'sociological grounding' as Faye notes.
 14. Andrew Ross is a sociologist at the Dept of Social and Cultural Analysis at New York University.
 15. A conference held in Manchester in November 1999. Stuart Hall's keynote 'Whose Heritage? Unsettling 'The Heritage', Re-imagining the Post-nation' was later published in, e.g., *Third Text* (49, Winter 1999-2000).
 16. Faye Ginsburg was mentioning BFI, the British Film Institute. Some of her students has worked with them. The BFI holds the world's largest film archive in its sub-organisation the BFI National Archive that has existed since 1935 under different names.

II. Ethnography and Agency at the Margins

When and How Does Voice Matter? And How Do We Know?

Jo Tacchi

Abstract

This chapter seeks to complicate our understanding of voice in development. It proposes that while it is important to consider not just voice, and the processes of valuing voice, it is also important to understand what voice and agency mean in the complexities of everyday life for populations who are marginalized or disadvantaged. The chapter draws on research in an Indian slum cluster to illustrate how an ethnographic approach can help us to appreciate these complexities and problematize notions of voice. It explores examples of the ways in which people seek to remain unheard and invisible in official and formal terms, and suggests ways that we can rethink what voice might mean in development. While communication for development and social change cannot simplify complexity, it does provide a way of facilitating participation in the design of development. It can highlight the contestations and different perspectives involved, and can draw attention to the relationships of developers and people in development contexts.

Keywords: voice, agency, everyday life, ethnography, development, complexity

On a cold January morning in 2012, in the run up to the Delhi Municipal elections a candidate led a political rally headed for the Govindpuri slums. Slum dwellers are important 'vote banks' and there are several ways in which candidates seek to gain their support, many involving financial incentives of some sort. In this particular instance the candidate halted at the entrance to the slums because a group of women from the slums were clustered around a woman's body. The body was dressed in white, covered in a white cloth, and laid out on a bamboo mat used to carry the dead, in the middle of the road. Blocking the road, the women were loudly wailing, and seemingly unaware and un-listening to the candidate and his supporters trying to negotiate a way past them in order to enter the slums. The wailing was intense and relentless. The women were unmovable. It was unthinkable to interrupt them in their grief and so the candidate and his rally bypassed the Govindpuri slums.

Having a voice, in a way that matters, requires attention to both processes of voice and the valuing of voice:

For ‘voice’ is about more than just speaking and the growing incitements to speak. An attention to voice means paying attention, as importantly, to the conditions for effective voice, that is, the conditions under which people’s practices of voice are sustained and the outcomes of those practices validated (Couldry 2010: 113).

This is, on the surface, an example of slum-dwelling women expressing themselves vocally, and their voices being recognised and valued. Their wailing was not interrupted; no attempt was made to silence them as their grief was clear to all. They were listened to.

However, on closer inspection, the interpretation of what actually happened here needs to be complicated. In fact, once the political rally had re-routed, the women packed up, the apparently dead woman recovered herself receiving great praise for her acting abilities, and they all walked home in a cheerful mood. They had achieved their objective – on behalf of a local candidate in the Municipal elections – to halt the opposing candidate’s rally and therefore his efforts to gain votes from within the Govindpuri slums.

The story above is from the ethnographic research of Tripta Chandola (2010, 2012, 2013a, 2014), which she refers to in her telling of this particular story, as “a listening of the inside” (Chandola 2014: 213). Such examples require us to complicate our understandings of voice as process and valuing. Voice can be, as we have seen here, strategic, manipulated, manipulating, and it has many depths that cannot be understood sufficiently at a superficial level – some of which I go on to explore below.

Complicating voice

This chapter is concerned with the need to complicate the ways in which we understand and research voice within development, and advocates an ethnographic approach to research and a participatory approach to communication for development. The growing dominance of project planning cycles and results-based management in development over the past twenty years has significant implications for how notions of progress, social change and participation are understood and how and why concepts such as voice matter. In many cases in development, ‘voice’ is used implicitly as a proxy for participation, representing something that can be valued by development agencies as a basic human right. However, how voice is thought about and applied needs to be further understood. It is not necessarily equivalent to a rights-based approach to development.

My argument draws upon ten years of ethnographic work by Chandola, many of them in collaboration with the author, in the Govindpuri slums of Delhi.¹ This work shows that we need to complicate how we think about voice, how voice is experienced in development contexts, and the implications for development interventions. What are referred to here, and colloquially, as the ‘Govindpuri slums’ are in fact a cluster of three slums, Bhumhiheen, Navjeevan and Nehru camps, that are situated next to the legal settlement named Govindpuri. These three slums emerged in the 1970s and are very densely populated with limited infrastructure. They are spread over an area

of five square kilometres, with an average of around 600 families living on every hectare of land (Chandola 2012). The slums are illegal settlements, and while residents might own or rent their house (constructed of brick, or more temporary materials including plastics and corrugated iron), they have no right to the land on which the homes are constructed, and have throughout the years faced the sometimes urgent threat of demolition.

Ethnography is proposed as a way to focus on a complex understanding of voice in development, one that challenges development's relatively static and often externally imposed classificatory structures and frameworks. The argument is that we need to engage with concepts such as voice as they emerge and are lived. Ethnography can help us to understand complexities, different contexts and classifications, cultural localities and meaning structures; it produces rich qualitative research to help us understand how voice matters, and by extension how and why participation in development matters. This dovetails with arguments for the need for "multiple voices and interests in the design, implementation and evaluation of development policy" (Manyozo 2012: 9) and the importance of communication for development and social change "to influence and transform the political economy of development in ways that allow individuals, communities and societies to determine the direction and benefit of development interventions" (Ibid.). Only then can voice as a concept be used in development efforts in meaningful ways.

Key framing issues in development

Development is an area of actions where preconceived categories and classifications can overly determine research and evaluation (Lennie & Tacchi 2013; Slater 2013). This is unsurprising, since development as a political and socio-economic aspiration and as a field of funded activities, is an effort engaged in by nations and multinational agencies, in relation to globally agreed agendas and protocols. The ways that these agendas shape how development is understood as well as efforts to progress it have been extensively critiqued both in relation to development as a whole (i. e. Escobar 1995), and through particular institutional examples (i. e. Ferguson 1990).

While there is growing pressure from donors to demonstrate accountability and value for money through mainstream impact evaluation, there is an equally strong emphasis on partnerships and local ownership as well as good governance (Dabelstein 2003; Mosse & Lewis 2005). We know from ethnographic work that despite the fast pace of change associated with new digital media and communication technologies, the drivers of social and cultural change, including structured gendered relations, are embedded in deeper, slower and complex social and cultural transformations (Coleman 2010; Tacchi, Kitner & Crawford 2012; Tenhunen 2008).

The role of media and communication in development, according to Manyozo, is to provide contestation that draws attention to participation, policy and power. Its role

“is to offer a platform where people can contest both political and economic power to enable them to transform specific development systems to their benefit” (Manyozo 2012: 10). This involves challenging ideas about development itself, because development institutions “operate with assumptions, values, and concepts, which are shaped in conjunction with historical and material forces. These are not comprehensive, monolithic, or held equally by all” (Crewe & Harrison 1998: 27).

Some key oppositional categories and concepts are often used as positioning devices by agencies, practitioners and scholars (Tacchi & Lennie 2014). These could be seen as competing binaries, including:

Forms of development:

- top-down instrumental; bottom-up participatory

Approaches to development:

- results-based management; learning-based and emergent

Theories of change:

- Linear, planned and predictable; complex, locally defined and unpredictable

On the one hand, a participatory and engaged approach to understanding development contexts and concepts can lead us to understand complexity and uncertainty, but this makes notions of planning for results difficult and sublimely contextual, when the dominant frameworks of development demand that technical solutions are sought and applied that can be spread and scaled up.

Development unavoidably contests different ways of knowing and experiencing. The emphasis on development planning and on the role of technical expertise as value free and unassailable denies this contestation (Crewe & Harrison 1998, Mosse 2013), which communication for development can make visible, and actively encourage (Manyozo 2012). Development has been largely characterised by a privileging of disembodied and rationalist models of behaviour and expertise. Economist William Easterley writes in his book *The Tyranny of Experts* (2013) about a “technocratic illusion” whereby poverty is thought to exist because of a shortage of expertise rather than a shortage of rights. He argues that technical problems are a symptom of poverty, whose cause is the absence of political and economic rights. He calls for a move away from what he characterizes as authoritarian development, towards free development.

All of this has implications for our understanding of what counts as knowledge and ‘expertise’ and for people’s sense of agency in the world. Gender researcher Ineke Buskens is concerned with our lack of critical attention to the frameworks we use for constructing knowledge in the field of ICT (information and communication technology) for development. She suggests that while it’s appropriate to focus on recognising and working to increase the agency of the beneficiaries of development, the agency of those who set the agendas is largely ignored – we need to make it highly visible, because, “[a]lthough their [donors, practitioners, researchers, scholars] agency may be less visible, and definitely under less scrutiny, their frames of mind impact directly

the way meaning is made of Southern women's experiences, dreams, and perspectives in the context of human development, poverty, and ICTs" (Buskens 2010: 19). One could say that while the emphasis is on the agency and voices of the intended beneficiaries of development, the agency and voices of the developers are paid no attention even though they drive activities and frame the conditions of engagement with said beneficiaries. We need to reflect more on this relationship.

This resonates with the notion of "travelling rationalities" that reinforce the new expert consensus on how to eliminate poverty, which nevertheless is subject to a growing demand for accountability, which itself entrenches expertise (Mosse 2013). Travelling rationalities are generally applied, "framed by the universal logic of the new institutional economics (rules/incentives) and law (rights/accountability/transparency)" (Mosse 2013: 4). The universal is asserted "over the particular, the travelled over the placed, the technical over the political, and the formal over the substantive" (Craig & Porter 2006: 120 quoted in Mosse 2013: 4). Expertise is centralized, and this inevitably shapes how development thinks about and defines what participation is, and when, how and why 'voice' matters.

Strategies of exclusion

Chandola, in her essay "I wail, therefore I am" (2014) focuses on the voices (or lack of) of the women in the Govindpuri slums. In general the women's voices in the highly gendered soundscapes of Govindpuri are "at best, muted" but one "sonic performance by women in Govindpuri ... has the potential to disrupt the intersecting sonic, spatial, and gendered masculine hierarchies, however temporarily: it is that of a wailing woman" (2014: 214). The power of this particular "sonic performance" is clear from the story above, where the women's voices were valued. One could see this as an example of double valuing, since the candidate and his supporters are from outside the slum. To those outside the slums, especially the media, officials and the middle class residents that neighbour the slums, the sounds and soundscapes of slum dwellers are generally heard and categorised as polluting, as "noise", as nuisance. The categorization of the sounds of the slums and slum dwellers as noise "is effectively employed to create social, moral and political exclusion" (Chandola 2012: 392). The way the women were mobilized to halt the political candidate demonstrates clear understanding of the need to strategically utilize a particular and unassailable expressive form and dramatic staging. Alternative efforts by such women to halt the rally might have at best been ignored, at worst attracted violence.

The material conditions that people experience lead them to strategically manage their lives and representations according to their particular conditions and context. This is not necessarily visible to development agencies seeking to promote voice. Indeed, many people might desire a lack of attention and a lack of recognition. This raises questions about the applicability of concepts like voice, the idea that giving

people a voice is always and straightforwardly positive, and signals a need for deeper understanding of when, how and why voice matters, as well as when invisibility and lack of formal listening is a necessary condition for survival. The notion of political voice in Govindpuri slums is even more complicated, given their value as vote banks and the consequent value of their vote, which can readily be sold. For example, in recent political campaigning, some Muslims living in the slums “sold” their votes to Hindu nationalist parties (although some of the people observed doing this denied that they would actually cast their vote in this way on election day). This is not to suggest that this is always the case, and that political engagement in formal politics is non-existent, but it is fair to say that it is complex.² Certainly the slums are both highly political and politicised spaces.

One of the themes that emerged early on in the ethnographic fieldwork in the Govindpuri slums was that of “strategic exclusion”. We saw that certain structural factors, including gender, land ownership, employment and caste, significantly affect the levels of inclusion and exclusion that people experience, and along with this their access to and strategies towards information, services and communication technologies. We became aware of the necessity to explore issues of inclusion and exclusion as complex, shifting and negotiated. While some structural factors such as gender and caste are relatively fixed, negotiations and exceptions to well-established norms take place nevertheless, while other factors such as employment, health and land ownership are intricately bound up with the former.

In order to explore this we considered social inclusion and exclusion as it manifests itself in everyday lives at three levels – structural (access to social, economic and technological facilities and utilities, whether formal or informal, legal or illegal), social (caste, gender, income, mobility, welfare, social networks) and strategic (the crossing of boundaries and instrumental use of structural and social categories). This helps to appreciate the negotiated aspects of the manifestation of strategic exclusion in everyday lives. We used the concept of the social exclusion framework to explore strategic inclusion and exclusion which plays with structural and social inclusion and exclusion in ways that reflect on a deeper understanding of dynamic practices and processes and which brings a higher degree of agency into the discussion. The people encountered through fieldwork are, after all, social actors rather than passive subjects.

Life in the slums

There are a range of individuals and family groups living in the slum cluster, and for a variety of reasons. Most of the populations characteristic of urban slums come to the city to look for job opportunities to escape severe economic constraints or to earn money to pay crushing debts. For many the slums offer an environment where they can engage in economic activities that would be closed to them in the places that they moved from; for example, men working in jobs that would not be acceptable according

to their caste and other social structures at home, and for women, the ability to work outside the household for economic gain. But differences in the migratory patterns are important because while in the case of most households, the migration is undertaken essentially because of severe economic and social constraints in their home, the reasons for moving to the slums for some can be far more strategic, enterprising and intentional: reducing their expenditure on rent in other localities; squatting land in the slum settlement in order to claim their own legal land in a resettled colony in the future; or strengthening existing employment or business opportunities. Many of those we met demonstrated clear aspirational motivations, albeit making the most of the limited opportunities available to them, and it is these households that are discussed here.

The most well established households in these terms have been living here for a considerable period of time, some having shifted to the Govindpuri slums in its initial period of settlement in the 1970s because the slums offered a far cheaper living possibility than neighbouring legal settlements, and, there was an entitlement to compensation in the form of land in a resettlement colony. This means that those who have been recognized as having “claimed” space in the slums are entitled, when the slums are cleared, to a piece of land in a resettlement colony. This entitlement to resettlement requires forms of registration, and they are finite, and in some cases identities as well as brick and mortar homes have been exchanged in order to ensure the entitlement is part of what has been bought. Given the longevity of the Govindpuri slums, many inhabitants have been here for many years.

One example is Mahesh’s household. He came to Delhi in 1994 and managed to buy a house, open an STD-booth (telephone booth) and has since dabbled with many other professions and businesses. His is a “success” story of a villager with few options optimizing the opportunities offered by the city and the slum cluster. Living here, he is able to operate businesses, save money and send his children to good schools outside of the slums. All the households mentioned here explain their slum dwelling status in terms of the opportunities it offers – to establish and maintain status and the ability to plan and work for a better future, precisely because they live in the Govindpuri slums which allows them to enjoy certain exemptions like land rent and the payment of taxes. Living in the slums brings down the cost of living in the city drastically. Being in the slum area, they are automatically issued ration cards and officially recognised as belonging to the *Below Poverty Line* category, which exempts them from paying taxes. This means that Mahesh does not pay commercial tax on the shops or other businesses he has in the slums.

Another example is Meera’s household, who live in a three-story house which was initially referred to as a gift from a family member. In fact, a relative of Meera’s father-in-law is registered as living on this piece of land in the Govindpuri slums, but he lives outside in a legal colony. He needed someone to stay in the Govindpuri slums to be able to claim the resettlement land he was expecting to be offered. It has been more than 25 years now, and the house and the prospect of resettlement rightfully belongs to him. Although the land in the slums is not straightforwardly ‘owned’ by its settlers,

they use their habitation of that land as a token for land that will later come their way when the slum dwellers are resettled. As habitation of land is the only claim to it, the camps are densely populated, with all once vacant spaces occupied swiftly, and in some cases encroachment into neighbouring areas or pavements and roads (though these have regularly been cleared, with no relocation offered).

In most of these households, more than one member has a regular job such as in an office or factory, or they own some form of stable business. The assets possessed by these households are similar to poorer households outside the slums, as they have access to basic facilities. They have a toilet within the house, a separate kitchen and running water, although water is often shared by a few houses (Chandola 2013b). These households strategically engage and disengage with formal systems and processes depending on the need for visibility and voice, or its inverse, invisibility and lack of recognition.

Amongst the concerns of these households are future security (they are generally forward thinking, aspiring to and planning for better lives for their children), getting a good education for at least some of their children, and ensuring business and/or employment security and improvement. Their location within the local social networks is deeply embedded, exercising some degree of influence in some areas of decision making at the very local level. This kind of aspiration for the future, with its referents to what is possible in the slums, being far away from the many constraining structures of their homes, needs to be understood in cultural and social as well as economic terms (Appadurai 2014).

While the majority of these households do not have bank accounts, they generally do have savings (not declared to any officials), which are circulated within the community through an informal network of associations called chit funds. Under this scheme, people who know each other form a group within the community and deposit an amount of money to a designated person each month. The workings of a chit fund are similar to that of an official Self Help Group, except the money circulates informally and depends on understandings of mutual benefit, and trust. Members of a chit fund can draw on their savings but also ask for a loan. One of these chit funds is managed by Mahesh. Within this savings and debt network these people can both raise debts on the basis of their cohesiveness within the social network, and ensure economic cushioning in the form of savings. None of this is visible outside of the chit fund members, and none of it reported officially. Informal social support networks such as chit funds and other social support mechanisms are crucial to a household's sense of security and wellbeing. Strategic exclusions from formal society emerge as important choices for some groups, who nurture, and sometimes thrive from informal (and sometimes illegal) networks. Social networks can be more important than official recognition. How development interventions can support those who are excluded from such networks is an important question for communication for social change.

There is relatively strong cash flow circulation within this section of the slum population. These families are able to cushion themselves from crises because they are

able to appropriate the advantages of staying within the slums and thereby increase their prospects for both immediate sustenance and future sustainability. If they lived in legal colonies they would not be able to live with such security and would not be able to improve the prospects of their children (ultimately aimed at owning legal land, receiving good education, and maintaining good and stable employment). In this way, living in the slums now, ensures a better future for the family; it is a form of strategic exclusion.

These families with their relative social and economic stability have been able to sustain their social and cultural values and attitudes, though these have undergone transformations and digressions. This is very situation specific and because they (social and cultural values) are implemented in a context outside where they came from – villages, small towns and communities with strict social expectations – this can create both anxiety and freedom from constraints. For example, in these households, women who are widowed are able to work in ways not otherwise sanctioned, break ties with extended families, and with this, break from gendered responsibilities and commitments (Tacchi 2014). They are able to operate in ways that break down gender roles, which they nevertheless expect their daughters to observe – they are working to create a situation where their daughters will be able to conform to the social and cultural norms that they have been able to strategically disobey, for the sake of their immediate family's future.

A strong apologetic sense of belonging to the slum area is also very prominent within these families. Mahesh constantly talks in terms of being part of the "other", legal community by reiterating that his children attend the best public school in the area, and that he could shift anytime from the slums, but does not, because his wife has not yet found a house that she feels is suitable for them. At the same time, he justifies remaining in the slums as due to a sense of responsibility for other members of his village – extended family – who he is supporting at the moment, and who he would not be able to support if he were to move out of the slums.

Social inclusion and exclusion

These people and their strategies provide paradoxical examples of social exclusion. At the same time, they demonstrate the kind of rationality that development assumes exists amongst the poor – the desire to better themselves and improve their prospects. These people are situated partly or wholly outside of formal sectors and engage with and avoid formal recognition and attention as and when it is prudent for them to do so. They are at once the people development wants to develop, since they aspire to financial gain and social improvement, and at the same time they would resist external development efforts if it meant becoming fully visible. As Hillary Silver and S. M. Miller point out, "Social exclusion is a relative, intrinsically social term. It takes on different meanings, depending upon context or the point of reference for inclusion"

(Silver & Miller 2002: 12). The social and political aspects of exclusion and inclusion are less well accounted for than consumption and income measures, and much of the income circulating among these households is invisible to the authorities in any case.

De Haan (1999) considers that a social exclusion framework can help us to understand the relational features of deprivation; it is about social relations and thus levels of vulnerability and support, access to information and resources and the ability to act and use those resources. It is not what the poor possess that is important, rather it is what it enables them to do. In order to measure social exclusion there is a need to identify the processes and relational features that lead to deprivation, and, we might add, the processes and relational features that can result in social inclusion, because social exclusion and social inclusion are not necessarily the inverse of each other (Levitas 2003). Social relations are at the centre of the analysis of deprivation in the social exclusion framework, and Levitas argues that social inclusion agendas force us to consider the nature of society itself, and how it might be changed for the better, to become more inclusive.

A big challenge, according to De Haan (2000: 37) is that research needs to take seriously a focus on actors and processes, on social relationships that both exclude and include. These are of a cultural and social as much as political and economic nature. To some extent it is the “noise” of the slums that allows the households discussed in this chapter to remain partly and strategically invisible and un-listened to by the authorities.

In conclusion: the role of communication for development and social change

The story of the women wailing and blocking entry into the slum is somehow reminiscent of Clifford Geertz (1973) on the interpretive nature of ethnography, and the importance of “thick description”. In Geertz’s example, to illustrate the interpretive nature of ethnography, he describes someone closing and opening one eyelid. Was it a blink or a wink, and what did it mean? Interpreting cultures requires thick description, to understand signs and their meanings in context. The women and their wailing needs to be interpreted to be understood.

Ethnography provides an approach that can help us focus on how communication, media and social change are experienced and made meaningful in particular sites (Tacchi 2014; Tacchi, Kitner & Crawford 2012). It does this by engaging with people on their own terms in ways that challenge researchers’ preconceived frames, classifications, knowledge, and interpretations. It privileges frames, classifications, knowledge and interpretations as they emerge through fieldwork. As Slater (2013) points out, this is important as a way of reconceiving and challenging the “holy trinity” of new media, development and globalization as organising concepts within which we are all positioned, and in relation to which some people are positioned as needing to “develop”. We need to understand how “the boundaries between one apparent category

of social actors and another are bridged, transformed, and shifted... [what is needed are] ethnographies and analyses that explore the complexity and multi-level nature of development processes" (Crewe & Harrison 1998: 19).

I argue that at its best ethnography is thick, open, adaptive, critical and ethical. Ethnography provides thick and rich description and interpretation, through immersion and attention to the tangible and intangible and the structures of meanings. It follows an open and reflexive approach that questions taken-for-granted assumptions, and avoids allowing preconceived categories and classifications to define what is seen and understood. It is adaptive, iterative and non predictive and incorporates different approaches to suit changing situations and emergent questions. It is critical in that it considers the situated nature of knowledge and knowledge production, making frames visible, and takes account of power. Finally it is ethical both in the research engagement and process, but also through its equal privileging of knowledge, classifications, frames, and the centering of structures of meanings and experience, which Slater (2013) names "ethical symmetry".

Being thick, open, adaptive, critical and ethical can help us to understand situations, contexts, experiences and development needs. However, it does not fit so well with the demands for universalizing technical expertise and planning for results approaches which permeate and drive much of development today. Through ethnographies of development "[i]nterventions are not seen as the simple outcome of a value-free and linear planning process, but rather as the changing and negotiated manifestation of diverse and sometimes competing interests" (Crewe & Harrison 1998: 19).

If we accept the complexities of voice, and the need for paying critical attention to the frameworks of development and the relationships and competing interests at stake, where does this leave us in relation to voice and development? After all, while there is a global emphasis on participation in development, along with this there is recognition of a major problem: participation is often criticized as ineffective or simply rhetoric, meaningful participation is not easily recognized or measured. Here is where communication for development and social change has something important to offer development. It can, as Manyozo (2012) proposes, provide the mechanism and space for multiple voices and interests, and for contestation.

While communication for development cannot simplify the depth of complexity or take away the need for interpretation and ethical symmetry that pays attention to ways of knowing that are not necessarily aligned to "travelling rationalities", it does provide a way of facilitating participation in the design of development. It can highlight the contestations and different perspectives involved, and can draw attention to the relationships of developers and people in development contexts. It can make visible the frameworks that are implied and imposed by development as well as allow for participation on terms that suit those encouraged to participate, and in some cases this may consist of the strategic withholding of participation. Communication for development, along with ethnographic approaches to research, can help us understand and work towards a range of different and context specific terms of engagement.

Notes

1. The author and Tripta Chandola began their ethnographic work together in the Govindpuri slums in 2004, as the urban Indian component of a comparative Department for International Development study on emerging technologies in developing communities (Miller et al 2005). Between 2006 and 2010 Chandola undertook a PhD at Queensland University of Technology, supervised by Tacchi. The PhD was an ethnographic study of the soundscapes of Govindpuri. Several additional projects and bits of funding have assisted in the continuation of the ethnographic work in Govindpuri (Chandola, 2010, 2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014; Tacchi 2014; Tacchi and Chandola, 2016). This long-term ethnography is outlined in chapter 2 of *Digital Ethnography* (Pink et al, 2015).
2. Chandola is currently focusing her research on social and political mobilisation, and the recent 6th Delhi legislative assembly elections and landslide victory for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP). Unlike in earlier elections, there are signs of a different form of political engagement through AAP.

Building Voice and Capacity to Aspire of the Urban Poor

A View from Below

Sheela Patel

Abstract

Due to old legislation, dating from the Industrial age, an increasing number of the world's urban population is living in informal settlements. Facing the constant threat of eviction, the slum and pavement dwellers are making indispensable contributions to the wellbeing of the formal cities. Yet the city authorities neglect and ignore them, neither acknowledging their contribution to the GDP nor providing secure tenure basic services or entitlements of citizenship.

Social movements of the urban poor, organized on the basis of livelihoods or habitat have begun to spring up in various cities, aggregating at county, regional and transnational levels. This chapter tells the story of the transnational social movement Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI), which grew out of an alliance of pavement dwellers' organizations and women's collectives in Mumbai, India. SDI interprets voice as a form of collective representation at different levels. The self assigned responsibility of these grassroots organizations has changed the self-perception of the urban poor as active participants rather than beneficiaries and may serve as a model for addressing other pending planetary challenges.

Keywords: cities, informal settlements, poverty, participation, inclusion

[W]hy does culture matter? Or let us revise the question and ask why culture matters for development and for the reduction of poverty. This both narrows and deepens the question. The answer is that it is in culture that ideas of the future, as much as of those about the past, are embedded and nurtured. Thus, in strengthening the capacity to aspire, conceived as a cultural capacity, especially among the poor, the future-oriented logic of development could find a natural ally, and the poor could find the resources required to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty. This argument runs against the grain of many deep-seated images of the opposition of culture to economy. But it offers a new foundation on which policymakers can base answers to two basic questions: why is culture a capacity (worth building and strengthening), and what are the concrete ways in which it can be strengthened? (Appadurai 2013: 179)

Many years ago, Professor Arjun Appadurai spent time with our alliance, and with the transnational Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) in India.¹ He participated in various events, observing, asking questions, exploring how the alliance of three organizations functioned, what the respective members identified as their problems and how they sought solutions. He generously claims that he learnt a great deal, and in return his essays on our work helped us explore the dimensions of what we do in concepts and terms that we had never been able to convey ourselves. The “capacity to aspire”² is a concept which helps the alliance encompass the journey of the urban poor, as excluded migrants of several generations who come to cities in search of a better life, to collectively develop rituals and practices that aggregate these aspirations. By voicing their aspirations and taking pride and responsibility in developing strategies and solutions, the urban poor may transform their own lives and the city and locality they live in, as well as bringing that voice to the global stage to challenge obstructive policies and practices that deny the poor that possibility.

The urban millennium is here and yet its regulatory framework, the management of cities, remains archaic and exclusionary, with national and international development policies and political views that pitch urban development against rural development, stating that good rural investments will curb urban migration. These views continue to remain dominant in spite of the demographic evidence. Poor people coming to cities, creating informal settlements, are finding informal livelihoods in spite of the city development plan that refuses to allocate land use to accommodate their needs. Over the last five decades the volume of informal settlements have grown in cities through internal dynamics as well as migrations; cities themselves have grown using the labour of the poor while neither acknowledging their contribution to the GDP nor providing them with secure tenure basic services or entitlements of citizenship.

There have been serious concerns about the consequences of the local, national and international doublespeak about urban developments. Cities are seen as engines of growth, and investments in city infrastructure are expected to expand their potential to bring in more investment for further improving the formal infrastructure of the city, thus widening the disparity between the formal and informal sections of the city as well as deepening the rift of the two halves; the increasing population of the informal half is being squeezed into smaller and smaller localities.

Faced with these challenges, the informal city residents, especially women, are mobilizing to build institutional arrangements to voice their aspirations, to ensure that their children and grandchildren get a better life while transforming the city itself through their interventions. At the heart of this process are the rituals and practices of collective articulations of their hopes and aspirations, and the building of a knowledge base that emerges from their own experience; so that what they learn from others, and how they facilitate this knowledge to be accessed by others like themselves, forms a basis for negotiations with the formal institutions who have directly or indirectly suppressed these aspirations. By fulfilling their own aspirations they are also aiming at improving the city and its wider development as a whole.

This is clearly a very slow and painful process, one that does not yield spectacular immediate gains; people and institutions cannot change dramatically and the processes that evolve are more like marathons than a 100 meter dash. Yet the capacity to endure, to remain focused on what needs to be done, to change the content and scope of dialogue, comes from the voice of the new entrants in the development discourse; one that is much needed to bring peace and inclusivity to cities. Peace and safety comes from inclusivity and engagement, which cannot happen unless the marginal and excluded voices are heard and their interventions made to matter.

The invisible and the voiceless in the city

Why the laws do not work for the informal poor, is a question that always gets asked when the exclusion of the poor is discussed in relation to the city and its development. Development plans are often the foundations on which many activities that the poor do are deemed illegal. This is vital in this discussion of voice; to state what this constituency wants, what alternatives it suggests. The genesis of many municipalities emerged from the organization of the urban trading centers in order to make the area function efficiently for the traders. Cities as centers of trade and commerce were never considered to be functioning for everyone, but emerged from managing law and order, infrastructure for transporting goods and people; in cities like Mumbai amenities for workers emerged in the 18th century to ensure they stayed in the city to work in the mills, so families were provided tenements. Sewers came into being when the Egyptian emissary refused to allow ships from Mumbai to go to Cairo as there was plague in Mumbai and Surat. In most countries in the global south these exclusionary practices continue.

Thus the framework of the legislation that guides the framework for the city is an old and exclusionary one. 18th century industrial age legislations have created laws and regulatory frameworks that make 15-75 per cent of the people living in cities, invisible, illegal and informal. Rather than reframing them in a 21st century context, each and every issue is fought and contested with very few gains. Migrants in cities have to squat illegally on land, they face evictions for decades, and only when they become a sizable vote bank they usually get informal “consent” to exist. Water and electricity are often stolen from providers and sold at very high rates and allegiance to intermediaries; some politicians, some local leaders with political connections, “protect” the settlement’s interests.

NGOs work on a range of activities, but rarely on land security and basic amenities, and they work within project frameworks. They may focus on health, education and sometimes livelihood, but rarely get the basic issues of survival organised for the communities, as these go to the heart of voicelessness and isolation. Most poor and informal neighbourhoods are trapped between a rock and a hard place. The city ignores and neglects them and the deficits of the informal dwellers’ needs keep grow-

ing, as valuable inputs of health education etc. get eroded with lack of water, sanitation and safety for women and children in the slums. Since land and amenities have become deeply political in terms of who the city provides access for, when and what gets provided, most localised interventions, be they by NGOs or Community Based Organisations, do not lead to change in this access.

The issue of Voice continues to be a huge challenge. The founders of SPARC (Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centers) realised this in the 1980s when pavement dwellers faced evictions and their invisibility was so evident that even slum dwellers' social movements did not acknowledge them. NSDF, a group of slum leaders fighting against evictions approached SPARC to consider forming an alliance into which the cause of pavement dwellers and the women's collectives of Mahila Milan got included. The resulting alliance has since developed rituals and practices which facilitate reflections within groups, between groups and at inter city level on what they know and what they do to ensure their survival within informality, however hard it is. With the shortcomings of these strategies as a point of departure, the alliance then explores and works out possible activities to deepen and strengthen the relationships between members and their ability to help each other. This is done through savings and loans collectives managed by women, who nominate a treasurer who collects money from them daily, provide emergency loans to the households and gather and produce data and evidence to counter their invisibility and set their collective priorities, which are then negotiated with the state, the city and other resource providers.

We interpret voice as a form of collective representation at different levels. Articulating issues and developing a strategy to make an external representation requires internal consensus. Democratising spaces within the organisational process that allows men and women to build a collective voice is the starting point and an important ritual. Our experience informs us that we can't expect the poor to claim the right to voice their opinions, dissent or represent their demands, unless they have both capacity and confidence to produce evidence to make those claims. Often voicing concerns is assumed to lead to "others" acting on the demands and expectations, especially from the poor. Getting ignored or overlooked is the usual response that often leads to the apathy and dissolution of organisational processes. Within NSDF and Mahila Milan, accompanying the collective voicing of priorities is the self assigned responsibility of actively driving the agenda for action; activities that the organisation can undertake themselves. By so doing they not only change their own self perceptions as participants rather than consumers and beneficiaries, they moreover challenge the self image of passivity.

In many instances professionals and researchers interview a wide spectrum of poor men and women or even organisations and document these as "voices of the poor".³ In the eyes of the alliance and SDI they take over the agency of making the representations, away from the communities and organisations. When the urban poor lack the right to make a representation, professionals often intervene, but the crux of the matter is whether or not this intervention serves to help the organisations of the urban poor to take over the process themselves. The question of voice and agency evolves

and develops over time. Creating a process where representations and negotiations are gradually taken over by an increasingly confident leadership of the poor is however seldom part of monitoring and evaluation processes for development practices.

We believe that choices made by City and State authorities are political in terms of who gets what entitlement. These are usually long drawn struggles for reforms that often can be denied on technical grounds, i. e. they are not in the regulatory frameworks, or the law does not allow them. However, history of policy making indicates that the rules keep changing and the pressure for change is inevitably political. So facilitating the poor and their representation to operate within the realm of that frame is critical in order for development to be inclusive. Besides, when professionals and NGOs make representations it inevitably follows that the communities tend to look up to the NGOs and expect them to bring about change rather than demand change themselves.

The process of creating voice has huge bearing on the aspirations of the urban poor. On the one hand, there is the older generation seeking change and voicing demands in a more conciliatory and patient manner for their children. Yet more worrying is the slow burning flames of anger, frustration and violence that are building up, especially among the youth but also in the informal settlements, whose inhabitants make a huge contribution to the well-being of the formal city and its services, but do not get neither equal resources nor recognition and legitimacy in return for their labour. This non acknowledgement is often at the peril of the city and its economic engine, when violence that erupts from such frustration destroys life and property. Yet, whether as in Tunis, where a vendor who set fire to himself in frustration over his goods being confiscated ignited the Arab Spring, or as in other places where spontaneous gathering in large numbers have brought the city to a standstill, life quickly goes back to a “normal”, ignoring the real underlying reasons for the disruption. The economic costs of disruption for the formal city are quickly calculated, new forms of “insurance covers” get put into place; yet the impact on the informal city is rarely acknowledged.

It is under these circumstances that the emerging social movements of the urban poor, organized on the basis of livelihoods or habitat, have begun to spring up in various cities, aggregating at county, regional and transnational levels. In many instances they are built around a core institutional identity as networks, unions or some other form, but each have characteristics of creating knowledge developing strategies that work for them and seeking dialogue and negotiations at city, national and international levels. These are recent explorations to effectively create voice and agency of the constituency by themselves.

Changing the format for creating voice?

The capacity to aspire has many powerful values. It means you don't give up hope, it means you explore ways to find solutions to challenges you identify, and it means the emergence of voice to articulate these aspirations. Yet the creating of voice needs

acknowledgment, first internally within the constituency which has to agree on the issues that will represent collective voice. Internal discussions and debates are a vital aspect to produce a robust representation from which those who stand behind the leadership don't back off. Yet, they are also a preparation for the future discussions with the external group, be it the city or other resource providers, in the developmental stage. Discussions and reflections for changes is a vital and much needed process whose content stands strong on the basis of which it gets argued. So information, experiences, data and its analysis are all vital for the representation. It transforms the representatives of the poor from supplicants to drivers of change. Often, to accompany the demand for change, there needs to be possible suggestions for policy projects and programs to facilitate that change, because otherwise it again becomes the case that the state or other agencies decide on behalf of the poor. For example, when Mahila Milan and NSDF demand amenities, such as sanitation and water, they also suggest how they should be designed and delivered, what the role of the state and communities be in that process and so on. What emerges is a negotiated outcome, albeit not something that happens immediately but nevertheless it creates grounds for negotiation and builds experience and capacity to leadership of the poor to take on these roles. Community sanitation facilities were suggested by NSDF and Mahila Milan in informal settlements where the houses were less than 300 sq feet, and where the densities were so high (as in Mumbai) so that disposal of fecal matter and access to water inside the house were not possible. Accompanying this priority setting the communities demanded that procurement rules be changed so that organizations of the poor could bid for the construction of toilet blocks. The provision of the sanitation facility was seen as a joint production of public goods where capital costs of construction was the city's contribution, and the residents' association would manage and maintain the toilets. This accompanied an expectation that the city develop a strategy to ensure universal minimum sanitation to all, and to utilize the budgetary allocations for slum sanitation that it generally allowed to lapse.

As part of Slum Dwellers International (SDI), NSDF and Mahila Milan have shared these experiences in sanitation to produce a SDI campaign for universal city wide sanitation. Through exchanges between country federations they have invited administrators and politicians to visit Mumbai and see the strategy as it actually occurs, in order to inspire other cities in the SDI family.

This and other examples of information gathering for actual project design and execution in partnership with the state manifest the transform strategy into action for the alliance. Collecting data about slums at city level, and households and neighborhoods collecting data about themselves, which began with the slum census in 1985, has helped contest data about informal settlements in the city register of slums; it has created systems where, instead of evicting slum dwellers, infrastructure projects have a relocation component that community federations drive, using their self collected household data forms as the basis of entitlements (Mumbai Urban Transport Project-II). Over time many other cities in Asia and Africa have also begun to explore this

strategy which clearly indicates that projects actually work well economically as well as fulfill critical social and poverty linked agendas.

What should the aspirations of the excluded demand of the state and the city? This is the question at the center of many discussions within social movements of the poor. Should the demands be made for the state to fulfill expectations? What should the representation making demands do when the state agrees but asks the market to deliver a solution that is unaccountable to the specific demands of the groups. Many demand that this is the duty and obligation of the state, so why should the poor have to participate?

On several instances within urban areas in India and elsewhere, demands for housing by the poor have led to construction of tenements by the “market” on subsidized finance by the state, some of which never come to the benefit of the poor but eventually get purchased by other sections of society somewhat better off than those making demands because the affordability levels make them more competitive.

Besides SDI, there are presently a handful of social movements around habitat issues, such as Asian Coalition of Housing Rights (ACHR), who began with community networks and their supporters fighting evictions but gradually moved to seeking a proactive role in transforming the city, and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WEIGO). They reflect the inability of traditional local and national organizational forms alone to voice the claims of the urban poor and build a capacity to represent them at the global developmental fora.

Such transnational movements are characterized by:

- Federating settlements or occupations with similar challenges of a downward accountability to their constituency, using global and national representation to bring goods services and recognition to local demands and expectations.
- Creating knowledge networks that affirm that people themselves do and know is vital and has contributed to surviving in the city despite all exclusionary practices.
- Creating the legitimacy for knowledge and data and information of these organisations and their national and global aggregation, often contesting what others have to say about them.
- Envisioning what additional inputs and investments are needed, some of which they can contribute themselves and others that the state and city or the market must contribute. Building a general consensus of what roles and participation elements will be community contribution and what are the expectations of the state.

These rituals of internal knowledge creation have led to, firstly, a clear and distinct perspective that the leadership can voice to the city nationally and globally. Through trial and error, through experimentations, there is now a leadership cohort in these organizations that have begun to mentor many others to explore these roles and capaci-

ties. Uniquely many of these mentors are women who now train men and women, and intergenerational processes demonstrate changing practices of role models in slums. These emerging new roles and functions are also changing who is producing those goods and services for the urban poor; they themselves are no longer mere consumers or supplicants but co-producers of the development investments and all the time refining, adapting and innovating how to improve what they do. Peer exchanges have further strengthened this process of self-reliance.

Secondly, there is value in impacting policy with a distinct character of advocacy from below. Rhetoric alone is not acceptable. Political and administrative leadership or civil society leaders and the leaders of federations themselves must operate in a language of action and making things happen. In India and in other southern countries there are often many progressive policies, but they are never acted upon. The evidence of demonstrating action to follow advocacy has to come in scalable products and services that serve the poor and demonstrate inclusion of large numbers in which the poor are involved themselves.

Yet despite all these very important transformations, global economies continue to produce more and more economic disparities, and climate change and the energy challenges it brings are inducing new vulnerabilities on the urban informal poor that are requiring their access to new knowledge, new rituals and practices. All this while the gini coefficient in cities grows and fewer and fewer people hold large incomes.

Implications for response to the challenges of whose voice and whose matter

Discussions within SDI between grassroots leadership and their support NGOs often arise from the frustration over predetermined project development activity outputs and outcomes when international agencies and national and local governments occasionally make projects that address urban poverty issues. While the City officials, national and international professionals, increasingly see value in community participation, there is frustration on both sides about the inability to include possible activities and strategies suggested by the communities of the poor themselves in a rigidly predetermined project framework. When monitoring and evaluation takes place, the failure of achievement is assigned to various reasons, but there is never public recognition that it may be due to inability to address deeply political issues that inhibit development, or to the non inclusion of the poor themselves in creating solutions.

In the last few years SDI has sought to explore alliances, partnerships and joint project development with organizations working on urban and city development strategies. Many of these engagements began challenging the invisibility of informality in livelihoods and habitats, but some enlightened stakeholders now actually design interventions with us. SDI is a member of Cities Alliance (www.citiesalliance.org), whose Land Citizenship and Services program is now operating in five countries, to

facilitate partnership amongst multilaterals, bilaterals, NGOs and other stakeholders, so that resources pooled together internationally and nationally produce local impact and further encourage other investments.

Conflicts large and small cost hugely to all concerned and even more to everyone in general. This 21st century has brought many new and tough challenges. Climate Change exponentially increases the vulnerability of so many geographies, urban and rural. This is now further exacerbated by increasing waves of violence, terrorism and civil wars that deeply reduce any chance of creating resilience to address these planetary crises. While rituals of violence and their expanding networks draw the attention of all concerned globally, they are deeply eroding the voices of the poor and their plea to make development equitable and just. The war on terror produces a knee jerk reaction of increasing wars and greater investments in armaments. Paradoxically this reduces ability to allow local and vulnerable people to voice their concerns and to look at long term means to produce peace and equality and justice locally. Yet, social movements of the urban poor exploring ways to make cities work for all may perhaps also show the way in solving the larger conflicts.

Notes

1. The alliance was formed by the three organisations SPARC (Society for Promotion of Area Resource Centers), NSDF (National Slum Dwellers' Federation) and the womens' organization Mahila Milan. SDI (Schack/Slumdweller International) is a network of community-based organisations in 33 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America. SDI emanated from community exchange between India (the Alliance) and South Africa in the early 1990s. SDI now has its head office in Cape Town.
2. Appadurai's understanding of the capacity to aspire is thoroughly discussed in section three of this volume.
3. *Voices of the Poor* was the headline of a major research project conducted by the World Bank around the turn of the millennium, interviewing some 60,000 poor women and men in 60 countries. The project resulted in three reports (Narayan 2000a; 2000b; Narayan & Petesch 2002). *Editors' remark.*

Save us from Saviours

Disrupting Development Narratives of the Rescue and Uplift of the 'Third World Woman'

Andrea Cornwall

Abstract

The images used to market development often feature women, as victims of terrible traditions and disempowering situations, or – more commonly these days – as enterprising agents of change, poised to 'lift' economies and their families and communities. These images tell a story of victims and heroines, representing development as a project of uplift and rescue. This chapter explores the politics of these representations. It takes as its point of entry a film project that sought to disrupt these narratives, producing a short film called *Save us from Saviours*. Engaging with those often represented as tragic victims and left out of the story of enterprising entrepreneurs to tell a story about sex work, collective action and social change, the film speaks to a set of larger questions about development intervention. Juxtaposing *Save us from Saviours* with another film, made at the same time about some of the same people, which gave rise to a third film, made by the sex workers in response, the chapter reflects on the complexities of development communications in an age of global connectivity.

Keywords: representations, development communication, sex work, India, counter-narrative

*The most political decision you make
Is where you direct people's eyes.
In other words, what you show people,
Day in and day out, is political...¹*

Emblazoned on the billboards that line the commuter stations of southern England, sprinkled amidst adverts for dating sites, life insurance and car hire on London's underground, images of development are part of the everyday lives of millions of British people as they move between home and work. Opening their newspapers, they might see an advert calling on them to be a 'friend' to a girl child in India or text a word to a charity that will then collect their money and put it to work to 'fix the system'. On their televisions, interspersed with soap operas, home improvement and reality TV shows, they might be greeted with an ad showing rural Indian women and children levitating when a developmental intervention finds its way into their lives² or a scene

of an emergency that invites the good-hearted people of Britain to chip in their cash to alleviate suffering. And even if they remain oblivious to all this, there's often a direct appeal that drops into their letterboxes or presents itself in the form of a friendly young person with a clip board on their doorstep. The message: *You Can Help*.

In this chapter, I look at the politics of development communication about women through the story of a project that sought to generate a counter-narrative to the images of 'third world woman' used to market development in the form of a short film, *Save us from Saviours* (www.saveusfromsaviours.net). The project began with an attempt to challenge representations that are in many respects the epitome of the kind of poverty porn used to market development. An unexpected twist in the tale came in the form of another film, produced for a mass global audience and seen by more than three million viewers. That film was made about some of the same people, in the same place. It conveyed a very different set of messages. And this gave rise to a third film, a response by those whose lives were portrayed. Taken together, these three films give snapshots of a highly contested reality in which a multiplicity of possible versions and representations exist, and gives us pause for thought about the complex politics of development communications.

Representation and the rescue industry

Three decades after Oxfam led an enquiry into the marketization of misery by British development charities (Van der Gaag & Nash 1987), which led at the time to some honest reflection and a shift of tactics towards more positive images of development, we continue to be confronted with tropes of rescue and uplift that have their origins in the colonial era (Wilson 2011). In the preface to a hard-hitting report on the implications of the collusion of NGOs with media stereotypes of the abjection of the so-called 'Third World', Mark Goldring, then CEO of Voluntary Service Overseas, comments:

For too long, development agencies and the media have been complicit in promoting an unbalanced picture of third world doom and disaster. We have taken part in an intricate dance that sacrifices the long-term building of a balanced view for the short-term gain of raising funds for awareness of our work. (VSO 2002: 2)

The report, based on research carried out in the UK in 2001, found myriad negative effects of what they termed the 'Live Aid legacy'. The majority of those surveyed affirmed the associations made in NGO advertising and representations used by international development institutions and the media, of Third World misery, famine and disaster. The majority saw Britain's role as a unilateral one of giver and helper, and understood these countries to be dependent on aid to progress. As David Campbell notes of emergency appeal images:

[These] images portray a particular kind of helplessness that reinforces colonial relations of power. With their focus firmly on women and children, these pictures

function as icons of a feminized and infantilized place. A place that is passive, pathetic and demanding of help from those with the capacity to intervene. (2003: 70, cited in Paech, 2014)

The way 'poverty porn' is used to sell development is described in the blog *Plaid Zebra* as:³

... the tactic of media and charities that uses sympathy as a catalyst for monetary gain, exploiting the poor and uneducated, to showcase desperate conditions for an emotional response. And while the tactic may be effective at heightening profits – by misrepresenting an entire continent as slum – the fate of an entire continent is stamped with pity.⁴

With the arrival of multi-national corporations and philanthropic foundations on the scene, abjection has given way to images of 'empowerment' as the explosion of digital media has opened up new portals for reaching the consumers of development imagery (Gill 2006; Wilson 2011). Using similar tactics to those deployed in the pursuit of customers, development NGOs, government agencies and banks purvey a consistent set of messages (Lewin 2010). There is an abundance of images of women at work – hoeing fields, behind sewing machines, carrying agricultural produce. Women, we learn, are the ones whose enterprise can provide the motor of economic growth, a 'weapon against poverty' (DFID 2006); their economic activities are said to 'lift' economies, households and communities.

Yet there is an economic activity that many women undertake that is persistently absent from these positive representations. It is a significant source of revenue, not just as a source of work in itself, but also as a locus for other income-generating activities. It is a means for women to seek economic autonomy, celebrated by feminists as fundamental to women's empowerment (Kabeer 2012). It is a way in which women can generate the cash to see their children through school, support their households, resource their brothers and sisters' marriages, build houses and care for their elderly parents. Those who work in this business report that although like many workers they experience tedium and exhaustion, and may also face exploitation, abuse and harassment at work – especially from those in authority, such as the police – they also experience pleasure and empowerment (Doezema 2013; Seshu 2013). In India, many of those who come to this line of work have tried out other jobs, some continuing to pursue other occupations alongside this one (Sahni & Shankar 2011). Some have been married and have experienced the abuse and dependency that festers in many marriages, escaping from the strictures and privations of marriage for independence and the right to control their own bodies. The economic activity in question is sex work. It is spoken about by women in sex work in the area of India, the focus for the case study explored in this chapter, as *dhanda*, business (Seshu 2013).

Amidst all the talk in development about micro-enterprise, there is little mention of the thousands of women throughout India for whom the sale of sexual services is their enterprise. And for all that the narrative of empowerment has become such a

pervasive trope in contemporary development discourse, the very possibility that sex workers might experience empowerment as a result of their work seems to be difficult to countenance. Nor does it enter the frame of representations of women's empowerment that sex workers may become empowered through the very same ability to control their own income and make independent choices that is extolled by development agencies as the poverty panacea (World Bank 2012). The only images of women in sex work that we tend to see in the media and in the marketing materials of NGOs – apart from those organisations who are engaged in the defence and promotion of sex workers' rights – are those of abject victims, trafficked into hopeless sexual slavery, in need of rescue and the 21st century version of Victorian uplift, 'rehabilitation' (Agustin 2007; Doezenia 2009).

It is therefore unsurprising that far from featuring empowered women making their own choices, representations of sex work by foreign and local NGOs and the other organisations that together constitute what Laura Agustin (2007) terms the 'rescue industry', are all about saving of innocents from lives of depravity and horror. This field of representation focuses largely on girls – although the vast majority of those in sex work are mature women – and paints the extremes of the industry as if they represented its very nature. Lurid tales mesh with images of destitution to tell stories of injury. They appall the Western viewer with the colonial imaginary that is never far from the surface in development communications. They call to them to save, to *help*. Thus, for example, the NGO *Global Hope India* features a video with a white American intern who tells a tale of pimps door-stepping grandmothers, who are strung along with promises of education and a better life. She goes on to tell a sorry story of how the grandmothers 'sell' their children, who are taken by the pimps to the brothels, all the while accompanied by heartstring-tugging music and stills of young girls. These are scenes of desperation, composed to speak to a particular kind of Western viewer, one whose sense of moral superiority is coupled with a sense of the rightness of their acts of charity. In this way, funding and legitimacy flow to the kind of predatory 'rescue' outfits that have been the menace of those seeking to enable sex workers to organize and empower themselves against the human rights abuses they experience at the hands of society and the state (Seshu 2013; Overs 2014).

It is precisely because of these extremes that representations of sex work and sex workers offer such an interesting entry point through which to explore wider questions about the politics of communicating about development issues, especially to a western audience.

Introducing VAMP: "Sex workers freedom from injustice"

The story begins with Sangli-based sex worker collective, *Veysha Anyay Mukti Parishad* ("Sex workers freedom from injustice", or VAMP), whose work spans the Indian states of Maharashtra and Karnataka. VAMP has around 5,500 members in Sangli, Miraj

and rural towns throughout the region. It is a sex worker rights organization that campaigns for freedom from prejudice, violence and discrimination. VAMP's mission is to change society, to shift the stigma that is suffered by sex workers and that affects every dimension of their everyday lives from access to healthcare, education and housing, to abuse by the police and thugs who know they can get away with it because sex workers are treated as persons without rights by virtue of their occupation, gender and caste. They mobilise sex workers to press their demands through collective action, and run community-based condom distribution and a health advice service focusing on HIV prevention and care. VAMP has successfully eradicated child prostitution in the communities where they work, supporting underage sex workers to find safe places to live including VAMP's own hostel, where girls can go to be educated before making their own choices about possible occupations and that offers a safe, caring space for orphans left behind by sex workers.

Activist and social worker Meena Seshu of the NGO SANGRAM has been a driving force in supporting VAMP, securing resources and facilitating practices of organizing that have built a powerful organization of women, men and transgender people over more than twenty years. Sex workers in Sangli and beyond have found their strength and their voice in the collective, and transformed their own perspectives on sex work. Those who grew up as children in families of sex workers speak of how society taught them to despise the work that their mothers did to keep the family afloat, and how they have come to re-appraise that work and with it, their views of their mothers, aunts and other relatives who have worked in sex work. Those who had internalized societal stigma, turning it on themselves, have found the means to shrug it off and reclaim their self-worth. And the many women who in their isolation from each other had been vulnerable to abuse from the police and *goondas* (thugs) who were able to take advantage of them with impunity were now able to call on the organization to help and protect them. The women's lives continued to be difficult: clients could turn ugly; the police continued to resort to acts of violence for which VAMP needed to be vigilant in holding them to account.

VAMP's stories of change were amongst the most impressive that I'd heard in my six years as director of an international research initiative on women's empowerment, Pathways of Women's Empowerment (www.pathwaysofempowerment.org). I was most struck by their accounts of the lives of the women the sex workers called 'domestic women' – the wives that some had been and might otherwise have become – who could be raped by their husbands with impunity, abused by their in-laws and be stuck in loveless marriages with little prospect of exit. The sex workers I met spoke of these women with pity. In their empathy, they expressed one of the contrasts between themselves and these 'domestic women', and with it a dimension of choice that is rarely invoked in accounts of sex work: the ability to choose their own lovers, and to choose not to be with those lovers if the relationship grew abusive, tired or boring. They were assertive in defending their own choices and the lives that they had chosen to lead. The problem, they said, was with society: not with them. This combination of

collectivization and collective action on issues of rights and recognition and critical consciousness as women and as workers were everything I'd come to recognize as 'empowerment' (Cornwall 2012; Cornwall & Edwards 2014).

Our collaboration began with the exasperation that VAMP and their inspirational mentor Meena Seshu felt at the rescue industry.⁵ VAMP had been harassed for several years by one particularly driven would-be white saviour: an American missionary who had colluded with the police to enact a series of 'rescues' that had caused profound distress in sex work communities in the city of Sangli. I was as keen to confront the kind of imagery used to sell these kinds of interventions, as I was to challenge the appropriation of the label 'feminist' by those who so evidently disrespect sex workers' rights over their own bodies and choices. Meena and I put our heads and some funding together, and came up with the idea of commissioning a short film. Our aim was to speak to a primarily western audience, and to challenge the images of depravity and abjection that so often accompany representations of sex work by getting VAMP to tell their own story, and present themselves in their own terms.

We had set ourselves quite a challenge. Not only were we roundly critical of the ways in which sex work is represented by the media and in mainstream development. And not only did we have a critique of all that underpins those representations – the 'assistentialism', the coloniality, the rescue mentality and all the moral and cultural superiority with which all this so often comes to be larded. We were trying to do something far more difficult: to produce a version that challenged all that, and did something different. Whether or not we succeeded is for the viewer to judge. But the process was to offer us something that we had not anticipated, and it is on that this chapter reflects, and, with it, on what insights might be derived from it about development communications.

A year later, I returned to Sangli with members of Brighton-based film company Animal Monday to make *Save us from Saviours*. The choice of a British film company was deliberate: we wanted to communicate above all with a Western audience. Animal Monday's aesthetic, the emotional intelligence and sensibility of director Kat Mansoor and the creativity, nuance and skill of sound artist Will Hood and editor Adam Lavis seemed the perfect fit. Kat's choice of Stephanie Hardt as Director of Photography was inspired. Steph had previously worked in fashion photography and produced stunning visuals that were in their beauty and elegance a far cry from the conventional representation of Indian sex workers. In researching the film, Kat and her team were guided by the core members of the VAMP collective through a process of gathering stories, working iteratively with the material that the film crew generated every day. Following the conventional genre of documentary filmmaking meant casting three characters to follow through the film and seeking a dramatic denouement that could show the sex workers in action. VAMP wanted it to represent them all. Making the film inclusive of the voices and versions of VAMP's many members called for visual and narrative devices that could reflect the collective. Kat and her colleagues called it a 'corporate' film, and were intrigued by the accounts that women gave of themselves

as ‘in business’. It was only to strike me later quite how apposite – and challenging – this framing might be for the development industry.

Prostitutes of God

Around the same time as this film project was underway, another film was being made. Shot by a hugely popular youth-oriented online media outfit, it featured a young white British female journalist as narrator. It offered a commentary on the Hindu institution in which young Dalit women are dedicated to the Goddess Yellema and are thereafter prohibited from marrying, the devadasi system. Many devadasis become sex workers. Many, although not all, of VAMP’s members are devadasi. Through this work they make significant contributions to the income of their families. Although the practice was made illegal, it persists, and in some parts of the country – including the region where VAMP are active – many sex workers are devadasi. The film’s focus was this practice, dubbing devadasi ‘prostitutes of God’.

Prostitutes of God opens with the narrator commenting on India’s polarities, with vivid verbal imagery: ‘while some people are still shitting off the side of railway lines and eating from banana leaves, other people are drinking frappuccinos and wearing Gucci sunglasses.’ The camera pans to an image of pigs grouting in the garbage and onto a man in sunglasses on a scooter in a busy urban thoroughfare. She continues, ‘along with this feeling of progress and moving forward, there’s still this undercurrent of tradition and religion and superstition and an even more deeply ingrained caste system.’ The images tell their own story. It is one of rural poverty, a man hoeing a dry field, a young woman standing by a mud hut with a child in front of the camera rubbing his eyes, a temple, two poor-looking women, one with a large basket on her head, a crowd of impoverished looking children pressing towards the camera. And then we see the narrator in a series of snapshots with a group of women, sitting cross-legged on the ground, listening, wearing a *shalwar kameez*, establishing her authorial authenticity.

The narrator talks of how she had ‘met a group of temple prostitutes who told me of an ancient Hindu tradition where pre-pubescent girls are dedicated to a goddess and for the rest of their lives they will become sex slaves of the temple’. Narrating a version of the history of the devadasi system – one that conveniently omits the role of the British Empire – she announces, ‘today devadasis are no different to common street hookers servicing drunk truck drivers and bored businessmen.’ The film then follows the narrator to Sangli, to the red light area and to the home of Anita – ‘one of its most successful brothel-owners’. We’re invited to laugh at the interpreter: the film captures him responding to the question ‘everyone is friends?’ with ‘everybody is in France’, subtitled for comic effect. The camera follows them upstairs. There’s a scene where the narrator puzzles out what’s going on, whilst being shown the rooms where the sex workers work. Anita explains her work;

This is my house and I conduct my business over here. No-one has brought me here, no-one has kept me here. I became a *devadasi* only because I decided so. I wanted to be a sex worker to start the business and make money. I decided to build a fine home and buy utensils. I really don't think there is anything wrong in doing this work.

Against this narrative, the choice of shots tells its own story: a flickering flame in front of a picture of a Hindu god, bathed in a red glow; the camera roving around her house, panning the TV and a shelf full of metal storage containers. There's something a little derogatory about the way the film splices her words with the images, something that leaves a tang of something akin to derision. The narrator comments: 'For Anita and her friends being a *devadasi* was nothing to be ashamed of. Sex work was their choice. They had condoms, power in numbers, and SANGRAM looking after them. But these were just the lucky few. For the vast majority of *devadasi* prostitution isn't a choice. It's forced upon them, often by their parents.' She then fills us in on the background. 'Like most Hindu legends, the story of Yellema is long, convoluted and surreal. However many times we heard it, it still didn't make much sense.' She goes on to retell the story, which, in her words, includes 'a load of fat Hindu gods with blue skin and gold bikinis', all the while accompanied by images from a Hindu film that to a Western eye affirm a stereotypical exoticism.

After this concentrated dose of derogatory commentary, one that frequently verges on racism, the film then moves to northern Karnataka, the region with the reportedly highest concentration of *devadasi*. Along the way, the film collects images of destitution. We learn that the practice of dedicating girls as *devadasi* is ultimately about parents pimping out their daughters. Back in Sangli, the narrator meets another member of VAMP: the transgender sex worker Pandu. Here the narrative and visual sequence chosen by the filmmakers work to completely obscure Pandu's account of herself. She's pictured polishing the brass figurines of her 'blessed shrine', whimsical music playing in the background, and speaks about 'leaving everything for God'. When she then begins to describe her sense of freedom – in a situation in which the discrimination transgender people experience is not made evident to the viewer – the camera roves over her, as she clutches her goddess. The significance of her words dissolves.

I am able to dance if I want, live well. I can freely roam anywhere and do whatever I want. Nobody can stop me from going anywhere. Nobody has a right over me. I can now boldly tell society, this is my life and I will live properly. Nobody can restrict me.

The film closes with a glimpse of aged women who've survived lives of extreme poverty, and a sequence of clips scanning the impoverished horizons of *devadasi* practice. The voice-over that returns to the opening narrative, and frames what we've seen as a clash between 'superstition' and 'Western capitalism', and *devadasis* as victim of it all.

India is a land of extremes polarized by extravagant new wealth and ancient poverty. Everywhere you look, there's a battle being waged between the traditional forces of superstition and the inevitable force of Western capitalism. Nowhere are these

clashes more evident than in the plight of the *devadasis* where religious devotion has been exploited for commercial gain. The *devadasi* tradition is destroying families and communities, generation after generation. And with the advent of HIV, the practice now has a deadly price tag. Today, any remnants of the *devadasis*' cultural origins have all but disappeared. All that's left is a system that turns children into prostitutes and their parents into pimps.

'Under Western eyes'

Prostitutes of God has been viewed more than 3 million times. There are hundreds of comments, mainly from viewers in the US and UK. They reveal much about how these representations are viewed 'under Western eyes' (Mohanty 1988). Chandra Talpade Mohanty writes:

This average third world woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and being "third world" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized etc.). This, I suggest, is in contract to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions. (Ibid.: 337)

In the comments on *Prostitutes of God* we see representations of the third world that echo and reproduce this 'third world'. There is a seamless continuity in these readings with the effects of the kinds of images used in development marketing: the abject child, the grinding poverty and the miseries of 'tradition' from which development intervention can 'lift' and rescue.

Robert P: Sometimes I wonder if India is even worse than Black Africa, which is already notorious as is.

John L: Thank you for showing India in such condition and letting us know how India is. If it is shared in social sites their (sic.) might be a chance in earsing (sic.) such situation in India

Thanatos: India is demon infested... false gods, idol worship, hell. That's all that comes to mind when I think of India.

Michael L: I knew some India (sic.) families in the US and the women had no rights what so ever. They were live slaves among their own families. I really feel for all the females of India, the males, they can go fuck themselves.

Blackmassus: what a piece of shit country.

Angel Elf: Thank God and an accident of birth that I live in the United States of America! After watching this documentary I got down on my knees and kissed the

ground. I honestly don't think that the people that live here realize how fortunate we are. God Bless America.

Masterchief: Only 1 word can describe these people: Subhumans. I feel both pity and disgust of the people that is unfortunate to live in this dirty, inhumane shithole. Maybe we should nuke India to eliminate these evil shits and put the millions of pour souls out of their misery.

Emmiej Cathiey: why does all the fucked up shit seem to happen in India.

The world that these comments reveal is one of profound ignorance and arrogance; one that, I contend here, is abetted by the choice of frames and representational forms of the development industry, which feeds western viewers a steady diet of abjection and pity, making films like *Prostitutes of God* an extension of what's already on offer, rather than an extreme. The preoccupations of the western viewer include more of a concern for animal welfare than humans, as shown in the number of remarks about a dog in the film. Thus MissZella Babe writes: 'This is sad to watch but throughout the video I can't help but feel pity for the dog on 07.56. Maybe if someone just opened up their heart to this poor animal.' It is also a world in which people feel an entitlement to intervene, to rescue, like "MegaHobo Joe" who says, 'Looks like I got to go to India and abolish these whores taking advantage of the poorest of people'. Tennena S. writes:

Absolutely tragic. This is a human rights issue, and not an East vs West or Muslim vs Hindu issue. We are one race, the human race that needs to work together towards abolishing human trafficking, empowering an exploited community, and educating vulnerable populations.

Amidst all this, there are dissenting voices. They focus on the politics of representation, and raise larger questions:

Penurishify: Reading these comments are the starting to become the real reason why I'm starting not to like my American culture and the main reason why no-one likes America.

Destinyhasu: Do other countries go to euro populated areas and make depressing documentaries about hicks living in trailers? Like "oh you get this feeling of contrast", while some people have expensive veneers, others are toothless gross hicks and are super poor on meth. Let's all pity them and be super judgemental about their everyday lives. It's for educational purposes.

Iseepolarbear: Sorry, but this video's narrator sounds too much like a white savior to me. First of all, it's her demeaning way to describe the religious god and then generalize the system as a way for family to "pimp out" their daughter. It's a very subjective way of thinking.

Ish Singh: can you do a documentary now on a civilised western nation. How about England. This time do exactly what you have done in this video. Avoid the rich/

middle class areas and people. Go to the most run down poor filthy areas and choose homeless poor people as representatives of the nation...

Yanyah Mi Al: Why is this ignorant reporter laughing at these people.

Nick S has a rejoinder to the rescuers:

I live in the United States and I believe what goes in India should be taken care of by Indians. I really have no say in what goes on over there and I don't believe I ever should. Same goes for all the other countries. Look at our past and current failures like Afghanistan and Iraq. They didn't/don't want us there and all we did was fuck it up even more.

And Amir Iqbal reassures Pranjal Singh: 'Don't worry bro. These materialist Westerns don't understand anything beyond the surface; it's useless explaining bias to them. Peace!'

The film was released online. Within days, it had begun to be circulated in Sangli and the nearby area. Watched in internet cafes, the film revealed secrets about its subjects. A 14 year old girl was reportedly outed as an HIV+ve sex worker. Another, a married woman, was exposed as an occasional sex worker; she drank acid and tried to take her life. Attempts were made to get the film taken down. It was removed and edited, and put back up again. VAMP members were furious. They felt taken advantage of by the white narrator and her crew. Yet unlike many of those who supply the poverty porn on which the western development industry thrives, VAMP were not only highly mobilized. They were also in possession of a film unit, *VAMP Talkies*, and the means to make a video response and upload it to YouTube. The very medium that had brought such anger and distress could be used to send a rejoinder. They took a video camera and recorded their response.

VAMP talks back

VAMP protests Prostitutes of God opens with Anita.

My name is Anita. I am a sex worker. I told you I am a woman in sex work but you have defamed me as a brothel owner. Is this not wrong? I took you into my house, allowed you to shoot and you have laughed at us. You know the whole world here was laughing at you, we stopped it. Why? We understood you were a woman just like we were women. They laughed at your clothes, your body, your colour. We explained to them not to laugh at you. Her country is different from ours. She has come to shoot about *devadasis*. Who gave you the right to laugh? You have taken advantage of us.

Bimawaa is next. She introduces herself as a sex worker, and begins:

If I had come to your town and insulted your gods, would you have liked it? We do not know their English, they do not understand Marathi. You say you took us

shopping – you think we don't know how to shop? Wear saris? They really think they came to teach us?

Their male colleague Raju pitches in, explaining that he is the son of a *devadasi*.

You have named the film “Prostitutes of God”. This title itself is not appropriate. Who told you all *devadasi* are pimps and traffickers who force daughters into sex work? My mother used her money from sex work to raise me. I would not be here otherwise. Your analysis is wrong and we do not agree with it... What is the research that informs her story. You have no right to malign our mothers as pimps, agents and traffickers. This is not true.

Then the veteran sex worker organizer Kamalabai comes onto the screen, declaring herself to be a *devadasi* and a sex worker.

Did the girl tell you she was HIV positive? Who gave you the right to out her HIV status? Did the girl tell you she did not use condoms? Who is [she] to decide that condoms are not used? Why has she violated the human rights of this girl? Who is [she] to state that the girl is spreading HIV?

Raju takes up the issue raised by Kamalabai of confidentiality; he also draws attention to the way in which the film is framed and the mis-reading of sex workers lives that it gives license to:

Ballawa's HIV status is reported and that she spreads HIV. Who gave you the right to break her confidentiality? To sell your film, you have used an emotional appeal. We know films are made from various angles. But the angle you have used is not true according to us.

Members of VAMP are then shown sitting together and being asked if they signed consent forms. It turns out that they didn't and that they'd asked to be sent clips and photos, which hadn't materialized. A typical enough tale. Except this film went viral, and found its way – quickly – via the internet to the very people who were exoticized in it. Their anger and indignation speaks volumes; that this white woman, in whose film they had participated in good faith, could produce something that was so deriding of their dignity. As they address the camera each in turn, they deliver a powerful commentary on the ethics of the production of poverty porn. Their commentary addresses issues like confidentiality, basing a film on sufficient research and evidence for it to be truthful, the ethics of disclosure to a general public audience, filmmaking angles and the politics of representation. Their critical reading of *Prostitutes of God* comes from their years of being on the receiving end of stigmatizing and derogatory representations – and of the critical consciousness and sharp political awareness that they've gained, as part of an organized collective of sex workers whose mission is to confront discrimination and fight for rights and recognition.

Save us from Saviours

Save us from Saviours had been shot by the time *Prostitutes of God* appeared, so was less a rejoinder than an attempt to find a way to communicate VAMP and their mission to a Western audience. But we were all too aware of the challenge of entering a representational minefield. On the one hand, the film sought to counter the kind of derogatory, demeaning images of women in sex work that were the stuff of NGO fundraising campaigns. On the other, everyone involved was anxious to avoid romanticizing the situation women were in, as members of a stigmatized profession, economically exploited in the everyday marketplace for basic commodities and discriminated against and abused in their encounters with public services. At the same time, life for these women was not a never-ending sea of misery and exploitation. And the answer to their problems was not to be rescued by a white saviour, or indeed by the state, but through collective empowerment, rights and recognition.

The film opens and closes with a series of messages crafted by the VAMP collective. These represent what they would like to tell those whose rescue projects disrupt their lives and violate their human rights, and the corrective they'd like to throw back to western audiences:

Sex workers haven't fallen from the sky, or grown from the ground. They come from within society itself. They should be respected.

VAMP has helped the women and their children develop self-respect and they have started thinking.

Being part of VAMP has made me feel protected.

Just as the police and doctors change society, we are also changing society by working with VAMP.

My sisters, who are sex workers, should be treated the same as any other woman.

This is MY body, and it's my choice what I do with it.

VAMP works to improve society.

Together we've got the power to fight.

Every human being has the right to life and the Constitution gives equal rights to everyone.

The film introduces its three main characters: Shabana, sex worker; Raju, son of a sex worker; Kamalabai, brothel owner and retired sex worker. Kamalabai begins:

We never spoke the truth about ourselves before. When we spoke, we were treated like "these women in prostitution". People didn't understand us. They would call us "dirty people". Before, if I was beaten up, I would remain silent. We started coming together, and slowly VAMP came into being.

Raju then explains VAMP's history, beginning in 1992, and that VAMP works with 5,500 women. He then shares his own history:

For boys like me, who are the sons of prostitutes, our future is often ruined. It was very difficult. I used to get very angry. I used to think it was awkward to be born into this family. Before, I used to think that all these women are bad – rotten. I also thought that women had been made for men and that men are always right. But when I met them, and started working with them, I realized they have made a choice to do this work. My initial views about prostitutes changed completely.

This is an important part of the project of challenging the 'single story' – in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's terms⁶ – of exploited sex workers: one that repeatedly fails to recognize them as women, or as humans, with relationships of love, care and closeness. As the son of a sex worker, Raju was affected by the discrimination sex workers experience quite directly; he also internalized that discrimination, projecting it back onto the women who brought him up. His transformation was one of consciousness. He began to think differently. With that changed perspective, he began to see their work differently, and with that, to revalue the role of his mother in his life. Raju has become a staunch supporter of the sex workers he works for; he tells us in the film of spending half his day on the phone and that all the women have his number, and call him if they're in trouble, if they're ill, if they've been arrested. We then meet Shabana, who tells us:

I started doing sex work when I was twelve years old. I was facing many problems at home. One of my sisters was burnt to death. I might also have been killed so I ran away. It's only recently that I've started thinking it's good that I'm in sex work. I have all the power. I'm not dependent on anyone for anything. Right now, I'm free as a bird, and that's a very good thing! If I'd have been a married woman, I would have HIV by now. Because my husband would have sex elsewhere without a condom and I would be infected. So I am very proud to be involved in sex work.

Shabana is shown doing outreach HIV prevention work. She explains how this grew out of being appalled that people with HIV were being thrown out on to the street and wanting to do something about it. Here we encounter another facet of the life of many sex workers: care work. This is another development taboo; development talk of the 'care economy' is generally reserved for women in normative heterosexual marriage.

Most of all, sex work in this context is associated with the trafficking of young girls into the horrors of sex slavery. There are myriad local and international NGOs dedicated to rescuing young women from vice, often in collusion with the police – who are, in many sex workers' experience, all too often a source of hazard rather than protection. Once again, Raju takes up the narrative to challenge the rescuers – and to introduce the solution that sex workers themselves have developed, most famously in Sonagachi in Calcutta, of self-regulation.⁷ He adds: 'In our patriarchal society, women earning and being independent is frowned upon.' We then cut to Kamalabai, passing

a vegetable seller and commenting that she's very expensive – the local traders take advantage of the stigma sex workers experience if they go into town and shop at the markets where goods are cheaper – and then to the distribution of condoms.

One of the issues that the rescue industry does not address is the human rights abuses perpetrated against sex workers by the authorities. The film takes us there. We cut to the scene of a meeting in the VAMP office where women are sharing the story of being beaten by a female police officer. They decide to go to the police station that evening to tackle the issue directly. The film captures the group in the flickering light of passing traffic. 'For what reason did the police beat them? We need an answer to this,' says one of the women; 'why shouldn't I get justice? Am I not a citizen of this area?' says another. Inside the police station, they confront the constable. Kamalabhai is fierce, resplendent in her anger, shouting back at one of the male police officers, 'Does that mean we're not humans?' The film draws to an end with what looks like a social gathering of women at night, back in the community, with Kamalabai narrating: 'We want to tell society that the social mindset has to change. We are a part of society, and we are human.' She goes on,

We have more power than housewives. The difference is that a housewife is suppressed. And we are not suppressed like her. Whatever we are doing, we feel secure. And we are earning money. We are also doing something with that money... We have power in our hands.

This is perhaps the most challenging message of all. For all international development's talk about women's economic empowerment, the frame within which women are expected to empower themselves is deeply normative. The 'good woman' is married. She spends her earnings on her family, lifting them out of poverty through enterprise and industry. The possibility that women might use their earning power to exit miserable or abusive – or plain unhappy – marriages never enters the picture. That they experience stigma and discrimination when they seek lives outside the marital heteronorm, whether or not as sex workers, is rarely if ever taken on as a 'gender equality' issue, for all that it affects so many of women's basic rights, from housing to healthcare to rights over their own bodies and pleasures. Most of all, the film seeks to convey, through a very different set of visual, aural and narrative messages, that those who would seek the 'empowerment' of sex workers should pay more attention to what sex workers are doing for themselves, and take more seriously their call for rights rather than rescue.

Conclusion

Challenging the stereotypes peddled by the development industry calls for complicating the settled narratives that have been used to market its enterprises. The growth of digital media and its increasing accessibility has opened up the field of representation to many diverse versions of realities. These realities are complex and conjunctural.

There is no simple ‘single story’. The images of abjection used to market what Teju Cole (2012) so memorably labeled the ‘white saviour industrial complex’ are increasingly contested by the representations that those who have conventionally been the object of development communications are producing for themselves. This changes the frame. It also opens up new possibilities for those for whom development is more about a global movement for transformative social change to create a fairer world than a neo-colonial enterprise. Digital stories, participatory photography and video, blogs and zines, all offer modes of communicative intervention. With this comes a shift from rescuer to facilitator of people’s own representations of their own lives, and to a polyphony of voices and versions that can engage us all in the critical acts of interpretation and interruption that have the power to destabilize the hegemony of development’s narratives of rescue.

Notes

1. Wim Wenders, *The Act of Seeing*, cited in Paech 2014: 5.
2. See the Oxfam “Lift” campaign, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n2zymuD83aM> [accessed July 3, 2015]
3. This likening of development imagery with porn is not new; Permuter (1998) talks of ‘hunger porn’ and Berman (1994) of ‘disaster pornography’, among others.
4. <http://www.theplaidzebra.com/africans-are-fighting-media-poverty-porn-by-tweeting-beautiful-images-of-their-real-lives/>. See also the Twitter hashtag #TheAfricaTheMediaNeverShowsYou
5. For more information about VAMP and SANGRAM see their website, www.sangram.org and Meena Seshu’s (2011) article ‘Sex, work and citizenship: the VAMP sex workers’ collective in Maharashtra’.
6. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, ‘The danger of a single story’, TEDGlobal 2009, www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story
7. http://antitrafficking-durbar.org/srb_impact.html

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Africa's Voices Versus Big Data?

The Value of Citizen Engagement through Interactive Radio

Sharath Srinivasan & Claudia Abreu Lopes

Abstract

In this chapter, we reflect on opportunities to expand citizen engagement in developing world contexts using digital technologies and interactive broadcast media. Taking seriously the need for a reality check that gives emphasis to valuing human voice, to actual social realities and to technologies in use, we guard against the latest technological fetishes and the troubling big data bandwagon. Instead, we examine how and why African audiences engage in growing numbers in local radio shows through mobile phones. We draw on insights from a two-year research project, *Politics and Interactive Media in Africa* (PiMA), and the related applied research pilot, *Africa's Voices*, which worked with local radio stations in eight Sub-Saharan African countries. We examine the social and political significance of new opportunities for voice, debate and claim-making in the mediated public sphere that interactive broadcast media enables, and how an approach to citizen engagement that values pluralism and inclusivity and is not extractive, might better seize opportunities that interactive broadcast offers. The chapter critically reappraises what kinds of engagement count in communication for development, what kinds of 'publics' audiences in interactive shows constitute and how we should understand the power of these 'audience-publics'.

Keywords: interactive media, broadcasting, mobile telephony, citizen engagement, public sphere, big data

The danger with the current fetishist fascination with big data for development is that it is yet another technologically determined trip that obscures what matters for engaging citizen voice in inclusive, dignified and valuable ways. The data obsession creates a data hunger that can unquestioningly reinforce inequalities of access and engagement in search of large and fast flowing hosepipes of digital code. It also produces a data driven logic of knowledge production that disembodies voice from human context and content. We must get real about citizen engagement, focusing on the actual social spaces of communication, discussion, information exchange and mediation that people value. To be sure, that reality is fast-changing, but never as fast as a myopic focus on shiny new technological advancement might delude us into thinking. Starting from a more realistic foundation of actual lives lived, the remarkable affordances of digital communications for fostering new opportunities for strengthening citizen engagement and building social knowledge can be more carefully assessed.

This chapter reflects on opportunities to expand citizen engagement within governance and development processes in Africa using new communication technologies and interactive broadcast media. We examine how and why African audiences engage in radio shows through mobile phones, guided by insights from a two-year research project *Politics and Interactive Media in Africa* (PIMA)¹, funded by the UK Department for International Development and Economic and Social Research Council and the related applied research pilot, *Africa's Voices*, which worked with local radio stations in eight Sub-Saharan African countries. Both projects investigated the social and political significance of new opportunities for voice, debate and claim-making in the mediated public realm, created by the intersection of prodigious growth in mobile telephony access and the burgeoning broadcast media landscape.

Drawing especially upon evidence we gathered through household surveys and behavioural data, this chapter explores the ways in which people engage in interactive shows by calling or texting, whose voices populate these shows, why audiences contribute to these discussions and what conditions facilitate participation. We reflect on what kinds of engagement count in communication for development, what kinds of 'publics' audiences in interactive shows constitute and how we should understand the power of these 'audience-publics'. On a more applied level, this chapter also discusses the challenges of designing technology-dependent programmatic interventions to collect spontaneous voices in interactive radio shows, particularly the balance between the integrity of individual voices and aggregation; the compromise between anonymity and recognition; and the interplay between structured technology-led processes, and open spaces for voice and discussion anchored in their social contexts. Pivoting our argument on the vital importance of valuing voices in the face of the depersonalising and deterministic qualities of new technological affordances, we turn our attention to how innovation and method should come after, and not precede, modes of engagement that are grounded in real social realities and actual human living.

Valuing voices

In *Why Voice Matters* (Couldry 2010), a searing critique of how neoliberal techniques of governance stifle socio-political life, the media and social theorist Nick Couldry draws our attention to how new opportunities for voice – enabled by increasingly sophisticated and accessible media and communications ecologies – are in themselves not enough to bring about progressive social change that might stem and reverse the dominant tide. How we *value* voices matters, whether in our own societies or as actors interested in supporting progressive social change in other societies. Couldry elaborates some key elements of how voices can be better put to work in processes of social cooperation, which he connects to Pierre Rosanvallon's search for "an authentic rediscovery of ordinary politics" (quoted in Couldry 2010: 145).

Whether seen through the frame of social cooperation or that of 'ordinary politics' what is at stake is not citizen engagement for, or as a means directed towards, another valued end (*for* development, *for* governance, *for* democracy etc), but rather for itself, as a valued end and as a vital constitutive property of a vibrant, inclusive and empowered body politic. Voices enabled, shared, heard, contested, concurred are arguably at the heart of what makes us political beings who can create a common world between us. Therein lies the power – contingent, unpredictable, fleeting and always capable of new beginnings – that humans coming together in shared social and public spaces are capable of, and with which greatness is made possible. Such greatness is not measured by specific achievements, but by the very fact of creating something bigger than us that may outlive us.

The value of voice as a process of organising human experience through interconnected narratives lies in the emergence of social and political realities where people can be heard and influence decisions that affect their lives. That said, institutions and even the physical world matter, for they enable and constrain not only the possibilities for voice but also the manner in which they are valued.

It is by turning our attention to practical opportunities for valuing voices that Couldry suggests we can begin to critically reassess how we think about citizen engagement within development and governance work. Much depends on taking a socially situated approach to the contexts in which voice already matters in how people engage with each other, and then amplifying and extending these opportunities to new contexts where they can be valued in innovative and more powerful ways. We should not treat voices as data points, as dominant neoliberal logics of economic and social ordering do, there to be farmed and harvested and brought into mechanised forms of knowledge production. We should give value to what sustains voices, including acts of greeting and communicative gestures, by which people "recognise each other as included in the discussion, especially those with whom they differ in opinion, interest or social location" (Iris Marion Young, quoted in Couldry 2010: 145). We must foster acts of exchange and listening and new spaces of narrative formation where citizens do not merely give or receive information but are motivated to empathise, understand and form active judgments. We should not isolate spaces for engagement but rather see them as situated within wider acts of retelling, where interpretation recurs and is refreshed and citizens make sense in new ways. And we should be attentive to the meaning that exercising voice holds for individuals as social agents within a social reality that they care about, above all by giving due attention to forms of recognition that value voices. It is these concerns that have motivated reflections on the research discussed in this chapter, in the context of interactive media in Africa.

Interactive media in Africa: an opportunity

The uptake of new information and communication technologies (ICT) has transformed the media landscape in Africa. Hybrid and convergent media infrastructures combining new ICT (mobile phones, social media) with traditional print and broadcast media are enabling journalists as well as audiences to generate content in new ways, for listeners/viewers to participate in talk shows and audience polls, and for a range of third party actors to ‘intervene’ to create interactive programmes on specific issues. More than previously was the case, media institutions have come to be seen as “participatory organisations” (Willems 2013) where audience opinions might be communicated to and amplified by the media reaching other citizens, governments, companies, and international actors.

Despite growth in television and, from a low base, rapidly rising internet penetration and use of social media, radio remains the dominant media channel across the continent in part due to its geographic reach, the low-cost of equipment and the versatility to operate with different sources of energy. Following different degrees of media liberalisation in many countries in the 1990s, the African radioscapes has progressively become richer and more diverse. Local language broadcast, commercial, community and religious broadcasters, and internet-based broadcasting have served to further extend radio’s importance. It is a medium that also resonates with and augments dominant oral cultural practices in many African societies. On the heels of radio’s efflorescence, mobile phone penetration has also rapidly risen across the African continent. In 2014, Africa was the fastest growing mobile market in the world and was reaching close to 70 per cent of the adult population with mobile subscriptions (International Telecommunications Union 2014).

Although there has long been elements of audience participation in broadcast – ranging from letters, landline calls and studio guests to vox pop recordings and out of studio broadcasts – the popularity of interactive radio shows arises out of a relatively recent revolution in media and communications, with much work yet to be done to assess its potential for expanding opportunities for voice, practices of citizenship, and discursive publics. New public spaces of discussion are being created with diverse forms, characterised by their wide spatial reach, communicative immediacy and their higher density of interactions. Changes in the production of popular culture, the generation of news, and the social life of meeting and greeting are some of these manifestations alongside debates on social issues, politics and development (Wasserman 2011). The latter exhibits interesting potentialities, such as the possibility of exposing facts, ideas and beliefs to public scrutiny and allowing for them to be reinforced or contested by citizens holding similar or different worldviews. It is this potentiality that the collaborative research project, *Politics and Interactive Media in Africa* and its sister applied pilot, *Africa’s Voices*, sought to interrogate.

A reality check:

From unique voices to the spectre of 'big data' in a digital age

Sitting on plastic chairs outside the office of Breeze FM – a private FM radio station broadcasting from Chipata, the slow-paced regional capital of Zambia's Eastern Province – a casual conversation we are having with a journalist and production hand is interrupted by the station's founder and owner, Mike Daka. "You want to talk to people here about the importance of the radio station in their lives? Come in and meet this man." Daka is one of Zambia's media pioneers of recent decades. He came back to his hometown and founded Breeze FM in 2002, giving up senior official positions and a career in national broadcasting in the capital Lusaka to seize an opportunity to shape Zambia's new liberalised media landscape. Breeze FM reaches an ever-expanding regional population in local languages as well as English, combining news, music and social shows with discussion programmes. Third parties such as government departments and NGOs sponsor some shows, whereas the station's programmes team creates others. Many shows take calls and SMS, in addition to older methods for capturing audience voices such as vox pops, letters and studio guests.

We step into the station building and are introduced to an elderly man, Dackson Nywingwe, by a station presenter, Grayson Peter Mwale, famous locally as 'Gogo' (grandfather) Breeze. We sit down and talk a little, through Grayson as our interpreter. Dackson came to Chipata that day from his village a good hour's travel away. He was born in 1915 and had led a long life with stories he wanted to share on Radio Breeze. Broadcasting in the local language, Breeze FM was a love of his, especially the interactive shows with Gogo Breeze. People rang up, texted in, and sent letters, sharing concerns and discussing how their culture had advice to give on everyday life. Live on radio Breeze, Dackson continued, "a lot of wrongs have been announced, and most people have known them. And it's up to those perpetuating these wrongs to learn and stop these wrongs. Before these radio programmes, during the one party state," he added, "more people were in the dark". Later that day, at the end of his radio interview with Gogo Breeze, full of reflections from his long life, he was asked for any last words. He ended the interview by announcing that he was looking for a new partner. He was 98, with 16 children, and going strong!

Local radio stations like Breeze FM are generating new public spaces for discussion, debate and voice that matter to Africans. Dackson Nywingwe visited the studio, but was inspired by the many others who call and text in. In a growing number of African countries, interactive radio shows are amplifying African voices. Listeners relate to these new expanded spaces of social meaning and belonging because they connect with them in relevant ways.

Yet the dominant, but by no means only, tendency in thinking about the use of ICT in citizen engagement has been to focus on technological innovation. The internet, social media, 3G-based mobile innovations etcetera are all exciting and certainly point to dynamic and fast changing futures, notably in growing urban centres and among

younger generations. However, citizen engagement endeavours focused on African societies writ large, especially those directed at people whose voices are least heard and often most in need of delivery of public goods, must start with communication technologies that are dominant in the here and now.

There is another, more recent, dimension to this that speaks to new potential digital divides. The recent 'data revolution' and the turn to 'big data' frameworks are heralding new possibilities of analysis and action on grand scales. Yet 'big data' approaches that rely on clustering of individual moments of expression into large and often abstract categories risk overshadowing and silencing the diversity and uniqueness of voices, especially the hardest to hear. The same information and communication technologies that enable voices might also undermine them in other ways. Those excited by big data are hungry for data that flows with volume, velocity and variety, with an inherent bias to already digitally encoded data flows, such as from internet and mobile data applications. Analogue and other non-digital voices, such as those on local radio shows, are invariably devalued. Big data driven approaches that search primarily for general patterns are also incompatible with the uniqueness of voices and local meanings.

The big data revolution also creates new socio-political imbalances at a global scale, by favouring those at the top of the 'data pyramid' who have access to data and thus the production of knowledge at the expense of other groups in society. These new digitally capable actors are centralised, with high value technological assets at their disposal, and are becoming privileged in understanding and organising society and thus exercising power. The instantaneous and seemingly unmediated nature of digital communications mistakenly distract us from the material infrastructure, capital investment and institutional control that make digital communications and digital publics possible. The same enabling digital technologies for citizen engagement can, in the control of powerful actors – from national security agencies to telecommunications and Internet giants – be directed at purposes and logics that are quite at odds with the political agency and power of citizens coming together.

A commitment to valuing voices must adjust to technology and big data developments while guarding against these undermining tendencies in a digital age. This involves, in part, gathering harder to reach voices: because they matter to inclusive citizen engagement. It also involves gathering harder to analyse data, such as voices in local languages, with multi-formats (audio, text), framed in real interpersonal and social dynamics, whose meanings are linked to local contexts. An innovative approach to voice implies thinking about new ways of analysing these more complex voices, often combining human knowledge of encoded meanings and subjectivities with computational approaches that help manage large volumes of complex data. And finally, there needs to be an ethical commitment away from extracting and 'scraping' data to collaborating with locally meaningful spaces for 'voice'. In the research discussed in this chapter, these are aspects of working with interactive radio shows that are central to the *Africa's Voices* applied project.

Audiences, listenership and participation in interactive shows

Another reality check that our research has pointed to, is how the social dimensions of citizen engagement matter greatly, in addition to the more common concerns of access to communications technologies. Our research underscores how interactive shows in radio stations are social spaces influenced by cultural and social norms and also by material constraints that shape patterns of listenership and participation (by which we mean the fact of interactive engagement by texting in or calling in) of audiences. Mobile phone use and radio listenership are relatively widespread in many African countries, and thus the basic ingredients for interactive broadcasts are becoming commonplace. This is only likely to strengthen as mobile phone penetration and use extends and radio remains the most prevalent and popular media. However, as socially constituted spaces, interactive shows are expected to reflect society in many ways, such as being skewed towards those with more education and resources: typically men. The diversity of voices heard on radio is also influenced by media habits.

Participation in interactive shows is shaped by gender roles and social norms that dictate who should speak on the radio. As some ethnic or social groups are more politically active, and confident of their place in social and public life, their voice may dominate certain types of programmes (such as those on public affairs). However, our research has showed that the design of shows and the way that presenters invite and manage participation also plays a crucial role on the level and quality of audience engagement. When audiences perceive shows as interesting and presenters invite opinions from different groups and voice their diverse opinions, these spaces become more inclusive. Recognising individual opinions and encouraging meaningful discussions that matter for all audiences are important ingredients for engagement.

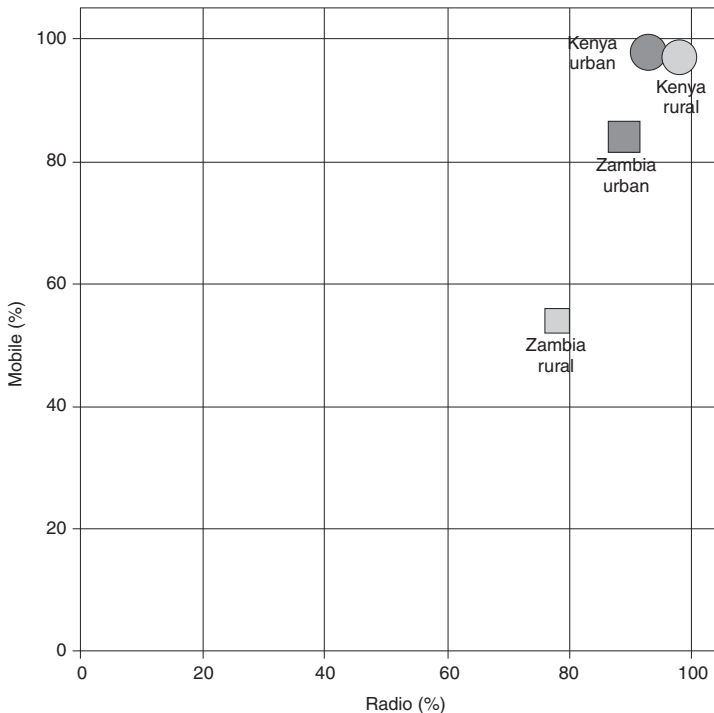
The questions of whose voices populate interactive shows, why audiences participate in radio discussions, what conditions facilitate participation and the significance of interactive shows for public debate and accountability processes were investigated in the research project *Politics and Interactive Media in Africa* (PiMA). Based on an eclectic methodological approach, PiMA advanced knowledge about interactive radio shows in Kenya and Zambia, particularly the media context, their political significance, their impact, social perceptions, and characteristics of participants. The research conducted for PiMA was enriched with insights from the applied pilot project *Africa's Voices*.²

The PiMA research project included a representative household survey of individuals of voting age (18 and over) in four constituencies in Kenya and in Zambia in 2013.³ In Kenya, the surveys were conducted in Ruaraka: a peri-urban constituency in the capital city Nairobi, with mixed demographics including one of the city's major slums; and Seme: a rural constituency settled around Lake Victoria in a largely fisher-agricultural community near the western city of Kisumu. In Zambia, the surveys were conducted in Mandevu: an urban constituency in the capital city Lusaka with a mixed demographic including some of the city's major slum settlements; and Chipangali: a rural constituency in the country's largely agricultural Eastern Province. The four

samples were designed as representative cross-sections of all households in those constituencies and were selected based on the possibility of capturing variation in terms of socio-economic factors, political context and media landscape. The household survey was supplemented with behavioural data of audience interaction using SMS from a radio station in one of the Kenyan constituencies (Radio NamLolwe in Kisumu).⁴

The high penetration and usage of both radio and mobile phones, especially in Kenya, offers supportive conditions for audience participation in radio shows, both in rural and urban areas (Figure 1). In Kenya, the levels of radio listenership and access to mobile phones is very high for both genders, with 99.4 per cent of men and 97.5 per cent of women listening to radio, and 99.4 per cent of men and 95.5 per cent of women using a mobile phone (the gender difference is not statistically significant). In Zambia, radio listenership is higher in the urban sample (89.7 per cent in the urban sample and 77.6 per cent in the rural sample) and among men (87.9 per cent of men and 77.6 per cent of women listen to the radio). Similarly, in Zambia, mobile phone penetration is significantly higher in the urban sample (84 per cent in the urban sample and 54.2 per cent in the rural sample) and among men (74.9 per cent of men and 62.8 per cent of women use a mobile phone).

Figure 1. Radio and mobile phone penetration in Kenya and Zambia rural and urban constituencies, 2013 (per cent)



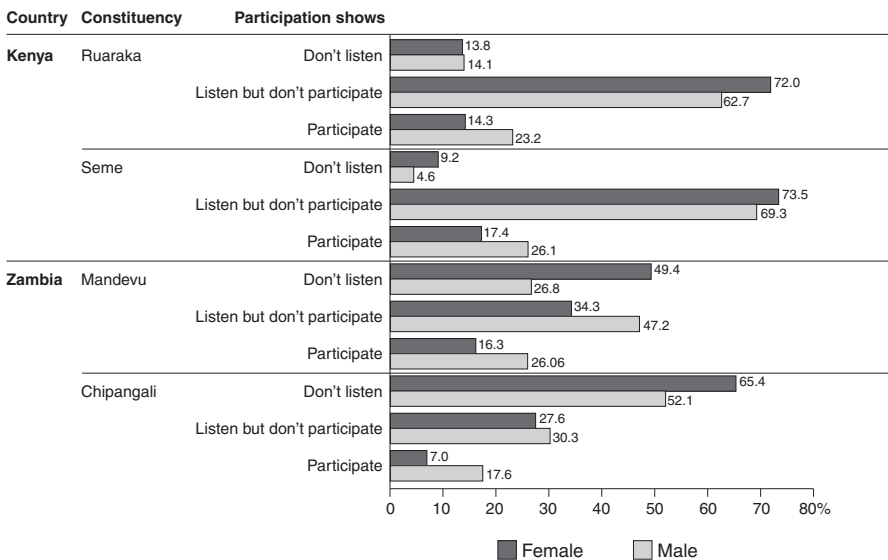
Source: Srinivasan, Sharath (2015). *Politics and Interactive Media in Africa (PiMA) Household Survey, Kenya and Zambia, 2013*. [Data Collection]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive.

The survey reinforced field observations, which revealed that interactive engagement with radio shows is done mainly by calling the studio, especially in rural areas. SMS is more popular in urban areas, particularly in Kenya. Using social media is not common, with only 10 per cent of those who have participated in interactive media shows having ever used social media to communicate with stations. Across all sites, the main barriers to interactive engagement identified are cost and expectations of not getting through.

Despite interactive shows attracting diverse audiences, participation is very skewed. Different pieces of evidence from our research clearly show that participation through mobile phones in radio stations is biased towards men and more educated populations in all the four constituencies. The survey showed that men are twice more likely to have ever engaged in interactive shows than women across all sites, suggesting that the observed bias cannot be fully explained by access to mobile phones (ownership and regional coverage of network) and radio listenership.

The levels of listenership and participation of interactive shows vary considerably among the four sites (Figure 2). In Kenya the levels of listenership range between 80-90 per cent of the population, whereas in Zambia, the levels of listenership ranging between 40-60 per cent of the population. The pattern of who communicates with radio shows, such as calling in or sending messages, does not follow the same pattern of listenership. For example, in the two Kenyan constituencies, access to mobile phones and radio listenership is not gendered, but participation is highly biased towards men. Also, despite lower levels of listenership and penetration of mobile phones, Zambia

Figure 2. Listenership and participation in interactive shows by location, 2013 (per cent)



Source: Srinivasan, Sharath (2015). *Politics and Interactive Media in Africa (PIMA) Household Survey, Kenya and Zambia, 2013*. [Data Collection]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive.

has similar levels of participation as Kenya in the four constituencies studied (roughly 20 per cent).

Probing this further, the higher relative participation in Zambia than in Kenya (ratio of people who participate by people who only listen to interactive shows) cannot be explained by assuming that participation is simply a function of a growing media offering and mobile telephony access (lower in Zambia), nor simply by summarizing participation skews in terms of basic socio-demographics (young men participate, women do not). There appears to be a more complex set of drivers of participation in radio shows, including social and cultural norms as well as the characteristics of the shows (style of presenters, format and content of the shows, topics discussed, strategies to engage listeners, popularity of shows and presenters). The latter, especially, points to the importance of sociality in understanding the potential of interactive broadcast shows for citizen engagement and citizen voice.

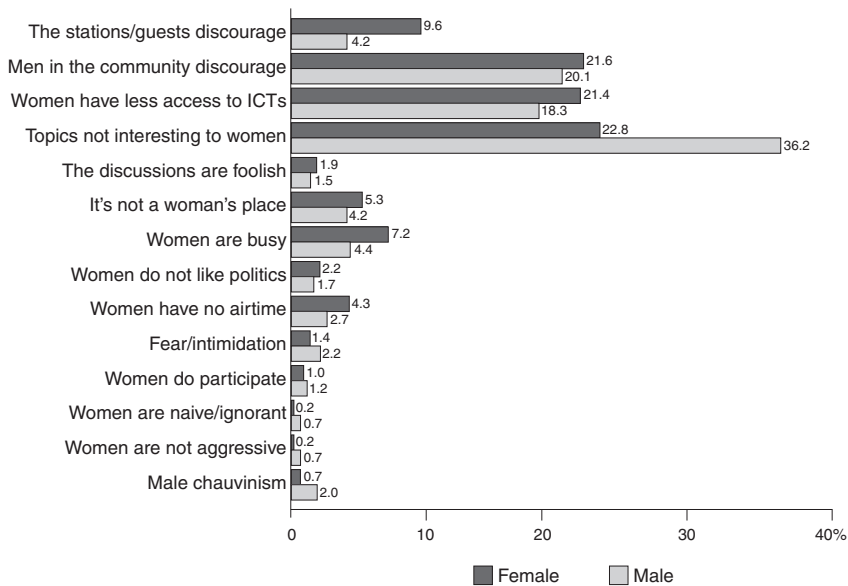
We found some evidence to support the intuitive idea that the content of the show is related to participation. But we also found that the content of the show is not related to listenership. Participation, then, tends to be more segmented than listenership. A more fine grained analysis in which the shows were classified into themes (politics and development, social/cultural and music/entertainment), revealed that radio audiences tend to listen to all types of shows, with no particular preference. However, as regards participation, there are clear preferences. Some people participate only in one type of show, with the popularity of politics/development, social/cultural or music/entertainment shows varying across the different sites and with gender.

Men tend to dominate participation across all shows, but there are important exceptions. For example, our survey results suggest that participation in politics/development shows in the Kenyan constituencies sampled is not as gendered as in Zambia, especially in the urban constituency (Mandevu), where political shows are almost exclusively dominated by men. Our behavioural data from a radio station that is popular in Seme, the rural constituency surveyed in Kenya (Radio Nam Lolwe, broadcasting from Kisumu in western Kenya), provides additional evidence for the gender gap in general participation, even wider than the survey results suggest. On average, across several radio shows, monitored over two weeks, the ratio of male to female messages was roughly 4:1. But in line with the survey results, we found that the variation across shows and timeslots was considerable with some shows attracting more female participation than others. These findings reinforce that social, cultural and political contexts as well as the topics of the shows and the way that presenters invite and manage participation, by presenting interactive shows as more gender inclusive, play important roles in the levels of female participation and voice in interactive shows.

Understanding radio shows as real social spaces implies seeing participation as influenced by the audiences' perceptions of who participates in the shows. If male voices are dominant, the accurate perception of this reality dissuades women to participate. Regular callers or texters, who are often conversant with the presenters, also contribute to giving the impression that these spaces are not open to new and different voices.

The PiMA household survey confirmed that all audiences' are aware of the lower levels of female participation. Audiences explain this, particularly for political/public affairs shows, as due to the discussion of topics not of interest to women (30.6 per cent), to low access to radio and mobile phones by women (16.9 per cent) and men discouraging women from participating (11.3 per cent). As perceptions rather than real reasons, they provide evidence of gender roles and related expectations. For example, the myths that women have less access to technology and that women's interests are confined to family affairs were challenged by the PiMA survey. Not only was the gender gap in access to radio and mobile phones (only observed in the Zambian samples) not sufficient to explain participation in radio shows, but there was also a remarkable gender difference in perceptions of reasons for female non-participation: men suppose (far more than women) that women do not participate because the topics are not interesting to them, as Figure 3 shows (36.2 per cent of men and 22.8 per cent of women). These ideas, when widely disseminated, contribute to shape their own reality through a self-fulfilling mechanism where social expectations turn into actual practices.

Figure 3. Reasons for female non-participation in radio shows by gender, 2013 (per cent)



Source: Srinivasan, Sharath (2015). *Politics and Interactive Media in Africa (PiMA) Household Survey, Kenya and Zambia, 2013*. [Data Collection]. Colchester, Essex: UK Data Archive.

Unlike the gender pattern in participation that is more tied to cultural norms and social expectations, age patterns are more visibly molded by the topics of the programmes and use of SMS by different age groups. Behavioural data of participation through SMS from the radio station in Kisumu (in the rural constituency in Kenya) illustrate this clearly. Although the most active age group for sending SMS to the station is the

20-29 year old bracket, older (30-39) and younger (<20) age groups also dominate participation on certain days and at particular hours. These age-specific spikes are related to the topics (and presenters) of the shows, such as younger participation on Saturday mornings coinciding with the young people's show, and 30-39 year olds participating more prominently during public/political affairs in early weekday mornings.

These selected results from the PiMA survey and behavioural data highlight the importance of what we call the 'mediation context', the various factors that shape the mediated social space of broadcast, including the design of shows, norms and practices for managing participation, audiences' perceptions of presenters, shows and participants. Together these elements shape interactive spaces for discussion within societal constraints, while also challenging and possibly contributing to reshaping them. More or less rigid social norms may be challenged by facilitating inclusive discussions, where women's voices are encouraged across all shows, including political affairs, and not limited to women's programmes (traditionally centred around relationships and family). This can be achieved by purposefully broadcasting more diverse voices, giving priority to female and more unique voices in order to shift audiences' perceptions; or by tailoring programmes for audiences' interests that cut across socio-demographical groups.

The power of audience-publics and political accountability

A dominant frame for understanding broadcast audiences comes from critiques of 20th Century mass media, and sees them as passive consumers and objects of manufactured consent (Herman & Chomsky 1988). "Radio stations," Habermas noted, "have turned the staging of panel discussions into a flourishing secondary business [where] discussion seems to be carefully cultivated [and] assumes the form of a consumer item" (Habermas 1991: 164). Such a monolithic argument has been countered by equally demanding claims in media studies (Silverstone 1990) that audiences are always participants and indeed always publics because of their constitutive role in any broadcast media production. This section critically reappraises what kinds of engagement count in communication for development, what kinds of 'publics' audiences in interactive shows constitute and how we should understand the power of these 'audience-publics'.

Interactive broadcast matters, in spite of its constraints and limitations. Interactive shows attract high levels of listenership, and are diverse in locations and languages. There is thus a tension that while listenership is broad, participation (as our survey and behavioural evidence made clear) is skewed towards men, particularly the more educated, somewhat wealthier and slightly younger. These are spaces that matter in spite of this, because audiences value and engage in them. They reflect the social reality from which they arise and are spaces for social influence to be exercised; yet precisely because of this, and their role in shaping shared ideas and collective beliefs, they matter greatly. They are also under-determined and full of possibilities for new voices to be heard and for a range of socio-demographic groups to be 'socialised' into having a

public voice. Whether listening alone, or listening and participating through mobile phones, audiences actively co-constitute and co-produce these interactive broadcasts.

'Participation' and 'inclusion' are also complex phenomena that have to be protected from parsimonious and populist definitions. Our close-range studies of frequent or 'serial' callers, who sometimes dominate the airwaves, underscores the well-known tension between pursuing popular 'inclusion' versus effective 'representation' in democratic politics. Many such callers conceive of themselves as brokers, representatives and mouthpieces for wider constituencies, even if they also use such shows to further their own social and political ambition. Indeed certain callers who call frequently are central to the success of these current affairs shows and stations and listeners value them. One frequent caller in Zambia, who describes himself as an "activist," explained how he uses the media to "amplify the voices of the silent people,"⁵ while another in Kenya spoke of his answering the call to act as scrutineer and watchdog: "the leadership of this country needs to be taken to task for whatever is happening. The new constitution has enlightened us, it is not right to sit down and wait for other people to voice concerns to correct the government. So, I have felt it is a noble thing and I should also be part of that. I want to be counted as those people who are trying to correct the government, to make sure that things are being done right."⁶

Interactive radio shows are mediated social spaces and media actors are central in enabling and constraining the quality and dynamism of interactive discussions and in shaping possibilities of public opinion. As Sonia Livingstone has noted in the European context, "in different ways, the media are crucial to today's publics (and audiences) in inviting, shaping and managing the focusing of collective attention and, hence, the construction of the collective fictions through which publics come into being, perform and, eventually, die" (Livingstone 2005: 12). A less idealised and less monolithic, more elemental, concept of publics allows for more subtle treatment of when and how audiences may be publics and publics may be audiences.

Here, the context of broadcast in Africa, especially radio, matters greatly. The work of Schulz (1999), Spitulnik (2000, 2002) and Barber (1987, 1997), amongst others, points to the deep social contextuality of local radio in particular. The kinds of imaginaries that radio programmes sustain are expansive and cooperative in nature. Daniel Dayan usefully distinguishes "meaning-making" audiences from "consumer audiences", the former catalysed into imagining the publics they are part of, the latter having these imagined for them in advance (Dayan 2005). Some of the show audiences we examined, appear to be 'meaning-making'. For example, audiences for morning current affairs shows seemed to imagine the citizen-public voicing to and holding to account elected politicians, with the uncertainty of who was listening creating solidarity amongst the audience and proximity to aloof politicians. One station manager noted, "People are very willing to be heard on the radio because I think they want to have audience with their area member of Parliament ... this is a general complaint in Zambia that once elected they are hardly seen in their area."⁷ Such motivations are echoed by regular callers, who are motivated by a view of democracy in which proper representation

of the people requires knowing and engaging with the electorate. Politicians' absence and lack of connection to their constituents is misaligned to their responsibilities. One frequent caller explained that because the politician avoids the people, these callers see themselves as compelled to use the interactive programme to enforce engagement between representatives and those they represent.⁸

Our station case studies in Kenya and Zambia broke down the false binary that often frames African media, as either an ideal watchdog or emergent public sphere, or lamentably caught in the intrigues of the wider political economy. Factors shaping shows as a social space (e.g. audience perceptions and trust of the show and its host, knowledge of people who participate) have an important role to play. Particular shows and presenters may matter but they are constituted and sustained by a wider audience-as-public potentiality that the station, presenter, guests and listenership mutually imagine, create, negotiate and contest.

These factors point to how interactive broadcasts are unconventional spaces for political accountability. Through their live, dynamic nature, interactive shows become spaces of legitimation and delegitimation, where public opinion is formed and has political effects at a particular moment. Certain radio show formats – such as shows attending to hot topics that are unscripted, immediate and local, or formats with political guests that are focused on efforts at mobilisation and legitimation – drive engagement. Such engagement is unpredictable and untidy, mixing insights into fluid manifestations of public opinion on important issues of the day with call-outs to presenters and friends, jokes, jibes, song requests and personal information. Far from the artificial neatness of structured surveys and the like, this social interaction data is messy but it is also real; it warrants greater effort to nurture its creation and to analyse it for social insights.

Incorporating voices into authentic ICT4D

The unique opportunity to access and analyse voices from hard-to-reach African populations using new ICT poses a set of pressing analytical, ethical and methodological challenges: the balance between individual uniqueness and aggregation; the compromise between anonymity and recognition; and the interplay between structured technology interfaces and workflows and open spaces for voice and discussion anchored in their social contexts.

One challenge that the *Africa's Voices* pilot project presented was dealing with forms of participation that work well on interactive shows but which do not lend themselves to easy aggregation and analysis. The desire to allow for individual expressions of opinion whilst seeking to learn at societal or community levels reflects a wider issue for research seeking to capitalise on Africa's digital communications revolution: how to encourage, value and protect unique voices while seizing the opportunities presented by ease of gathering larger volumes of data.

The possibilities of using live and unstructured data for social research remain underexplored (Gonzalez-Bailon 2013) not only because of complexity of tools for analysis but also due to some scepticism about the quality and usefulness of this type of data. Big social data is unstructured, mixed-format and incomplete, and complexity does not necessarily translate into rigour. Often big social data carry imperfections that threaten the validity of social research: self-selection of cases; self-presentation bias; few covariates; and ethical and access issues.

Moving away from traditional polls and survey-type approaches to gathering 'public opinion' (for example, featuring probability sampling, panels of respondents, or closed format questions), *Africa's Voices* has gradually adopted an approach that produces data that is richer and more dynamic, led by the pilot insights about audiences' preferred ways of participation in public discussions through interactive radio and SMS. This approach resulted in large volumes of texts in multiple languages and mixed formats (textual and predefined answers) whose meaning cannot be detached from local realities. Yet this type of data can capture, in a genuine and meaningful way, public opinion in hard-to-reach communities, at the expense of conventional scientific canons. The usefulness of such data to capture social or local specificities is limited by the non-representativeness of samples, which may lead to flawed interpretations. Such samples may however be adequate to capture patterns and contrasts in social ideas and collective beliefs, the uniqueness and contextual embeddedness of voices, the richness of arguments and the dynamics of discussion and the formation of opinions.

Another central finding of the *Africa's Voices* pilot is that having a voice, through the 'publicity' or recognition (Honneth 1996) generated by radio, matters, when audience members engage in debates on the airwaves either by calling in or sending SMS. Despite all the efforts to ensure anonymity of participants at the point of communication (although their mobile phone numbers are unavoidably communicated), people prefer to send their names, residence, and sometimes their occupation and the names of family members. If the answers give more elaborate reasons for their position, it is more likely that they will be accompanied by personal details, supporting the idea that audiences seek recognition for their opinion.

Recognition of one's own voice and contribution to the debate (or even the hope of contributing) or the vicarious sense of recognition that comes from a space in which others 'like you' participate, seems to be a key factor in interactive engagement in *Africa's Voices*' discussions. Yet the research team's concern for protecting anonymity in *Africa's Voices* data generated a tension between local recognition and research ethics. To some extent, anonymity does not seem to be a concern for audiences as they are eager to send information that reveals their identity. The opportunity to express their opinions and the actual or anticipated acknowledgement of taking part in a relevant discussion by other members of the community had to be given due regard by the research team. The public character of the discussion and the accessible format are designed to invite participation from different social groups, yet knowledge of the identity of who participates reinforce voices that are already dominant in the community.

Conclusion

The so-called 'data revolution' and rise of 'big data' are a salient reminder of the stubborn persistence of technologically-led visions of development and change. These visions invariably risk incorporating exploitative and dominating logics. They are instrumental in nature, pursuing ends with particular means (here the implements are algorithms). At a basic level, such thinking is at odds with human agency, human plurality and the power of humans to imagine and create common worlds. Any attempt to guard against such determinism and to be more ethically grounded in humanity must be, first and foremost, deeply realistic. Such realism implies taking into full account actual lives lived, including society's best and worst features, and working from this foundation. In the context of information and communication technologies and processes of social and political development, such a foundation involves working with media and technology in use and looking from here towards new possibilities for more inclusive and amplified citizen voice in social and public life.

Broadcast media, especially local language radio, remains vitally valued by a great cross-section of the citizenry and society in much of sub-Saharan Africa. The research project, *Politics and Interactive Media in Africa* (PiMA), reinforced this in many illuminating ways. Audiences of interactive shows are often as diverse as the societies from which they obtain, and even if that diversity does not map onto the demographic profile of those who interact by calling or texting in to such shows, the possibilities of the broadcast audience are vital to why these spaces matter. The interactive broadcast show forms an indeterminate social space into which people impose particular ideas about its significance. This potential is even more acute given the uncertain quality of the audience: its reach and who is listening. These are managed and mediated spaces – co-produced through the public contributions of the media professionals, the in-studio guests, the audience members who actively interact by calling in and texting in and the 'silent majority' who despite not actively interacting, by being addressed and thus imagined, are in effect working to constitute interactive shows.

Variation in the socio-demographic patterns of which audience members participate in interactive shows (communicating via their mobile phones), point to determinants other than mere access to communications or crude demographic predictions, and towards what we have called the 'mediation context'. This encompasses the particular qualities of each interactive show that, albeit within wider social norms and cultural parameters, enable and constrain possibilities for citizens to contribute their voices to discussions. These determinants include: the design of the show, and the imagination of the show articulated and conveyed by the show's host; station and show norms and practices for managing audience participation; and audiences' perceptions of presenters, the role of such shows and the profile and role of audience members who do participate. These are all under-determined dimensions of the show containing within them possibilities for citizen engagement and valuing citizen voice in different ways.

Valuing voices implies encouraging individual opinion and narratives and creating spaces where these voices can be heard. It also suggests that participants perceive that voice matters for making a difference to improve their lives and the lives of others. Most importantly, this requires that technology and methodology are first grounded in actual social realities of communication, and from this basis shaped to strengthen more inclusive and effective citizen engagement.

Notes

1. A collaborative research project, PiMA researchers included: Dr Sharath Srinivasan (University of Cambridge, Principal Investigator); Professor Winnie Mitullah (University of Nairobi, Co-Investigator); Dr Fred Mudhai (University of Cambridge and Coventry University); Dr Alastair Fraser (University of Cambridge and SOAS, University of London); Dr Claudia Abreu Lopes (University of Cambridge and Africa's Voices Foundation); Sammy Mangwi (University of Nairobi); Stephanie Diepeveen (University of Cambridge); Nalukui Milapo (University of Zambia); Moses Maina (University of Nairobi) and Emmanuel Tembo (Centre for Policy Dialogue, Zambia). The authors gratefully acknowledge the various contributions made by the entire research team to the research that informs this chapter.
2. *Africa's Voices*, a research pilot harnessing the reach of radio and the spread of mobile phone use to gather citizens' opinion on governance and development issues across sub-Saharan Africa was spun out into a social enterprise and registered UK charity in January 2015: see <http://www.africasvoices.org>. Africa's Voices Foundation now works with a range of development and governance actors, as well as researchers, to provide them with citizen engagement tools and social research outputs.
3. The results of the survey allow inferences to the voting population in the four constituencies (macro-units) with some degree of accuracy (but not to the two countries). The sample sizes are 760 for Kenya (383 for Ruaraka and 377 for Seme) and 688 for Zambia (327 for Mandevu and 361 for Chipangali). The margins of error for a 95 per cent confidence level are no more than plus or minus 5 per cent for both Ruaraka and Seme, 5.41 per cent for Mandevu and 5.12 per cent for Chipangali. The dataset and full methodology are available here: <http://reshare.ukdataservice.ac.uk/851648/>. The methodology is also available here: <http://www.cghr.polis.cam.ac.uk/research-themes/pdtm/pima/pima-working-papers/pima-working-paper-1>. An extensive paper on descriptive results from the survey is available here: <http://www.cghr.polis.cam.ac.uk/research-themes/pdtm/pima/pima-working-papers/pima-working-paper-4>.
4. The text messages were gathered in real time from all the programmes, during two weeks in August 2014 using a private shortcode, in a total of 19,800 SMS. The SMS are gathered through a cloud based platform that allows listeners to send free SMS to a shortcode announced during the radio programmes. The messages are linked to demographic information (age, gender, location) collected through a mobile phone survey prompted by a keyword in the original message. The response rate for the survey was 82.3 per cent (gender question).
5. Interview, Royd Moonga, Lusaka, December 2012, conducted by Dr Alastair Fraser, a research colleague on the PiMA project.
6. Interview, James Githuku, Nairobi, July 2013, conducted by Sammy Mwangi, a research colleague on the PiMA project.
7. Interview, Norman Tembo, Yatsani Radio, Lusaka, December 2013, conducted by Alastair Fraser.
8. Interview, Radson Musonye, Lusaka, August 2013, conducted by Alastair Fraser.

A History of Cultural Futures

'Televisual Sovereignty' in Contemporary Australian Indigenous Media

Faye Ginsburg

Abstract

This chapter explores what televisual sovereignty might mean for Indigenous media makers, using a historical lens focused on experiments with Australian Aboriginal television in remote communities beginning in the 1980s, through an analysis of contemporary developments, in particular work of the Indigenous Unit of the ABC, and the dramatic series *Redfern Now* that explores the lives of contemporary indigenous families in Sydney's Aboriginal neighborhood of Redfern. When the Aboriginal Programs Unit of Australia's ABC television began in 1988, every Indigenous person involved was a trainee under the direction of a Euro-Australian professional. They bore the burden of collective self-representation in a televisual wasteland virtually devoid of Indigenous voices. In 2011, Sally Riley (Wiradjuri) became head of the ABC's Indigenous Unit, with plans to create innovative work that "comments on our own problems, our own issues". Riley's projects demonstrate how far Indigenous tv has come in 25 years; new productions expand beyond the burden of representation carried by the first generation, showing the complexities of daily life for diverse Aboriginal subjects and audiences, enlarging the national imaginary through the local stories they tell. If the neighborhood of Redfern was known historically as the urban center of Aboriginal political action in Australia, the show *Redfern Now*, has become an innovative site of cultural activism both on and off screen.

Keywords: television, sovereignty, indigenous media, cultural activism, self-representation, story-telling

The series *Redfern Now* came about from a deep desire, from myself and Sally Riley [Head of the Indigenous Department, Australian Broadcasting Corporation], to ensure that an urban Indigenous community, a contemporary Indigenous community, was represented on our screens in some way. It was never any other place; it was always Redfern in our minds.

Hopefully for us it creates a place where we can more regularly see black faces on screen. Certainly the talent's there, we've got the writers, we've got the directors, we've got the actors and we've got the ability now with the support of places like Screen Australia and ABC to be able to produce the material. It's early days...It's

important to tell these stories because they've never been told before. They are firsts. *Erica Glynn (Kaytej), former Manager, Indigenous Branch, Screen Australia, (The Making of Redfern Now, ABC-TV, Oct. 30, 2012)*

Redfern is such a colorful place and it has such a great history and – I don't know – it excites the imagination. It does that for me. The people who live there are just like you and me. They are ordinary people with similar problems, similar situations, similar issues.

The fact that it is written, produced, and directed by Indigenous filmmakers is more than I could have hoped for. It helps people to understand Indigenous people, Indigenous life, Indigenous culture.

Sally Riley (Wiradjuri), Head, Indigenous Department, ABC-TV, (The Making of Redfern Now, ABC-TV, Oct. 30, 2012)

On Thursday evening, November 1, 2012, at 8:30 PM, Australians who switched on their televisions to the nation's flagship public service broadcaster, the ABC, were part of a groundbreaking moment in the history of Indigenous media. They witnessed the inauguration of a new outstanding six-part indigenous drama series. Entitled *Redfern Now*, the show is testimony to twenty-five years of struggle to gain Indigenous control over almost every aspect of a mainstream Aboriginal television production. Both on and off screen, *Redfern Now* speaks forcefully to the unfinished business of decolonization, powerfully demonstrating “why voice matters” (Couldry 2010). On screen, the series tells riveting, complex stories about urban Australian Indigenous lives that have not been told before, reaching out to Indigenous audiences as well as to the broad public constituted as part of a televisual national imaginary.¹ Off screen, the show was the result of an astonishing coming together of both new and seasoned Indigenous talent in the writing, acting, directing, shooting and editing of this first Aboriginal dramatic series to be broadcast on Australian national television. Because of the top-to-bottom control and participation of Indigenous media makers, I make the case in this chapter that *Redfern Now* constitutes a project of “televisual sovereignty”, a point I will develop more fully below.

The TV series *Redfern Now* consists of two seasons (2012, 2013) of six loosely connected one-hour episodes that explore the lives – and unexpected moral dilemmas – of Sydney-dwelling Indigenous families in Australia, living on the same street in Redfern, a working-class neighborhood (now gentrifying) long known for being home to the city's Aboriginal community. The series has raised the bar for what Indigenous media makers can achieve through influential contemporary media platforms, such as the ABC, that have considerable resources and wide reach across the nation. In particular, it brings recognition to Indigenous urban experiences that have been more or less invisible in Australia's public culture which, until now, tends to highlight remote living people engaged in either traditional performance or dysfunctional activity (Hartley & McKee 2000). And the excellence of the writing, acting and production in *Redfern*

Now is such that the issue of indigeneity is almost taken for granted in some of the reviews of the show, in the discursive field that emerged around the series. Ironically, to have indigeneity ignored is considered by some to be one of the most valued signs of success. While Karl Quinn, the national film editor for one of Australia's newspapers of record, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, headlined his positive lead review on the eve of the launch of *Redfern Now* with reference to their status as Indigenous stories, *Getting Aboriginal stories out of the ghetto* (2012), another respected critic described the series simply in terms of its quality.

The characters are caught at moments that in time define them: a decision to pick up the phone, to ignore a cry for help, the refusal to sing the national anthem, a moment of sexual jealousy, a seemingly insignificant car accident, a thought that suddenly consumes. Their response to these moments threatens their work, their love lives, their equilibrium, and their identity. And.... we can only gape in amazement at how elegantly those involved in this production have taken these moments and filled them with resonance and meaning. Each episode is like a beautifully constructed short story that sees straight to the fragile hearts of *Redfern Now*'s characters, without the stories becoming sentimental or stubbornly political. (Blundell 2012)

I want to consider *Redfern Now* as exemplary, not only for its considerable accomplishments in the present as a form of Indigenous media, but also to look back at the history of how what we might think of as televisual sovereignty for Aboriginal voices came to be in Australia. My goal here is to open discussion about what Indigenous control over screen media representation has meant at the local and national levels, in both remote communities and urban settings. In other words, this work has a history and a context, one that I have been involved in for over two decades.

The aboriginal invention of television

I first encountered Indigenous television in Australia in 1988, when I made my initial research trip to Central Australia in order to understand what had enabled the lively emergence of Aboriginal TV in remote communities, in particular at the Warlpiri settlement of Yuendumu, where American activist scholar Eric Michaels had gone to learn about – and advocate for – the “Aboriginal invention of television” emerging there and elsewhere (Micheals 1986). Despite the small scale of such work, the experiment in radical alterity that it represented – to create television on distinctly Indigenous terms – brought it to the attention of many people, including myself, living as far away as New York City (Ginsburg 1991). Like others, I was curious about how different cultural protocols might reshape our taken for granted and ethnocentric assumptions about televisual media practices, a point I will return to later in this chapter.

Additionally, that same year, after considerable struggle and demands for greater representation on the national stage following Aboriginal protests during the 1988

Bicentenary, Indigenous units were created at Australia's ABC and SBS, the nation's two key public service broadcasters, both located in Sydney (Ginsburg 2010). What indigenous control over television meant in these different contexts – the remote central Australian indigenous settlements with relatively traditional communities as both producers and audience, and the more mainstream context of national television with a minority bicultural urban Aboriginal viewership – was a source of considerable contention at the time, as there were few opportunities for Indigenous Australians to gain the experience needed to make Aboriginal television a self-determined enterprise (Ginsburg 1994). A few years later, in 1994, after further agitation by Aboriginal cultural activists who demanded more opportunities for Indigenous actors, directors, screenwriters, and cinematographers, training programs for Indigenous media makers were established via the Indigenous Unit at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (Ginsburg 2010). Eventually, these initiatives were headed by Sally Riley, a Wiradjuri woman with film and theater credits to her name, and, as it turned out, an incredible creative capacity to nurture talent and build capacity in the emerging Indigenous media sector (Riley 2007). Through her initial position at the Indigenous Branch of the Australian Film Commission, and then as head of the Indigenous Department of Screen Australia from 2000-2010, she guided a phenomenally successful Indigenous media training program. These initiatives have been central to developing the range of capacity and vision that anchors not only *Redfern Now*, but also much of the Indigenous media work that speaks compellingly to and about the circumstances of contemporary Aboriginal Australians, including films that have won major awards at some of the most prestigious showcases for new cinema, such as the Cannes Film Festival, Sundance, and Telluride, to name a few. Through a variety of outlets, these media productions – documentaries, dramas, experimental works, comedies – have been reaching audiences in and beyond Australia, particularly with the growth and intensification of platforms and festivals all connecting Indigenous media producers across the planet (Ginsburg 2009; Wilson and Stewart 2008).

As scholars and supporters of Indigenous performance and media arts, one of our tasks is to understand what makes such achievements possible, especially in a time when funding for these forms is often at risk. If we confine our interest in Indigenous media practices to textual analysis alone, however important such work might be, we fail to fully understand the historical, cultural and social dynamics, and the value of infrastructure, funding and other forms of support that are the crucial off-screen realities that make these images both lively and possible. To rephrase a popular idiom, televisual sovereignty is in the details...and like God...they may not always be evident through what we are actually able to see on screen.

While my focus in this chapter is on *Redfern Now* as a contemporary instance of televisual sovereignty, it is important to recognize that it is part of a complex mediascape of Australia's Indigenous media sector. These include feature films that have gone on to win major awards, such as Central Australian Aboriginal filmmaker Warwick Thornton's extraordinary work, *Samson and Delilah*, the second indigenously-directed

film to capture the *Camera d'Or* award for best first feature film at the Cannes Film Festival in 2009 (Ginsburg 2012).² And of course, these venues are important locations created by and for these media makers to meet, exchange ideas, and see each other's work including Indigenous film festivals such as *imagiNative* held every October in Toronto, Canada since the year 2000,³ the Sundance Institute's Native and Indigenous Program, and the global gatherings at the Indigenous Sami Film Centre.⁴ Additionally, there are meetings for Indigenous national broadcasters (now numbering twelve) who have been represented collectively since 2008 through the World Indigenous Television Broadcasters Network. These kinds of social formations have been essential to the emergence of a transnational Indigenous counter-public in which media practices play a central role. For example, through this network *Redfern Now*, has been shown not only on the ABC in Australia via the Indigenous Unit, but also on Maori TV in New Zealand, and the Aboriginal People's TV Network in Canada.

The making of *Redfern Now*

In Australia, *Redfern Now* has been an unqualified success. When it was launched in October 2013, it was seen not only on the small screen in the proverbial living room but also on a huge outdoor display in Redfern itself, to an audience of over 3000 residents. Kim Dalton, then Director of ABC TV, a former Director of the Australian Film Commission, and a crucial supporter of Indigenous media for nearly two decades, including *Redfern Now*, spoke to the crowd. His speech was heartfelt, indirectly referencing his own role as a strategically placed advocate of Indigenous media in his role at the Film Commission.

Rarely is it more appropriate to begin proceedings by acknowledging and paying respect to the original owners of the land on which we stand tonight, past and present, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. And beyond this protocol, going further and acknowledging and paying respect to the original owners of all of the lands we now call Australia, past and present, including those of you here tonight.

Tonight we are here to celebrate a moment of great achievement in a long journey.

Redfern Now is born of, is resonant of, and speaks of Australia's Indigenous culture, its deep and profound historic roots and its vibrant and contemporary expression.

A far-sighted Australian Film Commission initiated that journey over 15 years ago by recognising that if the mission of our industry is to tell Australian stories, then Indigenous people need to have a place and number amongst our storytellers, on and off the screen.

Dalton quoted in Meade 2012

In addition to enthusiastic support from Indigenous audiences, the series received positive reviews in Australia's often scathing press, strong audience ratings and excep-

tional professional recognition. Awards included Most Outstanding Drama Series for both the 2013 and 2014 Australian Logies (the television industry awards, named in honor of John Logie Baird, the Scotsman who invented the world's first television), as well as outstanding television show of the year at the 2013 Deadly Awards (the annual celebration of Aboriginal and TSI achievement, deadly meaning “fantastic” in Aboriginal English). In 2014, it also won Best Television Drama Series at the Australian Academy of Cinema and Television Arts Awards (AACTA). Perhaps its most ringing endorsement is that it was renewed for a second season, especially considering the particularly brutal cultural economy of television in the current climate. Moreover, its off-screen value is not to be ignored. As the largest Australian indigenous television drama production ever undertaken, it has given hundreds of people a start in the film and television industry, embracing the locals Aboriginal residents of Redfern, the inner-Sydney suburb, as non-professional actors and extras (Meade 2012a). As two of the key players in the production team noted.

You know, Redfern has had its ups and downs and its major triumphs. We wanted the rest of the country to share in those joys and ups and downs, you know. As long as the Indigenous community there were happy with us exploring that turf, which they were, we were keen to go there.. I mean, we would have been mad if we didn't go there.

Erica Glynn, 2012

ABC-TV, Celebrating Redfern

The enthusiasm with which people really got behind this project amazed all of us. And people were very supportive, letting us into their homes, up to five days, you know, having 50 people in there. We really did want to stay in the radius of Redfern, and be true to the series and that show contemporary inner city Sydney.

Darren Dale, 2012

Celebrating Redfern

Going global, staying local

Redfern Now is not only a product of robust local collaborations – the Indigenous Unit of the ABC, Blackfella Films, and the experienced Indigenous directors, writers and actors involved in each episode, all in consultation with Redfern Community Organisations and elders. It is also, a product of a particular global aspiration to work with the legendary working-class Liverpudlian screenwriter Jimmy McGovern who, at Sally Riley's request, came over to serve as script advisor on the first season of *Redfern Now*, and who continued for the second season in this role. In thinking about how to bring Indigenous stories to the small screen, Riley had been inspired by McGovern's highly successful UK television dramas, including *Cracker*, *The Lakes*, and *The Street*, which played to considerable acclaim in Australia. The last bears a strong family resemblance to *Redfern Now*, following the residents of different households

on a modest unnamed street in Manchester, whose lives in each episode are changed by a seemingly insignificant incident.

When her total budget of \$5 million a year was approved and *Redfern Now* was still a gleam in her eye, one of Sally Riley's first missives was an email to ask McGovern to see if he would work with her writers on this series. Riley approached him not only because of her admiration for his disciplined and riveting screenwriting. She felt his sensibilities, as someone brought up in a poor working-class family who has successfully captured a sense of lives lived on the margins in his work, would resonate with the stories her writers wanted to tell about the issues affecting a range of Aboriginal families in Redfern, regardless of his cultural background. McGovern, in turn, loved the idea of collaborating on this very original idea for a debut series and came over to Australia to work intensively with the Aboriginal writers and directors as a story producer over several months, helping them to shape their scripts for the both the first and second seasons. As he put it, 'This invitation came out the blue. Like a shot I said I'd love to do it ... to work in Australia with indigenous people on stories about indigenous people, it really gripped me.' (quoted in Fulton 2012). This transnational collaboration was clearly successful. In speaking to *The Guardian* about his role in the process, McGovern called the work "some of the most rewarding I've ever done. The end product is very important, but the process is equally so. If people don't come out of this having learned a great deal, then we've failed." (quoted in Rourke 2012). Leah Purcell, Indigenous actor and director on the series gives a sense of that writing process with McGovern:

He brought expertise and reality. He didn't care who we were... He fine-tuned our stories. I talk blunt and he talks blunt and we learned the s-word – story. I sat and watched him for a few days until I said to him I've got a story and [when he heard it] his eyes lit up. One guy threw out seventeen stories and he slammed them. So story became a sacred word. He's a good bloke and he made us comfortable, as green as some of the writers were. He told us things straight.

Leah Purcell, quoted in Leys, 2012

As is the case with Indigenous media everywhere, space and location are foundational, but in this case, the series itself makes a rarely considered case for the underrepresented significance of Redfern to Aboriginal Australians. Every episode takes place in inner-city Sydney, in the well-known Aboriginal neighborhood of Redfern, all set around The Block, a precinct in Redfern known historically as the center of Aboriginal political action beginning in the 1970s. In the 1970s, Redfern gave birth to Australia's first Indigenous-run housing as well as health, legal, and children's services. It also served as a focal point for civil right demonstrations and the reconciliation movement, leading some to call it a "modern sacred site" for Aboriginal families. Despite poverty, low employment, and discrimination, Redfern was also the place where then-Prime Minister Paul Keating made his now historic 1992 speech, publicly acknowledging that European settlers were responsible for many of the difficulties Aboriginal communities continue to face. Now, it is the site of some controversy regarding its historical

meaning and recognition, due to gentrification and the demolition of buildings that long characterized the rough street sensibility of that neighborhood, such as the ones we see in *Redfern Now*. In the series, the careful choice of place makes a serious if understated claim to the area's significance in Aboriginal Australian history on the streets, in homes and public space, and now on screen.

The question of sovereignty

The broadcast of an all-indigenous television series on primetime TV in Australia is being rightfully celebrated as a groundbreaking moment. My choice of the phrase 'televisual sovereignty' to capture a sense of this social fact is inspired by the phrase "visual sovereignty", initially deployed to characterize certain works by Indigenous artists in the North American context. To the best of my knowledge, the term was first used in 1995 by Tuscarora scholar, artist and curator Jolene Rickard, who argued that the legal-political assertion of sovereignty in the twentieth century has always coexisted with a complex, expressive indigenous visual imaginary (Rickard 1995). Most recently, Seneca scholar Michelle Raheja discussed this genealogy, elaborating on the term and giving it well-deserved recognition in her important 2011 book, *Reservation Reelism: Redfacing, Visual Sovereignty, and Representations of Native Americans in Film*, arguing that this concept "intervenes in larger discussions of Native American sovereignty by locating and advocating for Indigenous cultural and political power both within and outside of Western legal jurisprudence" (Raheja 2011: 194). Raheja builds on the work of a number of scholars. In addition to expanding on Rickard's call for enlarging the boundaries of discourse around Indigenous sovereignty to the arts, she acknowledges the influence of Tewa /Dine (Santa Clara Pueblo) writer and filmmaker Beverly Singer's notion of "cultural sovereignty" to describe Native American filmmakers' strategies to trust "in the older ways and adapting them to our lives in the present" (Singer 2001). Additionally, she recognizes Osage scholar "Robert Allen Warrior's term 'intellectual sovereignty,' which in turn builds on the Lakota activist and intellectual Vine Deloria Jr's understanding of sovereignty 'as an open-ended process' that involves critical and kinetic contemplations of what sovereignty means at different historical and paradigmatic junctures" (Raheja 2011: 194). Raheja concludes her book with a powerful statement about Native American media makers and visual sovereignty that could easily be extended to other relevant contexts, such as Indigenous Australia, and more specifically, *Redfern Now*. She writes:

...video-makers and cultural artists are doing more than simply resisting and surviving, they are interrogating the powers of the state, providing nuanced and complex forms of self-representation, imagining a futurity that militates against the figure of the vanishing Indian, and engaging in visual sovereignty on virtual reservations of their own creation. (Raheja, 2011: 240)

Most recently, Kristin Dowell has taken up this conversation in the Canadian context, using the term “sovereign screens” to capture the sense of how the First Nations filmmakers she worked with incorporated “Aboriginal cultural protocols, languages, and aesthetics on-screen as well as off-screen (Dowell, 2013: 1).

I want to build on this robust intellectual legacy in my exploration of the term televisual sovereignty by acknowledging the different infrastructural demands of particular media regimes, drawing on a classic legal definition of sovereignty as having authority over an area. Here, I am extending the idea of sovereignty’s usual reference to political authority over a land and populace, to consider the significance of being able to have technical and creative control over representations of Indigenous lives on the medium of television, particularly those that claim a place in the national imaginary of a surrounding settler-state, as is the case with the work of the Indigenous Unit for Australia’s ABC. I have had the privilege to witness the two-decade long struggle on the part of Indigenous Australian artists and cultural activists in both remote and urban contexts to develop their voices and visions in moving image media. These Aboriginal writers, directors, actors, musicians, producers have gained increasing control over the means of film and television production to tell their diverse stories on their own terms.

In developing a concept like “televisual sovereignty” it is especially important that we attend to two contextual frames: the material conditions of the platforms on which work appears, and the local histories that shape Indigenous projects in particular locations. Let me start with the question of platforms. *Redfern Now* is scheduled at prime time across the country on the ABC, arguably the most prestigious national television station, enabling this Indigenously produced work to intervene in an Australian national imaginary that for two centuries has excluded, for the most part, the self-authored representation of Indigenous lives in the public sphere, what Raheja aptly identifies as the violence of invisibility. In addition to being mindful of who is in control of creating visual imagery, I also want to consider how ideas of sovereignty might also take into account the question of audience. For example, *Redfern Now*, as a production of the ABC, brings this work into thousands of viewers lives, whether via the domesticated space of what Australians call the “lounge room”, long associated with leisure time built around analog and now digital/satellite/ cable tv; or in the highly mobile locations and potentially time shifted realities of the digital age for those watching on their ipads in cafes or laptops while snuggled in bed. Indeed, current debates about the impact of television vs. film in terms of audience outreach in the cultural hierarchy of funding in Australia are worth noting here. Australian media critic Lynden Barber raised this question effectively in an article in *The Guardian* (October 10, 2012), with the less than subtle title “Better to fund high-end global TV than back Australian films”. As he argued:

For too long Australia has been hobbled by a model in which feature films are the Rolls Royce, and TV dramas the Holden, even as it has become increasingly clear that that way of thinking is outdated. Meanwhile, many Australian feature films strug-

gle to make an impact. While the Indigenous drama *Satellite Boy* got enthusiastic reviews this year,...it managed to earn a week average of only \$3,270 a screen in its crucial opening week (double that number is considered a good figure). But feeble cinema turnouts do not mean that Australian viewers are shunning Australian-made stories. The success of quality Australian television shows like ABC's *Redfern Now*, shows that audiences are keen for more.

This quote helps clarify the complexity of the discursive field that can be encompassed by the idea of Indigenous televisual sovereignty, including the shifting status of television's infrastructural reach and its value in the hierarchy of national funding of Indigenously directed media representations. And while the work of *Redfern Now* (and other scripted dramatic and comedic works coming out of the ABC's revamped Indigenous Department under Riley's leadership since 2010) is at last nearly completely in the hands of Indigenous media makers, including producers, directors, actors, writers, photographers, and musicians, we would be remiss to look at any of this contemporary work without understanding the historical precursors that emerged out of very different Indigenous local histories.

Outback experiments and early indigenous television

Another, earlier version of televisual sovereignty was achieved in the 1980s in the aforementioned media experiment by Indigenous communities in remote central Australia, innovations that captured local and world attention due to the inventive creativity of the Warlpiri Media Association (WMA) and Ernabella Video and Television (EVTV), both on and off screen. A comparison of the circumstances of *Redfern Now* with these historical precursors, I suggest, draws our attention to the importance of the specificity, contingency and diversity of Aboriginal television in different times and locations, rendering the idea of televisual sovereignty more enduring and complex. The experiments began in remote traditional communities, initially in the Aboriginal settlements of Ernabella (Pitjantjatjara lands) where EVTV was established, and Yuendumu (Warlpiri lands) with the creation of the WMA, in South and Central Australia respectively. Both established their own local television and were originally considered "pirate" as there was no licensing category by which these diy workarounds could comply with existing state regulations for television stations at that time. I think of these as an early distinctive assertion of televisual sovereignty; they were based on local control, organized along principles and values of Indigenous social life, used the languages of Warlpiri and Pitjantjatjara as well as cultural idioms drawing on their histories and repertoires, and imagined as performances for their own communities. The work emerged initially as a defensive response to the launch of Australia's first communications satellite over their lands and the cultural impositions that followed this event; the sudden availability of dominant commercial television when there had been almost nothing prior to that

was seen as particularly threatening to young people's engagements with Indigenous cultural practices. Indeed, in the mid 1980s, satellite television in Australia initially was seen by Indigenous residents – borrowing a term from Inuit counterparts – as the third invader, following guns and alcohol (Kuptana 1988). As creative acts of resistance, these early innovations in creating television by and for people living in remote Aboriginal communities offered alternative ways to imagine what media could mean in terms of Indigenous collective self-production, outside the hegemonic model of western television. Scholars and media activists, myself included, saw this work as empirical evidence of a kind of embedded cultural critique, an aesthetic, socially creative, political alternative to mass media that was not beholden to either governmentality or late capitalist interests (Ginsburg 1994).

This sense of possibility was first articulated in the work of American researcher Eric Michaels, in particular the 1986 publication of his report on his research with the community of Yuendumu, with the intriguing title *The Aboriginal Invention of Television in Central Australia*. Among other things, his work showed the complex epistemologies surrounding moving image production in traditional Aboriginal life – including the significance of recognizing appropriate members of kin, clan and ceremonial groups regarding who was in front of and behind the camera for particular kinds of performances. During a shoot, for example, the presence of particular ritual custodians, for example, served as a source of authentication as to the truth-value of the final product for local viewers. Restrictions on images of people who had passed away, or on ceremonies meant to be seen only by those who had been initiated (usually elder males or females), meant that certain works could not be circulated for long stretches of time or could be seen only in very restricted contexts.

Now, over a quarter century later, Warlpiri Media is linked to a network of local indigenous media initiatives called PAW Media.⁵ This, in turn, is part of a broad web of remote community media now called Indigenous Community Television, “an open forum to promote and celebrate remote indigenous talent, culture, language, history and innovation” launched in April 2013 enabling full-time programming of community-produced Indigenous media for remote Aboriginal audiences across Central Australia.⁶ The Indigenous Remote Communications Association (IRCA), founded in 2001, was instrumental in launching this initiative.⁷

The Indigenous Department at the ABC also has a history that goes back to the 1980s as discussed briefly above. The ABC's Aboriginal Programs Unit, as it was called then, was formed in 1988, during Australia's Bicentenary; it was a response to demands made by Indigenous protestors seeking a remedy to their lack of representation on national television (Ginsburg 1991). At that time, every Indigenous person involved in the Unit was a trainee, under the direction of a Euro-Australian professional. There simply were not enough Aboriginal writers, directors, producers, and actors to fulfill the ideal of an Indigenously governed entity, an imagined utopian formation that is foundational to a claim to sovereignty, but was only realized a quarter century after the Aboriginal unit was first created. Given the lack of capacity and budget for producing dramatic

or fictional work, most Indigenous productions at that time were non-fiction works, what filmmaker Frances Peters-Little (Kamilaroi), one of the few Indigenous women on staff at that time, described as the documentary ghetto. Consider her comments in 1991, expressing her concern about the limitations she and others faced at that time, and her prescient prediction of what was to come.

Its still like you've got to run to a non-Aboriginal person to make decisions about Aboriginal people. Ethically that's wrong. And it's not as effective. ...We're being very realistic, and we know that the Aboriginal person who takes a position as Executive Producer or whatever for our unit has got to be someone who not only knows us, but has got to be someone who knows the ABC. We need to be more in contact with more community based filmmakers or artists or whatever to give us more influence within mainstream television. Because one of these days, most Australian people will get to see the sort of programs that Aboriginal people will have complete control over and then they will get to really see what an Aboriginal perspective is. At this moment, we know we're compromising so that they can swallow what we have to say.

Frances Peters-Little quoted in Satellite Dreaming (1991)

In these early years of Indigenous efforts to change the Australian mediascape in the nation's mainstream institutions, it was as if these young activists such as Frances Peters-Little, were seeking the equivalent of land claims on the televisual spectrum. With the help of more experienced Euro-Australians, they hoped eventually to gain skills and recognition for a place in the national imaginary on their own terms, an acknowledgment that had long been denied them, and which in 1988 still seemed a distant hope. Much as the longstanding Aboriginal settlement of Australia was denied by British occupiers through the legal fiction of *terra nullius* – land inhabited by no one – until it was finally overturned in the famous 1992 Mabo case (Mabo v. Queensland 1992)⁸, the absence of Indigenously directed representations on national Australian screens left a vacuum that until the 1980s, was never even challenged as being anything other than the imagined natural order of things.

Frances was one of a new generation of Aboriginal Australian storytellers who had moved from the traditional media available to their forebears – justifiably famous for their remarkable ceremonial song, dance, and graphic designs painted on their bodies, barks and the desert sand – to film and television, the dominant media of the surrounding settler culture of the late 20th century. This sense of passage across media forms was captured in the title “From Sand to Celluloid”, given to the first series of remarkable short films made through the Indigenous Unit of the Australian Film Commission, the first Aboriginal films to be broadcast on the ABC in 1996.⁹ These works were created by Indigenous filmmakers who got their start in that now seemingly distant analog era of 16 and 35 mm film, here metonymically identified as celluloid.

The burden of representation reconsidered

As has happened in many locations over the last quarter century, including in the UK with the Black workshop movement that started in London with Black British diasporic media artists such as Isaac Julien and John Akomfrah (Fusco 1988), this first generation of media makers both in Britain and their Indigenous counterparts in Australia faced a similar dilemma. As postcolonial scholar Kobena Mercer famously argued in his landmark 1990 *Third Text* article, “Black Art and the Burden of Representation”, those first acknowledged as black artists carried a distinctive weight on their generational shoulders, to fill an enormous gap in a representational economy that was almost devoid of their stories. The burden Mercer wrote about was the expectation that they would have to somehow depict some imagined cohesive collectivity representing their diasporic lives, despite the complex intersections of history, location, culture, sexuality and gender that shaped the diverse sensibilities of artists from a variety of backgrounds. At the same time, these cultural activists were responding to what one might think of as a sense of narrative urgency, to create work expressive of their distinctive experiences and concerns. They faced both the opportunity and burden to begin to intervene in an imagined community in which Indigenous voices were either absent, framed as exotic primitives, or worse, associated with crime and social decay.¹⁰

Now, a generation of Indigenous media makers who came of age in the same period as their Black British counterparts – in the late 1980s and early 1990s – has been able to move beyond the burden of representation that they originally carried, secure in their own capacity to shape and indigenize Australian screens and in the knowledge that diverse Indigenous voices across Australia have access to a range of platforms appropriate to their circumstances. Individually and as a group, they had gained experience through the variety of above-mentioned remarkable programs (and more) that helped launch their work onto the Australian mediascape as well as the world stage. Crucial to what one sees on screen, are the off-screen opportunities, the extraordinary capacity building in the Aboriginal media sector that took place under Sally Riley’s visionary training programs during her decade-long tenure as head of the Indigenous Unit at the Australian Film Commission.

In 2010, Sally Riley was hired by Kim Dalton; he had been her boss at the Australian Film Commission and then moved to the ABC in 2006; among the changes he wanted to take on was the opportunity to revamp the ABC’s indigenous unit into a department. At that time, the unit was producing forty-two episodes of the 30-minute Sunday afternoon magazine program *Message Stick* and three or four documentaries a year. As Dalton explained, “It was good work, but it was peripheral. It sat on the edges, outside the mainstream. For the most part, indigenous faces and stories and creative talent have not been represented on our TV screens, particularly in prime time.” (Dalton quoted in Quinn 2012). Dalton hired Riley with a clear brief to “get indigenous material out of the ghetto.” The documentaries remain but her department focuses on developing both drama and comedy. *Redfern Now* is the first product of

that new Department, the initial test of a change of direction in how indigenous stories might be told on the national broadcaster. Riley stepped into that role with nothing less than plans to change the place of Indigenous Australians in the country's televisual imaginary, much as she helped to indigenize Australia's film world during her prior ten years at the Australian Film Commission. As Riley explained to *The Guardian*: "for so long we have had other people telling our stories and the government telling us what we should be doing to help ourselves. This is a chance for us to comment on our own problems, our own issues" (Riley quoted in Rourke 2012).

With *Redfern Now*, as well as other dramas currently in production, the Indigenous Department has the relatively newfound luxury of a range of experienced Aboriginal talent to write, direct, stage, and act in these productions that interpellate indigenous, Euro-Australian and other audiences. No longer consigned to graveyard timeslots, magazine formats, or the more limited audiences for documentary works, dramatic series such as *Redfern Now* are part of a burgeoning range of increasingly complex representations of Aboriginal lives on large and small screens, from both remote and urban communities, what I have written about recently as Australia's Indigenous New Wave. No single film, program, or theater piece, has to carry the weight of the collective need to be recognized and represented in all its diversity (Ginsburg 2012). *Redfern Now*, along with other projects in development by the Indigenous Department,¹¹ demonstrate how far indigenous Australian Television has come in 25 years. Not only is this series an outstanding exemplar of contemporary Indigenous media by any measure. Now, these Indigenous media makers are able to lay claim to televisual sovereignty, expanding far beyond the proverbial burden of representation that haunted the work of the Indigenous producers who entered this arena a quarter century ago.

Notes

1. Outback images persist as the primary location for Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander people, despite the fact that by 2006, 32% of Australia's Indigenous population lives in the country's major cities. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/lookup/4704.0Chapter210Oct+2010> (Accessed 15 February 2015)
2. In 2001, the first Indigenously directed film won the Camera d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival: *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* made by Zach Kunuk and the Igloodik Isuma collective. <http://www.isuma.tv/atanarjuat> Accessed 15 February 2015

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This chapter first emerged from a presentation given at the October 2012 conference *In the Balance: Indigeneity, Performance and Globalization*, in London, organized by Helen Gilbert, and took on new shape and energy as a keynote lecture given at the Voice and Matter conference held in September 2014 in Malmö, Sweden and Roskilde, Denmark. As always, I owe profound thanks to my longstanding relationships with many extraordinary Indigenous cultural activists in Australia whose creativity and insights offer constant inspiration. In this case, I am especially appreciative of opportunities to observe production and ongoing conversations with Sally Riley, Erica Glynn, Rachel Perkins, Kath Shelper and Warwick Thornton, as well as Wayne Blair, Beck Cole, Darren Dale and Catriona McKenzie. Thanks to initial comments on earlier drafts from Fred Myers and Pegi Vail.

3. For more information, see <http://www.witbn.org/> Accessed 15 February 2015
4. For more information about the International Sami Film Centre, see <http://www.isf.as/eng/about/> Accessed 15 February 2015
5. PAW is an acronym drawn from the first initial of the three primary language /cultural groups in the Tanami area that make up the network: Pintubi, Anmatjere, and Warlpiri. <http://www.pawmedia.com.au/about-us/history> Accessed 15 February 2015
6. <http://www.irca.net.au/sector/ictv> Accessed 15 February 2015
7. <http://www.irca.net.au/about-irca/history> Accessed 15 February 2015
8. For text of that decision, see <http://www.foundingdocs.gov.au/item-did-33.html> Accessed 15 February 2015
9. For information about this remarkable series see <http://nfsa.gov.au/collection/film-australia-collection/program-sales/search-programs/program/?sn=4710>; works that were recently rescreened on Australia's National Indigenous Television, NITV, <http://www.nitv.org.au/fx-program.cfm?pid=8425993C-DBF0-ED84-1AAD54660F536633&sid=85717441-EC00-064D-A88C0A65D1B3F8F3> Both sites accessed 16 February 2015
10. Recent series include a dramatic series *The Gods of Wheat Street* <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/programs/gods-of-wheat-street/> and a comedic series based in Alice Springs entitled *Black Comedy* <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/programs/black-comedy/> Both sites accessed 15 February 2015.

Gringo Trails, Gringo Tales

Storytelling, Destination Perspectives, and Tourism Globalization

Pegi Vail

Abstract

Tourism is one of the most powerful forms of cultural encounter today with an increasingly crucial role in the global economy. The documentary film, *Gringo Trails* explores the long-term effects of tourism globalization on cultures, economies and the environment in the developing world through the lens of budget backpacker travelers and their storytelling. This chapter explores the travel narrative to *tourism globalization* as it was visualized over a 30-year timespan through *Gringo Trails* and traces the effect of the film itself through its journey at international screenings and in press coverage. Tracking the film's trajectory from its premiere in late 2013 through 2015 and the reactions to it either verbally or in print provides the catalyst for a discussion on the role of long-term, ethnographic filmic observation and research in exploring globalization processes; and, connects media practices to the scholarship on development, tourism studies, and the anthropology of tourism.

Keywords: tourism, backpacker subculture, narrative, ethnographic film, gentrification, globalization

My documentary *Gringo Trails* explores the long-term effects of global tourism, traveling from the Bolivian jungle to the party beaches of Thailand, and from the deserts of Timbuktu, Mali to the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan. The film shows the unanticipated impact of tourism on cultures, economies, and the environment, tracing some stories for over three decades. While the film offers a cautionary tale of unintended consequences, it does so to illustrate what has, and can happen in places without proper planning or tourism management. However, *Gringo Trails* also features a number of sustainable solutions to destinations, as well. The hope in circulating the film is to actively engage with communities or countries facing similar challenges that come with tourism growth. In this piece I want to provide a more detailed outline and background of the making of the film in order to best understand its relationship to the arena of "Communication for Development" that provided the scholarly umbrella under which the conference and screening took place.

I initially set out in 1999 to make an ethnographic documentary exploration of backpackers; to examine how the subculture, along with their storytelling, plays a major role within the larger tourism industry and culture. I have traveled extensively myself to over 80 countries. Throughout my 20s and early 30s I journeyed far off the beaten path as an independent traveler for extended periods of time, often as a backpacker, throughout Africa, Asia, Middle East, Europe, and the Americas so I was very familiar with the subculture. I had also decided by 1999 to make the focus of my dissertation research for my Ph.D. in sociocultural anthropology the political economy of travel and tourism in the developing world. More specifically, I was exploring how backpacker travel narratives usher in, and foster the tourism development process—a process I am calling *tourism globalization*. Thus, it was both through my personal experience with travel (having witnessed the tourism industry's uncontrolled growth in so many regions globally over an extended period of time), and my then emerging professional interest in the topic of tourism as an anthropologist that spawned my interest in making the documentary. Our first shoot was during the summer of 1999 in West Africa.

We filmed in Burkina Faso and Mali on that first shoot, followed by Thailand in December/January 1999-2000 and again in December/January 2009-2010. My dissertation fieldwork as a Fulbright Scholar took place in Bolivia during 2002, with preliminary research previously funded by a Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship in summer 2000 that enabled our first documentary shoot in Bolivia. Through the funding we received via crowd-sourcing on a Kickstarter campaign, we returned to Bolivia for our final shoot there in 2010. Bhutan was added to the documentary in 2012. There was therefore a long gap in between the initial filming period to when we returned to the project. But it was precisely due to this gap that transformed the project from an ethnography of global backpacker subculture to one where we could visually track how much had dramatically changed in some of these destinations because of tourism development – both positive and negative. Indeed, the almost decade-long break in filming coincided with a tremendous, rapid growth of the tourism industry worldwide, positioning it among the top few global industries. Depending on who is compiling the statistics, some claim it is has risen to number one. *According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO)*, in 1950, there were 25 million international travelers. Today, over 1 billion people are traveling around the planet. That number is set to double again to over 2 billion by 2027. We are at a tipping point. It is therefore a crucial time to assess the past and to assure planning ahead is a key component in this next decade of tourism expansion. Thirty years ago we didn't have the kind of hindsight we do today as to the cultural and environmental impact of tourism.

The latter period of filming was deeply informed by my scholarly research, having by then completed my New York University Ph.D. dissertation in 2004, entitled "Right of Passage: Backpacker Narratives and the "Gentrification" of Tourism in Bolivia".

Responsible travel

Backpackers had often been dismissed as not having an important effect on the development of the tourism industry, but to the contrary: they are the ones who most often open the doors to the industry, *especially* low-income countries where the tourism infrastructure was/is minimal to non-existent. In fact, I liken the role of backpackers to middle class artists moving into poor, urban neighborhoods in industrialized nations who then spearhead gentrification in those locales. Based on my research, the majority of backpackers visiting developing nations, like artists moving into lower income urban areas, hail from middle-class to upper-income backgrounds in developed countries even if they are traveling (or living) on a shoestring budget. Through their privileged positions that allow for freedom of movement and choice based on economic class, both subcultures are key to these processes: gentrification and tourism globalization. By providing a visual tool in the form of a documentary to show the process over time, I intended it assist those working in “development” fields as well as within the travel industry, and for local companies/communities facing both the difficulties and opportunities tourism can bring to pinpoint where along the way a destination’s course could have been altered. What action can those facing similar circumstances in their communities take to avoid the pitfalls of a negative impact to their cultures and the environment? For young travelers about to set out, I also wanted it to encourage responsible travel; to recognize their own significance. As Lina Brochierri, *Gringo Trails*’ featured traveler in Mali put it:

I thought of myself as this sort of invisible traveler who has no impact on the place they visit. And so, in a way my idea of traveling was a very selfish experience. Totally selfish. It was just, it was just about me going to these places and being affected and inspired and meeting people. And that’s something I had to reflect upon after my trip.

Her honest musing is indeed a valuable reminder of our presence in places.

For those seasoned or older travelers the film has provided a means to reflect on previous journeys and perhaps consider ways to ‘give back’ and/or to work in the industry as a proponent of sustainable tourism development. As examples of this, the documentary highlighted two stories by former backpackers who accomplished the above. In Thailand, Costas Christ is seen as among the first young intrepid travelers in 1979 to “discover” Koh Pha Ngan, a once pristine island in southern Thailand that subsequently grew into a full-fledged backpacker scene by the late 1980s-early 1990s. It has since become known as a mecca for monthly hedonistic gatherings – the infamous “full moon” parties that still take place. In fact, there are now several a month: new moon, quarter moon, and full moon parties. By the time we filmed on Haadrin beach on Koh Pha Ngan for a combined New Years/full moon celebration in 2010 there were approximately 50,000 partygoers in attendance. What began as stories shared through word-of-mouth about this beautiful island in 1979 were eventually institutionalized by being included in the guidebooks and then ultimately fictionalized in novels and

feature films like *The Beach*, a book released in 1996 by Alex Garland which was made into a Hollywood movie in 2000, directed by Danny Boyle. The trajectory of storytelling, traced through these different forms, and their role in bringing waves of travelers to this destination, was crucial. This is one of the key points made in *Gringo Trails*, which also brings up the greater point of travel writing and its influence, which Christ himself discussed when he claimed he thought he'd "missed it already" with regards to former journeys recounted by travel luminaries like 19th century's Sir. Richard Burton.

Gringo Trails' interview with Yossi Ghinsberg also spoke to the role of travel stories and their inspiration on him: in 1981 he was a backpacker traveling in South America, "looking for adventure". Much of his search was deeply influenced by the previous adventure books he'd read, but as he says in the documentary:

This was my time to be the hero and not to read about the hero and I was driven to the remote and the unusual and the tribal and romanticizing about that.

Ghinsberg gets lost in the jungle, survives, and writes a book about his own travel experiences (originally titled *Back From Tuichi* in 1975, later renamed *Jungle*). In turn, *his* book brought backpackers looking for similar adventures after its publication. Tourism development ensued, and the cycle continues. Or, as another *Gringo Trails* featured travel writer Rolf Potts put it in relationship to Koh Pha Ngan, Thailand:

that scene transforms and burns itself out here and comes back up in another place.

However, these travelers have 'given back': Costas Christ is now the Editor at Large of National Geographic Traveler and an international expert of sustainable tourism. He chaired the World Travel and Tourism Council's Tourism for Tomorrow Awards for a decade and as of 2014, he launched and administers National Geographic's World Legacy Awards in conjunction with ITB Berlin. Both awards honor exceptional sustainability efforts and best practices in tourism overall. These types of activities support the message of *Gringo Trails* in ensuring better, more responsible tourism development than what happened on Koh Pha Ngan, that warns of disaster if left unchecked.

Chief Freddy Limaco Navi, of San José de Uchupiamonas, the community that helped find and save Ghinsberg from the forest, reiterated the importance of control, particularly by local communities towards their own destiny:

Tourism, when you control it, is a very good industry. But if goes out of one's control, is when you can see the differences. In regards to the benefits of what tourism has generated for us, great effort has gone into training the people of our community for the future.

Chalalán Ecolodge

San José de Uchupiamonas, a Quechua-Tacana indigenous community in northwest Bolivia, also benefitted from the notion of a traveler "giving back" just as the world's

eco-tourism movement has benefited from Christ's life work in sustainable travel and tourism. Ghinsberg returned to San José to thank the community eleven years later, only to find himself drawn into helping them fund their vision to open an ecolodge. They had the dream but no resources, with half the population having already left the community for work elsewhere due to lack of employment opportunities and little financial savings to launch a project of this magnitude. This prompted the remaining members to come up with ideas for sustaining their livelihood and community. Because some of the members had worked in the non-indigenous, non-community based tourism agencies nearby (initiated as a result of the tourism growth after Ghinsberg's book was released in 1985), they felt they could create a better project that would both benefit them financially and enable them to teach visitors about their culture, heritage, and environment. As Limaco Navi said:

We looked for something that would be much different – something to share – something we could explain what the forest means to us. Nature is something that for our grandparents and for our ancestors meant a lot.

In the end, Chalalán Ecolodge was born in the forest at Chalalán Lake, a three-hour boat trip down the Tuichi River from San José de Uchupiamonas. It was one of the first community businesses in Bolivia and one of the first pilot projects in South America to become an example throughout Latin America for others hoping to have community –based tourism initiatives. Yossi Ghinsberg assisted in making this happen by first educating himself about ecology, biodiversity, and ecotourism and subsequently helping to raise one and a half million dollars for the project. As a result of further combined efforts, including Conservation International coming on board, the larger Madidi National Park was formed in 1995, within which Chalalán is situated. With an area covering 18,958 square kilometers, along with the protected areas Manuripi-Heath, Apolobamba and the Manu Biosphere Reserve in Peru this forms one of the largest protected areas in the world.

Gringo Trails in distribution

Tracking the progress of what I hoped to accomplish with the film after it was released, to see if my intentions of advocacy or usefulness were realized through the film's international circulation and distribution was an equally important goal to the messages presented in the film itself. Some of this is evidenced by reading the substantial press the film has received internationally (eg. Al Jazeera, The New York Times, CNN, Der Spiegel, Conde Nast Traveler, National Geographic Traveler, Travel and Leisure, South China Morning Post, Globo, Calcalist, The Daily Beast, among others). I saw the nerve hit within the industry and travel press on this topic as being among the first films to look critically at our role as travelers, along with the tourism industry itself. Because the tourism industry is considered one of 'leisure,' it hadn't been explored in this way

in film through an ethnographic or social issue feature-length documentary lens. An exception, and inspiration for me was the groundbreaking 1987 *Cannibal Tours* by the late director Dennis O'Rourke with its documentation of a packaged tour along the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea. In addition, backpackers have largely been under the radar when critiques of tourism have surfaced as they are not seen as a part of the problems associated with mass tourism. For sure, they have long distanced themselves from it. Yet as Costas Christ pointed out in the film, backpackers have a "herd mentality", which is merely another form of mass tourism (albeit low-budget). Meanwhile, even through members of the subculture have long preferred the term "traveler" to "tourist" and even "traveler" to "backpacker" as a distancing mechanism, *Gringo Trails'* interviewee, sociologist Eric Cohen maintained "it's gone from backpacking to backpackaging".

Some of press received included titles of articles that were already indicative of the role the film was having on the industry, like "Is the Party Over" in *Fox News* and "Trouble in Paradise" in the *Today Show* online travel section, while quotes pulled from articles have given a glimpse into the effect the film has provoked for conversation among the travel community:

a fascinating and beautifully shot documentary called *Gringo Trails* about what happens to those faraway beaches, jungles, cultures after the crush of tourists arrive...should be required viewing for all thoughtful travelers. *Conde Nast Traveler*

Gringo Trails depicts in sometimes shocking images, the bad, the ugly and yes, the good sides of tourism, sparking much needed discussions about what it means to be a traveler *National Geographic Traveler*

How do we reconcile our romantic images of the world with the truth of what our presence in those places means? *AOL Gadling*

a thought-provoking documentary...that largely de-romanticizes a travel subculture that thrives on romanticized self-perception...but it's not an anti-backpacker film. In fact, it ends on a hopeful, prescriptive note. *Travel Weekly*

Whether you're an armchair traveler or you're working through a bucket list of exotic destinations, it's an important and moving film. *Outside Magazine*

When CNN International published an article on the film that included an interview with me in early January 2014, "Is Tourism Destroying the World", it was shared on Facebook over 23,000 times. CNN.com Travel's supervising producer Chuck Thompson told me via email that the story "hit a nerve at CNN" International Travel section and it was the "#2 most looked at story on CNN International" that weekend. I have subsequently been writing myself on solutions to the problems shown in the film, including being a featured debater in the *New York Times'* Room For Debate on "Smaller Footprints on the World's Welcome Mats" with a contribution I wrote entitled, "Travelers Can Choose to Make a Difference". Therefore, the film also had

a long-term impact on my own work and activism towards finding solutions to the cultural and environmental concerns that have arisen as a result of tourism. My way of ‘giving back’.

I have also either participated in panels or listened to the travel industry’s response in major conferences such as the World Travel Tourism Council’s (WTTC) Summit and at the International Tourism Exchange (ITB) in Berlin, the world’s largest tourism trade fair. At the WTTC Summit in China in 2014, the film was discussed in a keynote panel on sustainability and the future of tourism practices by panelists with BBC journalist Nick Ross, who opened the discussion to include how *Gringo Trails* has made people rethink how sustainable they actually are, even if they think they are traveling well or traveling only as backpackers. At the NY Travel Festival in 2015, which is more oriented to social media travel entrepreneurs and travel writers or bloggers, many told me that the topic of the film had caused a stir in the travel writing community globally, especially because it focused mainly on backpacker tourists, who as mentioned previously thought they were immune to causing any kind of negative impact and the majority of these writers are former backpackers, themselves. That said, I do think backpackers can be, and are great travelers who spend more time, more money locally, and more immersion into the communities they visit. It’s just that there more of us/tourists on the road today – from backpackers to luxury tourists. This means there will be more of both the positive and negative impacts of tourism unless we make some serious changes today regarding future planning.

The film’s influence as an educational tool in colleges and universities is evidenced by the film’s distribution. Through our North American distributor, Icarus Films, we were their number one selling title to educational institutions for over a year in 2014-15 and began our European distribution with our international partner, Andana Films, based in France in 2015. Numerous college campus screenings have also taken place across the USA, Austria, Canada, and Germany, among others.

Finally, another way to gauge the effects the film has had on travelers and the general public have been during our many post-screening discussions and Q&As around the world. *Gringo Trails* has had over fifty international screenings in twenty countries. Myself, or me and my husband, the film’s producer with me and the cinematographer have done thirty Q&As to this point so we have seen interesting differences in questions raised based on the viewing culture. We were excited to screen in New Zealand at the Documentary Edge International Festival in 2014, for instance, because New Zealanders are among the most seasoned travelers in the world. New Zealand has a passport possession rate of around 75 per cent of the population compared to 46 per cent of Americans with passports; a common phrase heard is that “there are more New Zealanders out of the country traveling than in New Zealand”. Due to their experiences, their questions often focus on this long history of travelers in places, so their personal travel impact culturally and environmentally was of heightened interest. In Ireland, however, where the role of “the story” and “storytelling” is integral to the culture, they asked more about the literary and storytelling aspects of the film, particularly about

tracing the stories over a long period of time as well as wanting to know more about the meaning and history of the term “gringo”.

In Germany, where there is also a long history of independent and backpacker travel, there is additionally a strong environmental stance with many institutionalized and activist outlets advocating for “green” or environmental issues. After many screenings on three different trips to Germany (outside North America, we have screened in Germany most often), we were asked very direct, pragmatic questions related to the environmental issues raised in the film and suggestions were always offered by audience members. In the USA, while backpacking culture abroad to developing nations has grown a lot over the last two decades, it is still nowhere near as prevalent as it is with Europeans, Australians, New Zealanders, Argentineans, or Israelis for example. So the role of tourism’s effects on the environment were strongly emphasized. Most notable were those viewers in the USA who expressed feelings of ‘guilt’ as tourists as many asked whether they shouldn’t travel at all? Meanwhile, after a screening at Asia Society in Hong Kong, China for their *Green Docs* series, a few viewers asked if I thought there are any difference in the tourist behavior by the ‘newer’ travelers: increasing numbers of young Chinese tourists? Or with others from the rising numbers of tourists en route the fellow BRIC nations of Brazil, Russia, and India?

With this in mind, I am including a transcript excerpt of a select few questions and answers from the post-screening Q&A at the Voice & Matter conference. Unlike some of the audiences just mentioned, this audience was a very diverse, large group representing numerous countries. I have thus edited down and added minimal notes for clarity [in brackets] for readers who have not seen the film:

Q: I wonder if you could say a bit more about your choice as a filmmaker to interperse different scenes with stories and storytellers and their role of storytelling is a part of development of tourism and your choices how to include that. I think you did it in a very understated way, but there is a very strong hypothesis there about what people get, but also about what are some of the consequences.

It’s interesting to think about in relation to the theme of this conference, and the framing of the conference around ‘voice’: whose voices have been heard? What stories have been told about people and places? I wanted to index that and to look at the role of “whose story is it?” What gets told [travelers vs. locals’ stories] that represent a place and what is the effect on our imagination of that destination? ...To replicate the travel experience itself by including storytelling – having people swap stories on the road or telling stories [about their trip] when they return. This then leads people to write books about these places and ultimately, feature films [may] get made about them. So I wanted to look at the whole trajectory of storytelling [starting with word-of-mouth to full stories]... how they facilitate tourism globalization.

Q: Towards the end [of the documentary] you present this concept of presenting this from happening in the future in different places. I would like to know what is

the feedback on that...this concept of 'preventative' models being acknowledged and incorporated by other actors in the tourism industry?

The two examples, Bhutan and Chalalán Ecolodge are quite different, but both [illustrate] the role of supporting local, indigenous, or community-based initiatives vs. maybe going to one of the large, foreign [owned] chain operators where money bleeds out of the country. I really wanted to show examples. With the Chalalán Ecolodge and the Yossi Ghinsberg story we were also looking full circle at how travelers can be responsible while at the same time show how locals can get their vision and tourism initiative off the ground...In the case of Chalalán Ecolodge, the community members from San Jose de Uchupiamonas had a vision, but they didn't have money. [*note: Yossi Ghinsberg helped the community raise money nationally and internationally*]. But... and we've heard a lot today about NGOs and the role of NGOs... that what happens later is that when some organization, an outside organization, comes in and gives money how much control is then left with this local initiative? In this case they had a deal [contract] where they would ultimately maintain a total control after a certain amount of years. Sometimes that happens, sometimes it doesn't. It actually took a bit of struggle for them to regain that control...[but] this was an early example [mid-1990s] that set the stage for a lot of other indigenous and community-based [tourism businesses] in South America, which is great. And there are many around the world now.

Bhutan, I think, is just a great example of showing the privilege that we have as travelers. Sometimes I hear people say, "Oh, but that means I can't go, I can't afford that [\$250-a-day mandate]", but then we have to ask: what right do any of us have as travelers to go there at the first place? So it brings other interesting areas for thought about such policies, not just the policy itself, but the ramifications for this [form of privilege tourism represents].

Q: I am curious if you've been able to get feedback from the current generation of backpackers, yourself and everyone included, from the impact perspective that we have been hearing about (and who are just starting this experience)? Everyone in this film has gone through it and can say now, "I know that we messed up and we did this wrong."

That's a great question, because so much here is about reflection [in the film] from the travelers that have been featured, and by all the young people that we've talked to who have seen the film. Of course, it depends on the culture, and it depends on the country they are coming from...we cannot homogenize young travelers...But they have all expressed an excitement having seen it, because they are going to think differently when they head out to travel. And it's partially one of the reasons why I wanted to do this documentary, so these young travelers have an available tool for thought. There has actually been quite a good reaction from the audiences that we've shown [the film] to. And they've really been proactive in wanting to "do something". And by "do" I don't mean that you have to be a volunteer [or do voluntourism], but to be more aware and to know what your impact is, where you're going, and to knowing more about the cultures you are visiting ahead of time. If you are a higher income

tourist and you are going to some resort, then find about their [sustainability and best tourism] practices ahead, it is easy with Google to do that! Find out if they hire local people in manager positions or if the resort is owned by a local organization? What are their environmental practices?

Q: Have you looked at some larger impacts on countries where people are coming from? The impacts of tourism on the countries back home?

I did a radio interview in New Zealand. They were interested in the “freedom campers” there [in New Zealand]. They are mainly New Zealanders or Australians. You can go camping to certain places where it’s free [and is designated as such], but there is a big issue now about people leaving trash like some of the issues that were brought up in the film on the beach in Thailand, so it definitely sparked some conversation around those countries...what’s happening there – the parallels...The difference is that the stakes are higher in lower income countries [who may rely on tourism and have more challenges responding to tourism influx with their limited resources].

Q: I come from southern Albania. When I was born, there were hardly any tourists there, but then after the 90s some of the first tourists started to come, and all of a sudden the country was being written about somewhere on the Internet and buildings started to be built all around and many tourists started to come. From the 1990s for 10 years locals contributed to transforming this country – just like every Greek island. And then 10 years after these first tourists came and found these ideal spots, they say, “We had enough of this place, let’s now go and discover some places where tourists haven’t been yet.” So tourists are going to one spot after the other in southern Albania and I don’t think there is any spot undiscovered anymore, but that is what happens...and the tourists have left the mess behind...What drives these tourists just to go somewhere and just destroy a place?

I don’t think people go out to destroy. They actually go out to enjoy. I love your country of Albania! I was actually doing a tourism evaluation site visit there for the World Travel Tourism Council’s Tourism for Tomorrow Awards and there are some places in the mountainous villages in the Dinaric Alps where there have been long discussions [between members of the tourism industry and government representatives with villagers] on how the villagers want to have tourism received in their communities on the mountain trek routes. And they are working on their vision to be heard in the process of tourism planning. So, there have actually been some very good initiatives that have been going on in Albania. But I have no idea about the beaches there. I can imagine, like anywhere that happens with beautiful beaches...Thinking about places like Myanmar, formerly Burma, where I remember going in 1980s and where you could only stay for a week... And then slowly that door was opened. How can you control those floods of people coming in?

In case of Thailand on Koh Pha Ngan [featured in Gringo Trails], travelers came in and opened the doors to tourism. But there is a difference between the first traveler in

the film in 1979 who said, “I’m looking for nothing,” and then the next guy in 1989 we interviewed who said, “I’m looking for something” [re: the “backpacker scene”]. . . You then see waves of backpackers a decade or more later coming mainly just for the full moon party. So you see what people look for in each of these different stages. . . Where were the loopholes in the tourism globalization process? Where are the points along the way that you can say, okay, we’re in this process in here in Thailand or Bolivia, what could we do differently at each stage? . . . So I wanted to show all those different places and where tourism development could have probably taken a different turn. What are the ways that it could have happened differently? It is a good exercise for teaching.

Ethnographic film

It was this last response to the question above that brings in a teaching method I have been using with the film in discussions among travelers; at talks with various sectors at tourism industry conferences and meetings; in recent scholarly lectures at universities; or when in consultation with local communities experiencing an influx of tourism. I ask each to examine at different points along the way where their ‘group’ might have acted differently in the case of Koh Pha Ngan island’s tourism development in Thailand – our cautionary tale in the film. How might have alternate actions in each era altered the course of development as it transpired there? Having the visual tool tracing development over 30 years has been a way into analyzing the past in order to better plan for the future. Additionally, it is a means to allow different voices to be heard and empowered in the process within a world industry poised to grow ever larger.

In conclusion, my hope through this piece was to emphasize the importance of ethnographic film and the visual to the scholarship on development, tourism studies, and the anthropology of tourism; to explore the critical role that documentary distribution and a documentary’s effect can play in the relationship between media, communication and social change; and to consider the role of the storytelling voice in what comes to matter.

III. The Return of the Politics of Hope

Debating the Politics of Hope

An Introduction

Ronald Stade

Abstract

In recent years, Arjun Appadurai has discussed the unequal distribution and development of the human capacity to aspire in an attempt to synthesize different analytical strands into a unified perspective on poverty. In this chapter, the concept of the capacity to aspire is disaggregated into its constituent conceptual parts for the sake of advancing the discussion on the politics of hope, especially with regard to the philosophical legacy of Ernst Bloch.

Keywords: voice, hope, cosmopolitanism, poverty, culture, difference

The not-yet

‘It is a question of learning hope,’ wrote the German philosopher Ernst Bloch (1995: 3) in the wake of the Second World War and Holocaust. Bloch declared – perhaps against his better judgement – that the creators of fear had been dealt with and that it was time to foster hope. On Bloch’s view, hope is both an expression of the human capacity for optimism and a response to negation and absence. That is, hope exists both as a possibility and because something is wrong and missing. We don’t necessarily know what it is that is wrong and missing, but hope points towards that which might be but is not yet. Bloch did not deny that life goes on in the midst of existing conditions, but he insisted that it is also lived towards the future, towards that which is not yet. Hope is a utopian surplus of material reality, that is to say, hope is a pervasive feature of actuality. That which is (actuality) does not make sense if we disregard hope (possibility).

Hope, the not-yet, has been the stuff of daydreams, fairy tales, wishful thinking, art, science and utopias. As a Hegelian, Bloch believed that only ‘educated hope’ (*docta spes*) – what we today might call ‘reflected hope’ – could give birth to a fully developed utopia of human deliverance. Hope has to be learned, comprehended and made conscious for things to change. In recent publications, Arjun Appadurai (2004 & 2013) has picked up this thread, arguing that the human capacity to aspire in order to grow has to be put into practice. To quote from Nigel Rapport’s summary

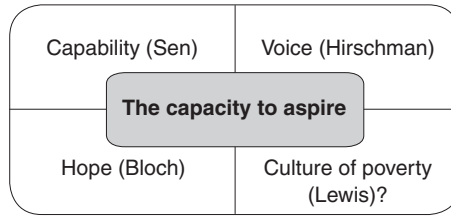
of Appadurai's approach (see Rapport's chapter in this volume): 'Aspiration is like a muscle. It needs to be exercised. Should it be underused – should there be no history of success, no role models, no cultural tradition, no habitual practice – then the possibility of imagining change and knowing how to achieve it is absent'. Staying with the metaphor, one could say that poverty is an atrophy of hope. Poverty deprives human beings of experiencing what it is like to live in a social and cultural context in which aspirations are habitually realised.

On 8 May 2014, the author conducted and recorded an interview with Arjun Appadurai via Skype. The interview was to be used as an introduction to a panel at the Fourth Ørecomm Festival on Communication for Development, 17-20 September 2014. The topic of the panel was 'Voice: The Return of the Politics of Hope?' (What is implied by that title will be discussed in a moment.) The panellists were given a preview of the interview; they also read two of Appadurai's texts relevant to the panel topic (Appadurai 2004 and 2013). Their contributions are included in this anthology, as is the transcript of the interview. The key concept in both the interview and the readings is 'the capacity to aspire', which intersects with the concepts of hope and voice, as well as with two more political and analytical keywords, which shall be presented in the shape of a conceptual map.

A conceptual map of the capacity to aspire

The capacity to aspire is a concept that in significant ways intertwines with four earlier concepts (see table 1). These concepts are Amartya Sen's 'capability', Albert Hirschman's 'voice', Ernst Bloch's 'hope' and, potentially, Oscar Lewis' 'culture of poverty'. Sen developed the concept of capabilities in opposition to principles of distributive justice and development that focus on the access to primary goods and the competitive value of resources (see, e.g., Sen 1985 & 1999). This kind of focus does not take into consideration to what extent an individual is capable of actually putting goods and resources to use. Capabilities, by contrast, include an individual's beings and doings, as well as her political, social and economic environment. Ideally, an individual could, for example, *be* well nourished, healthy, educated, sociable etc., and *do* things like travel, find a sexual partner, vote, debate etc. Whether or not an individual can develop and exercise such capabilities, however, is likely to depend on the political, social and economic conditions she lives in. The conditions could be conducive to individuals realising their capabilities, but they often are not. Individual and social development are thus two sides of the same coin, according to Sen.

Appadurai combines Sen's concept of capability with Albert Hirschman's concept of voice. Hirschman, himself a maverick at creating something new out of conceptual re-combinations, is the author of a treatise entitled *Exit, voice and loyalty: responses to decline in firms, organizations and states* (1970). In it he distinguishes between the choices individuals have at their disposal if they are dissatisfied with a private or public

Table 1. Conceptual map of the capacity to aspire

organisation, for example a business or state. Someone who has grown unhappy with the declining quality of a commodity like soap can, for example, choose a different brand, that is, he or she can perform *exit* by abandoning the declining brand. The alternative is to complain or protest. This option, referred to as *voice* by Hirschman, might be the only available choice in a situation where exit is not possible, for instance if an organisation holds a monopoly on a product, service, benefit, membership or the like (or if, for example, a government prevents its citizens from leaving the country; see Hirschman 1993 on the case of the German Democratic Republic). Exit and voice co-vary, according to Hirschman: the more costly or improbable the option of exit appears, the more likely it is that individuals choose voice, and vice versa: if exit is readily available, there is less reason to exercise voice. In relation to exit, voice tends to be the more costly alternative as it might require organising collective action, whereas the decision to exit can be taken individually and privately. As a form of dissent, exit might thus literally be the easiest way out. (Then again, exit from the global south to the global north often proves to be a high-risk option with a real chance of a deadly outcome.) Because of this comparative advantage, the option of exit is likely to '*atrophy the development of the art of voice*' (Hirschman 1970: fn. 1, 43; emphasis in the original). This general bias against voice is offset by the presence of loyalty, which makes exit unlikely and therefore creates a preference for voice. In other words, a loyal customer or citizen will probably choose voice over exit.

In relation to individual and social development, the three options of leaving, fighting and accepting represent different types of agency. Broadly speaking, exit is more common in the market place and voice in the political sphere. Hence, voice is more closely associated with political action. By combining Hirschman's concept of voice with Sen's concept of capability, Appadurai wants to show that developing 'the art of voice' is a means of both exercising human capabilities and realising aspirations for the poor and disenfranchised. By narrowing Sen's register of human capabilities to a specific human capability, viz. the capacity to aspire, Appadurai connects Sen's concept of capability and Hirschman's concept of voice with Bloch's concept of hope. Appadurai translates Bloch's idea of learning hope into the importance of building the capacity to aspire through collective action. Through a feedback loop, the capacity to aspire is strengthened by the experience of successful voice. Enhancing the capacity to aspire can thus result in reflected hope.

The future of utopia

In his discussion of the capacity to aspire, Appadurai does not engage with the variety of hope that Bloch was most concerned with, namely utopia. In our current historical situation, utopia seems to no longer have a future, which Appadurai in other contexts has celebrated as the end of (Enlightenment) master narratives (see, e.g., Appadurai 1996:52). The celebration seems premature, however: two master narratives not only survive; they are in bud and thrive. The first of these is the master narrative of capitalism, which holds a position of unchallenged supremacy. Nowadays 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism' (Thompson 2013: 32). Alain Badiou (2008) interprets this as a 'crisis of negation'. The destructive negation of the established social order that occurred in the eighteenth century in the name of the French Revolution, and subsequent destructive negations like the Russian Revolution and the anti-colonial struggles for liberation, did not bring about a life free from want. Nevertheless Badiou holds on to the belief that such a life is possible, as did Bloch decades earlier. According to Bloch, a precondition for salvation is turning individual hope into 'dialectical-materialistically comprehended hope' (Bloch 1995:9), which means going from what is possible under existing conditions to what might become possible under radically altered conditions.

This leads to the second surviving master narrative of the Enlightenment, which can be summarised under the heading of 'citizenship'. In 1789, the national assembly of France proclaimed the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. The second article reads:

The aim of all political association is the preservation of the natural and imprescriptible rights of man. These rights are liberty, property, security and resistance to oppression.

According to this proclamation, citizenship consists of a political association that guarantees human rights to each and all. Compared to previous thoughts on, and actually existing types of, political relationships, the principle of citizenship created radically altered conditions in Bloch's sense. In particular, it opened a door that to this day proves difficult to shut. Connecting political relationships to the natural rights every human being ought to be assured on the grounds of her humanity was an invitation for ever more individuals and groups to exercise voice and claim those rights for themselves (see, e.g., Soysal 1994 on the continuing development of post-national citizenship, which nowadays grants citizenship rights even to non-citizens). Women, slaves, colonial subjects, foreigners, children, groups defined by their sexual practices etc.: they all tried, often successfully, to enter through the door of full citizenship. The political and philosophical discussion about this development is seemingly endless. It has clustered around various keywords: justice, equality, recognition, rights, freedom, democracy, power, trust etc. In the kind of Hegelian perspective that Bloch subscribed to, these discussions would need to acknowledge that the negation of the established social order in the name of citizenship created hopes and aspirations that – at least in some parts of

the world – crystallised into laws, institutions and socially shared expectations. In some places, for example, it is expected that everyone is equal before the law. Demonstrating that this is not the case – because it never really is – carries some moral weight in such places, whereas it in other places is met with a shrug and cynicism.

Bloch was aware of the fact that the Enlightenment principle of citizenship is, and has always been, in conflict with capitalism. Citizenship and capitalism are conflicting principles and the relationship between these principles has been the topic of debate for at least a century and a half. Certain types of economic theory, like public choice and behavioural economics, but also several versions of Marxism, attempt to explain questions of citizenship in capitalist terms, thereby trying to eliminate citizenship as an independent principle. The basic idea is that political processes in reality are economic processes and politics and the common good therefore must be studied in terms of economic theory. Another line of attack against the principle of citizenship is the myth that capitalism can exist in some kind of original form. Sometimes this myth appears in the guise of simple-minded proclamations that taxes are a form of theft and sometimes in the shape of sophisticated mathematical models for turning matters of citizenship into issues of public management. The great illusion is that property can exist without something performing the function of a state (see, e.g., Murphy & Nagel 2002 for a philosophical critique of this myth). As already the authors of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen recognised, property rights are a subset of citizenship rights. It takes state, or state-like, institutions to guarantee such rights and it takes taxes to maintain such institutions. In modern societies, taxes are in other words a necessary precondition for property. A third argument against the basic tenets of citizenship claims that inequality is unavoidable or even desirable and that citizenship can be separated from equality. It can not. To be recognised as a citizen (in the widest sense) implies being treated equally, for example in a court of law or with regard to universal entitlements (which does not preclude that one, in a second step, allows for differences in needs and capacities.) The demand to be recognised as an equal continues to fuel political struggles around the world, which goes to show that the Enlightenment principle of citizenship has not lost its subversive potential.

Citizenship

A prerequisite for equality is the construction and upholding of concepts and categories that are meant to be universal. Some of these, like equal treatment before the law and property rights, have already been mentioned. T. H. Marshall (1950) famously distinguished between civil, political and social rights of citizenship. Civil rights derive from the rule of law: everyone ought to be treated equally before the law and have equal rights of contract and property. The key institution for civil rights is the court of law. Historically, civil rights came first in Marshall's native England. Political rights include the right to vote and stand for election. The key institution is the parliament

and historically political rights came second, according to Marshall. Social rights were introduced when the state decided to step in and check the devastation of human lives caused by capitalism. Employers were forced to contribute to a system of social security that provides a minimum of material well-being. Institutions of the welfare state like social services, hospitals, schools etc. are key for social rights of citizenship. The state, however, did not step in only with the introduction of social rights. Already the rights of contract and property presuppose the existence of state, or state-like, institutions able to, if necessary, enforce citizenship rights.

On one hand, citizenship is a universal concept because it – like a number of other cultural concepts, such as sin and salvation – is meant to apply to every human being. On the other, the concepts and categories of citizenship are historical phenomena and their evolution varies across international space to this day. If by culture we mean human meaning making located in space and time, and if we consider the historical evolution of citizenship, then we can only conclude that citizenship is a cultural concept that emerged in a particular historical context. Then again, the universal claims of concepts like citizenship are potentially self-fulfilling, thereby not just passively reflecting a particular historical condition, but informing aspirations and transforming the world. As cultural concepts, citizenship and its semantic siblings (human rights, justice, freedom etc.) may be contested, but they also serve as rallying cries, that is, they have a mobilising function. In this sense, they are oriented towards the future, towards the not-yet.

Appadurai uses the example of the grassroots organisation Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) to illustrate his point about the future as cultural fact. SDI started as an initiative by female street dwellers in Mumbai who were threatened by eviction. The initiative grew into a network of mutual assistance that spread across the subcontinent and in time even further afield. Today, SDI is a global network of community organisations by and for the urban poor in more than thirty countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America. On its website, SDI uses Appadurai's vocabulary, stating that SDI's core principles and practices are 'to build voice and collective capacity' (<http://sdinet.org>). SDI turns Appadurai's analysis of the capacity to aspire into a programme for action, which is not surprising since Appadurai made his social scientific expertise available to SDI at an early stage (which could raise the problem of analytical circularity: a scholar provides an organisation with key concepts, then goes on using the same concepts to analyse the organisation). In Appadurai's own writings, the concept of the capacity to aspire overlaps with positive concepts like hope, voice and capabilities. SDI also conjures up positive images of self-organised development rather than impressions of poverty and deprivation. However, talking about the need to develop the capacity to aspire not only implies that the poor are defined by the lack of this capacity, but also that there are those who possess it in sufficient measure, viz. the middle- and upper class. Does this mean that Appadurai and SDI reiterate the old cliché of the poor just having to be (more) like members of the middle- and upper class to escape poverty? Is there, in other words, a cultural norm, namely that of the middle- and upper class, which everyone ought to assimilate to for poverty to disappear?

Culture of poverty

The American anthropologist Oscar Lewis coined the phrase 'culture of poverty' to describe a culturally constructed way of life that is born out of dreadful material and social conditions. Inescapable poverty, he argued, forces the poor to develop adaptive mechanisms to cope with existence (Lewis 1965). The lack of hope for improvement – what in Bloch's terminology might be called an absence of a not-yet and by Appadurai is referred to as an undeveloped capacity to aspire – lets immediate and short-term gratification appear as a wholly appropriate strategy. The future is a cultural fact, as Appadurai puts it, and in the case of the poor, the cultural fact seems to be that they have no future. Lewis suggested that poverty demands adaptations that in the absence of hope perpetuate poverty, both in individual lives and across generations. Conservative circles soon misused Lewis' culture of poverty concept to blame the victims of poverty, which led progressives to accuse Lewis of having done the same. In the 1960s, Lewis was also criticised for narrating life stories instead of writing about poverty in a general analytical mode, for example in terms of pathological or structural causes. Thus, the culture of poverty thesis fell in disrepute, partly for ideological and partly for theoretical reasons.

In retrospect, the reasons for ostracising Lewis appear spurious. Lewis did not blame the victims of poverty for their predicament. Rather, he gave an unsentimental account of what it is like to be desperately poor. Furthermore, he managed to illustrate that people without hope nevertheless can be resilient and creative. As for the allegation that Lewis blamed the victims, it may be worth quoting from a letter he wrote to Eric Wolf: 'Once the poor begin to identify with larger groups or with larger causes, once they become class conscious or become socialist or Communist, they rapidly begin to lose some of the crucial aspects of the culture of poverty. They begin to take on an internationalist rather than a provincial, locally oriented worldview' (quoted in Rigdon 1988:231). These are hardly words of someone who is ignorant of poverty's structural causes. Moreover, the second sentence could be epitomised by the global network of SDI. While it may be difficult to tell to what extent the street dwellers of Mumbai became class conscious or, for that matter, socialist or Communist, it is beyond doubt that their outlook and actions became international rather than provincial. To what degree the members and local affiliates of SDI in different parts of the world lost 'some of the crucial aspects of the culture of poverty', as Lewis predicted, would have to be researched.

Contributions

The question of whether or not there is a culture of poverty can be extended to the more fundamental issue of whether or not we at all need the concept of culture to talk about human lives. In his contribution to this volume, Nigel Rapport argues that the concept of culture adds nothing to our understanding of the human. Gudrun

Dahl, in her chapter, takes the opposite view and insists that the concept of culture has heuristic value and that it ought to be extended beyond localised phenomena to supposedly universal and non-cultural spheres like development and economics. The difference between Rapport's and Dahl's perspectives – and, more generally, between anthropologists who reject the culture concept and those who commit to, or at least make analytical use of, it – is many-layered. On one hand, there appears to be wide agreement among anthropologists today that the concept of culture ought not be used to signify closed, unchanging systems of beliefs, norms and practices. Few anthropologists believe anymore that 'to be human is to be Javanese' (Geertz 1956:138). On the other, it is difficult to ignore the fact that what counts as truth has varied greatly in time and space – '*vérité au-deçà des Pyrénées, erreur au-delà*' – and that this variation has had profound effects on individual human lives. Throughout history, human beings have been enslaved, sacrificed, mutilated, killed and coerced in a most routine fashion because of truths that seemed as self-evident as, say, the right to private property does today.

It was the issue of property that led street dwellers in Mumbai, who were threatened with eviction, to organise. Although they could not claim right of property to their place of residence, they succeeded in relativizing the category of property. At least they were now tolerated as street dwellers. Sheela Patel, who also contributes to this volume, has a background in social work and has been engaged in the plight of the urban poor for a long time. In her contribution, she discusses the disjuncture between the focus of development agencies and the needs of the urban poor, which inevitably are about habitat and livelihood. Only when the urban poor organise, find their voice and formulate their own solutions will their conditions change. Nigel Rapport takes Appadurai to task for turning the profoundly human capacity to aspire into a question of cultural differences. Gudrun Dahl asks for a structural analysis of poverty that, on the one hand, makes visible the cultural premises of economic and development theories, and, on the other hand, is careful not to blame the victims of poverty. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, finally, attempts to subvert the issue of aspiration. He argues that it is not the poor but those living in abundance who lack the capacity to aspire. After all, what could he who has everything hope for? Bloch's answer might be: for the not-yet of human deliverance.

On The Capacity to Aspire

Conversation with Arjun Appadurai

Ronald Stade

RS: In your most recent book, *The future as cultural fact* (2013), you include a chapter on the capacity to aspire. This is a topic that runs through the entire book and much of your recent work as well. Could you just give us a kind of outline of what you mean by the ‘capacity to aspire’?

AA: For me the capacity to aspire fits into the general language of capacity and capability as Amartya Sen has particularly developed it. And while I am not directly trying to apply Sen’s capabilities idea, what was important to me, was the idea of capability, but even of capacity as capacity building as a central term of development economics, as well as of the World Bank and other global development organizations. So I realized that the word carried a lot of weight, but that typically it was used for, what we may call, more material and measureable assets in people’s lives, their incomes, sometimes education and so on and so forth; things that are measureable in their distribution. In the end I noticed that ideas like hope and visions of a future, which I wanted to capture with the word ‘aspiration’ are not treated in this sense as assets, which could be unevenly distributed. So the capacity, as I realized, is the effort to capture the idea that not the faculty, but, if you like, the practice of thinking about the future different than the present also comes in other forms of material resources not evenly distributed. That gave me the platform to enter into this kind of economics discussion from a different point of view.

RS: You already mentioned Amartya Sen’s idea of capabilities and his capability approach, which, of course, was then also fleshed out and given more philosophical dimensions by Martha Nussbaum. How does the capacity to aspire relate to the capability approach as it is, for instance, manifested now in the human development paradigm?

AA: That’s a very important question. I would say that at one level the two ideas are both connected and compatible. But there is a difference. And I would say that primarily the difference is that the capability approach, in both Sen’s and Nussbaum’s versions, tends to have a universalist modern and humanist set of assumptions behind it. In other words, the idea of what humans are capable of is tied up, especially in the case

of Sen, notoriously with the idea of freedom, but also obviously with equality. In short, the familiar Enlightenment idea, against which I have no objection. But my feeling is that for anthropologists it is easy to see that the Enlightenment package of freedom, knowledge, education and then, later on, rights, are all tied up with a certain model of equality and a secular idea. Furthermore, they are not the way in which many other societies might see the good life or what an individual or some people may wish to aim for. And so I just wanted to open that cultural conspectus, or range, or scope in a manner quite familiar for anthropologists in this sphere, this capacity to aspire, and in the essay I developed the fact of cultural capacity. And by that I mean, for those of us who are familiar with and who come from anthropology, that its content cannot be predetermined. It may have to do with equality, but it may not. It may have to do with rights, but it may not. And so capacity to aspire for me simply has this advantage over the capabilities approach that it can bring in other worldviews, other ideas of a good life alongside those that crystallized in the Enlightenment, but not necessarily against that source.

RS: And, of course, the objection, that Martha Nussbaum had in this context, was that if we relativize rights and equality, those cultural values, then we may end up with people aspiring to being like, 'yes, I don't mind being a slave, but at least take off the chains; but I will continue to be a slave'. So the aspiration may be culturally relative and then, of course, not be something that enhances capabilities.

AA: Right. Or even, maybe, to put it more extremely, an aspiration towards things that are actually negative or oppressive or fascist or xenophobic. So this is a very familiar problem and a familiar debate, and a difficult one between all of those ideals in the Enlightenment model, in the Nussbaum case very explicitly with Greek roots; but, let's say the Western model, a classical model modernized in the Enlightenment. And its greatest anxiety, of course, is what to do with the diversity of ideas of the good life. And my problem is that I am on the one hand sympathetic to the idea that we must make judgments, that we must have some kind of position on what is acceptable in human and social life and what is not. That said, even if we agree that there are some differentiations in the field, it still seems to me we have choices to make how broad or narrow is the idea of the good. And it seems to me that the classical Western idea is fine in its own terms, but to make it exhaustive and indispensable, seems to me, in the classic way ethnocentric or tyrannical and also self-republished, because it fails to take advantage of other visions of the good life that in the end – if you, for example, take a question of wealth, you might see that a Buddhist point of view about wealth as a some kind of detachment – might be very healthy for the West in the context of the recent explosion of financial crises, on the one hand, and 28:46 disaster, on the other hand, both tied up with capitalism. Well, those are some ideas of a good life; they have a very good sense. So when it comes to the question of diversity, the tension is between the diversity idea and the challenge of moral relativism. And recently, in order not to take up explicitly this debate, but in general to open up the question of

pros and cons of, let's say, the human rights framework as it has emerged for the last two centuries roughly, especially in the last century, I made a distinction, but it is not yet in my published work, between what I call 'basic or minimal humanity' and 'full humanity'. So, for me, the Western model assures a certain minimum, but it's basically defensive and protective. You cannot imprison me. You cannot harass me. You cannot limit me. So there is a minimum. But my feeling is to get to full humanity we have to somehow take on cultural variation and how people actually achieve a full life. We can actually achieve a full life by having access to a right to this, right to that, right to freedom. It has a kind of formal and minimal quality. So now I am trying to more explicitly develop why the cultural dimension is indispensable. Even if there are risks, but of course we know that the original pursuit of the Western ideas also has all kinds of risks, like the exploitation of women, exploitation of slaves. Maybe, they were not in the norms themselves, but they seem to be often innate in the practices that were associated with these ideas. So we don't know if the ideal is free from the risk of some kind of appropriation by darker values. It's the risk we have to run and to tackle, but I think that to give up on this full idea of humanity, which includes culturally diverse ideas of the good life, would be to give up too soon.

RS: So the relationship between minimal and full humanity – is that similar to a kind of liberal society where you have a procedural justice in place that permits you to pursue full humanity?

AA: I think, that's a very good way of putting it. So that's why I draw a minimal set. A minimal set is fine; it is necessary, but not sufficient. The only difference then, I would say, it is not only procedural, because it is also substantive. But, in addition, it means more flesh. And that flesh can only be local, because that's where I lived once long ago. In the aphorism, which I always found inspiring, Clifford Geertz said, 'to be human is to be Javanese', which means that you're not completely human until you're completely local – a paradox. It is also simultaneously an everyday idea for anthropologists, but its implications are not always thought through in discussions like these human rights discussions. So I would say that your instance is correct, but I would say what we're doing is taking substance and adding more substance. Not forming and adding more substance.

RS: Yes, I see, that's a very good point. If we connect the capacity to aspire to another concept, which is that of hope, you also already addressed this briefly. You mention explicitly Ernst Bloch – a German philosopher who wrote the book *The principle of hope*. So what kind of inspiration did you get from Bloch's writings?

AA: So, in my book you can see that Bloch comes up in a later essay, when I talk more generally about the future. When I wrote 'The capacity to aspire' in about 2003, I think it was published in 2004, my acquaintance with Bloch was very minimal. And since that time I have become more aware of him; though I am still reading that great work closely and trying to understand it fully. But it does point to a completely different body

of literature than development literature and even than the literature on recognition and so on, about which I actually have been involved with my wife and colleague, who is from Slovenia, from ex-Yugoslavia, and who has a strong research interest in the idea of utopia, but also nostalgia. And in that complex, hope and Bloch's work has a new relevance, so we are trying to think through these things together in a comparative way and try to explore the dynamics, both the effect and, if you like, the political inventions of hope as a horizon, and as a practice, and as a faculty. The most important thing that I now see in Bloch, though I am still working on his thought, which is quite complex, is this idea of the 'not yet'. So hope, the politics of hope, does not become politics of utopia in that sense of the common fixed state that human problems could be solved, but about the state which is emergent in the present, which is critical to the present and which seeks to improve the present, but is not yet crystallized. And the hope is a thing that moves one to that not yet.

RS: This is of course something that fascinates me in this flowing together of trains of thought, because you wrote already in *Modernity at large* about these daydreams and fantasies as a kind of social practice, as social fantasies. And this to me already hints at what Bloch really also is trying to write about. Of course, he is coming from a more Western, European environment. Obviously, his references will be to fairy tales and things like that.

AA: You're absolutely right that this minor thought is very congenital to me, because it indeed has roots in my earlier thinking about the imagination as a social practice. The fact that imagination can have a transformative or propulsive effect, that it's not nearly escape. So now I am more consciously trying to engage with the Frankfurt School on ideas like dreams and the idea of cultural industries, cinema, for example, as being sites of escape in one kind of Frankfurt School view. But I would say that in a more defined Blochean view, that kind of dreaming becomes more about the not yet, and not about some kind of a political or anti-political escape from the present. So you are absolutely right, this has affinities to the present and even precursory elements in my earlier works. So it comes easily to me, but I see it as now allowing me to engage this idea of capacity. Allows me to, on the one hand, intervene at some point in this development economics debates and human rights issues and so on. And, on the other hand, with the critical sort of cultural literature on dream, fantasy, hope as affect of political states.

RS: And another concept that is also in this sphere is – and this, of course, you bring up in this discourse of the capacity to aspire – how do you turn aspirations, hopes, the not yet into voice? Can you elaborate on that?

AA: So there, of course, my main reference, especially when I wrote this essay, was to Hirschman's great book on *Exit, voice and loyalty*, which I still find an incredibly inspiring effort to cross between politics, consumer behaviour and other forms of attachment. It is still always in the back of my mind and so, of course, Hirschman plays

an important role in this essay of mine. And I continue to struggle with precisely the question of how one moves from the affective and imaginative space of opened aspiration to the exercise of voice in, let's say, concrete political settings. And I've been developing that a little bit more. Again that's what has not yet seen any published light. But by pursuing some ideas about performativity, coming out of Austin and then, of course, particularly developed by Judith Butler, but in that development not much connected to, let's say, political theory or economics – at least in my sense. So what I am trying to do now is to take that material and experience that I have about urban activists, with whom I have been working for quite a while in Mumbai, and try to focus a bit more on their linguistic work. Not in a technical way, but in a kind of loose cultural way. To look at things like requests and promises, Austinian phenomena, but to explore how their misfiring can over time actually create small changes in the context which won't be evident at one moment, when the things look like the crude report, where the poor ask for things and they don't get them. But that, I think, is too broad, too pessimistic and too simple. So the quick way to put my line of approach to that connection, which you are asking about, from aspiration to voice, is impact of rethinking and trying to apply the tradition that starts with Austin and comes to Butler and others who are concerned with performativity in the social life and its powers.

RS: The difference in the capacity to aspire, where we started: as you write, the capacity to aspire is not just fulfilling or giving voice or enacting and being able to pursue one's aspiration, but the capacity to aspire itself is unevenly distributed. So what does that uneven distribution consist of? I mean, what is it based in?

AA: It's a very excellent and important question. I'm still struggling with it, because some critics of this idea still feel that it is uncomfortably close to the cultural poverty idea and has some deficiency, which may be social, but appears to be biophysical somehow in its nature. And I am, of course, very sure that uneven distribution of the capacity to aspire is not about IQ or any other fundamental disposition of biology or neurology or anything else, but is instead analogous to a muscle, which, underused, is never going to be as developed. And a thing about being wealthy is that you exercise it more often; the nature of your circumstances allows you to exercise that faculty, because you have plenty of examples in your own social environment that you can refer to. And in your self-narrative you have more density, as I try to say in this analogy. You have more examples and you have more detail. So that when poor people, even if they do aspire, they tend to make big leaps from where they are to something else. Or they are afraid to make leaps at all, because the distance seems to be too big from their position to, let's say, being in college or from being in a college to a career. Whereas as a wealthy person you have loads of instances and loads of small moves which you can attune to all around. So that faculty is more frequently exercised. So the unevenness, if you want to refer to it, which I don't do, is the practice or the habitus of the poor. There are limiting practices, in the domain of practices, and that's why I think interventions can affect the space of practices and open up more practice

spaces for the poor to aspire. And my urban activists and friends in the community that they work with, in many ways are doing this. Creating opportunities to try out that faculty. Even if in the short term it doesn't work, it begins giving you – you know, like climbing or running or swimming or skiing – that experience that you can do it more and you can do it more boldly. So that's one side: that the unevenness or the uneven distribution is an experiential unevenness. And, of course, that experiential unevenness is related to what others call the objective circumstances – wealth, class etc., which is what most people focus on. But I want to say that those things create also unevenness in the habitus and therefore in the space of practice, which can have its own dynamic, which is not simply a direct symptom of class position.

RS: I have just realized when you were saying those things, that there is an interesting connection between unevenness of using, having experiences with certain faculties, the idea of the habitus and dispositions and practice and, of course, what you referred to earlier, which are speech and acts of performativity. Because how do you formulate yourself when you ask for something?

AA: It's a very interesting connection, Ronald, because I haven't quite seen it that way. But, yes, the exercise of this faculty is not a direct intervention into economy or polity. It is usually some speech act, where you indeed present yourself. And in that sense, you know, when you talk or present yourself, you have not only the Austinian tradition, you also have Goffman. Without that tendency, Goffman had to see it all already in place. I mean, he needed a big space for change, though he understood the problem of change, it was the big one. But he explicitly set it aside and said, 'I'm not illuminating that. I'm telling you how the social life operates, not how to wake people up' in one of his great formulations. But you're perfectly right that there is some kind of inner connection between its disposition, its expression, its practice and linguistic acts, particularly performatively. Those are always available for people to do, even if hard assets are not yet in their heads – housing, wealth or shelter or security. They can certainly speak up and certainly ask, request, claim, promise – all the classical Austinian things. So while I have not explicitly made that connection, I think it is there and you are right to see it.

Aspiration as Universal Human Capacity

A Response to Arjun Appadurai

Nigel Rapport

Abstract

This chapter is in four parts. In the first I revisit Appadurai's argument in favour of recognizing a kind of culture of poverty, which limits the ways and extents to which the poor develop the habit of exercising their ability to aspire or hope for better. In part two, I offer counter-arguments of my own concerning an understanding of human being, human belonging, human capability and human aspiring. In part three, I offer a brief case-study: Roger Weir, a poorly paid hospital porter in a post-industrial Scottish city, and the hopes he has for his life and the escapes he habitually practises. In part four, I consider some general conclusions concerning capacity, culture, globalism and human rights.

Keywords: culture, poverty, globalism, human being, belonging, human rights

I want to address those points in Arjun Appadurai's carefully argued and sympathetic exposition where *Anthropos* – a sense of our singular humanity – comes into conflict with *Ethnos* – a sense of our belonging to particular groups or peoples. Appadurai uses the distinction between notions of 'minimal humanity' as against 'full humanity' to suggest that, après Clifford Geertz (1973), we become fully human only under the dispensation of particular cultures of socialization and identification: by virtue of being enculturated within systems of specific symbolic forms that give rise to the categories of our consciousness and identity. To be 'human' is to be Javanese, Jewish or Scottish. I shall address what I see as the contradictions that surround Appadurai's use of, and defence of, the concept of culture.

Appadurai's case

Let me first briefly rehearse the argument that Arjun Appadurai makes, its six key steps.

I. 'Aspiration' too often refers to narrowly material, tangible or measurable 'assets' when 'development' is being broached. We need a broader understanding of aspiration, Appadurai feels, one that is culturally inflected. Notwithstanding the insightful

writings of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, we must recognise how visions of the good life to which people continue to aspire can include non-Enlightenment visions beyond notions of human rights, equality, freedom and secularity.

II. This does not mean that we do not still make judgements concerning what is 'acceptable', but we widen the idea of 'the good' beyond narrow Western conceptions, while allowing that diversity does not entail moral relativism.

III. To elucidate the distinction, change the terms to an understanding of a 'minimal humanity' as against a 'full' one. Western discourses of human rights can be said to concern themselves with a decontextualized idea of a minimal human being; but in order to treat the human subject as a full actor you need to turn to culture: to fill the human actor with cultural substance. Western liberal society has been very good at putting in place a procedural justice that ensures a minimal humanity. This is necessary but it is not sufficient as a modelling or a treatment of the human. For sufficiency one needs a 'cultural turn'. Culture provides the flesh that creates a full humanity – both epistemologically and ontologically. To be human is to be Javanese, and so on: to be human is to be living a life ensconced in local circumstances.

IV. Local circumstances play a determining role in human life. This includes the phenomenon of aspiration. To be able to aspire, to hope and to have visions of the future, is an intangible asset that is as unevenly distributed around the world as any other asset. Yes, our imagination can possess a transcendent power, and one that can be propulsive and transformatory as well as escapist. Nevertheless, the capacity to aspire, to imagine a better future, being cultural, being subject to local conditions, can also be found wanting and to call for developmental assistance.

V. Is this a version of a 'culture of poverty' thesis, then, recalling Oscar Lewis? That the poor are different, deficient? Not exactly. We are not talking about intellectual or biological or neurological deficiencies. We are talking about the uneven distribution of *experience*. Aspiration is like a muscle. It needs to be exercised. Should it be under-used – should there be no history of success, no role-models, no cultural tradition, no habitual practice – then the possibility of imagining change and knowing how to achieve it is absent. The habitus of the poor contains a poverty in the practising of aspiration. Should they practice more, build up stamina and confidence and momentum, then they will learn how to *perform* aspiration.

VI. By practising hope, Appadurai concludes, by making aspiration habitual, imagination becomes voice and voice becomes structural engagement and intervention. Even when the means to make structural modifications are not in place, the very acts of imagining and asking and suggesting – the speech-acts – can over time effect material change. From imagination to voice to change.

An alternative case

Arjun Appadurai offers an original vision. I would like to make four counter-arguments.

1. ‘The future is a social fact’, Appadurai claims. He implies that visions of the future – hopes and aspiration, utopian and dystopian visions – are culturally informed or inflected, by which he means, in turn, that visions and futures are part of a cultural tradition of both hopes and ways of hoping, norms of hoping. So that freedom, equality, secularity as visions of a future Good Life are essentially Western cultural artefacts. But clearly this argument is not sufficiently subtle. How we relate as individual human beings to a so-called collective cultural tradition is a personal matter. Yes, for me, freedom and secularity and equality are the mark of any modern, civilized society, but not for the Far Right, nor for my religiously orthodox uncle, nor even my Foucauldian university colleagues. And so on. Why should I assume that other ‘cultures’ are any more substantively homogeneous than ‘my own’? Are individuals limited by cultural traditions? Irony, revolutionariness, eccentricity, idiosyncrasy, creativity as universal markers of human behaviour would suggest not. Collective cultural traditions are more properly seen as rhetorical constructs and political claims: as symbolic fabrications that do not accord to phenomenological reality, to how life is individually lived and experienced.

2. ‘While notions of “the future” and practices of aspiration are culturally informed – always and necessarily diverse – yet judgements can and should still be made concerning what is deemed “acceptable”, and limits put in place’, Appadurai claims. ‘Aspirations to slavery, to fascism and other negative visions, remain unacceptable. For this is cultural relativism’. So: diversity does not extend to relativism. How so? It seems that Western liberal assumptions, such as a discourse of human rights, *do* serve as universal, ‘minimal’ and necessary standards and sets of procedures. Cultural diversity may then be envisaged as a kind of addition of substance, filling up the minimal human being so that he or she becomes a full, sufficient human being. But is this not curious? Western culture – and all *is* culture in the Geertz-Appadurai picture – somehow undergirds or serves as a foundation for the remaining diversity of world cultures – the flesh on the Western skeleton – and sets their proper limits. But no: the concept of ‘culture’ cannot be deployed on both of these levels, the ‘minimal’ and the ‘full’. Another conceptual term is called for. Let us say, ‘civilization’. We then make the argument that a civilized (‘Western’) appreciation of necessary liberal procedures ensures global individuals the rights to choose and to make their own ‘cultural’ substance to their lives (Rapport 2011).

3. ‘To be human is to be Javanese’, *après* Geertz. We are fully human, Appadurai parses, only insofar as we belong to local cultures. No: I would reject this vision as neo-tribalist and ghettoizing, and as fictional. As I sit writing this in my study in St Andrews, in Scotland, my daughter sits next door watching a loud American soap opera on TV; on my *iTunes* I listen to Yiddish klezmer music from pre-Holocaust Poland; glancing up I see the Israeli flag on a miniature flag pole I have placed on my windowsill; beside it

are framed photographs of the philosophers John Stuart Mill and Friedrich Nietzsche, and next to them a pebble that I collected on my last visit to Malmö. Not only is this material collection particular to me, but also the reason for selecting it, and the world-view that deems it as having integrity, and the consciousness that reflects on it amid my writing and that reckons it to be instantiatory of a way of knowing the world and of making an intellectual argument vis-à-vis Arjun Appadurai. I mean that my location in space, and as a socialised human being, is not a collective one, nor a determinant one. Moreover, my location in one space does not preclude an experiential location in other spaces – Israel, Malmö – and other times – Nietzsche’s 1800s, pre-Holocaust Yiddishkeit. To be human is to be individual. I come to consciousness in a particular environment of cultural-symbolic systems and a particular material environment, but I appropriate these and make sense of them in personal ways. My membership of a cultural community pertains to public *forms* deployed in common; but the *meaning* of these forms and their exchange remains essentially private and idiosyncratic. I am not my St Andrews neighbours; I am not my fellow British citizens; I am not my fellow-Jewish sister; and so on. I am human over and against my particular and plural cultural or communitarian belongings.

4. ‘Human capacities, such as aspiration, are unevenly distributed’, Appadurai concludes, ‘not as a matter of IQ or something else biological but due to habitus. The poor are not in the habit of aspiring – albeit that this is not a “culture of poverty” thesis’... My most recent field research saw me working as a porter or orderly for a year in a large teaching-hospital in eastern Scotland (Rapport 2008). ‘Easterneuk’ is a poor, post-industrial city. Male employment is especially scarce. Hospital porters earn a minimum wage for a 40-hour week. And yet the capacity to aspire – as imagination, as voicing and as structural intervention – was far from absent among this professionally disadvantaged collective. My final counter-argument takes the form of an ethnographic case-study.

Roger Weir as aspirant

Roger Weir was a fellow-porter who became a regular interlocutor of mine. We had begun on the same day and undergone the same induction procedure. Roger was some 20 years my junior (in his early-twenties) but I would match my assimilation into the institutionalism and hierarchy of the hospital against his: we would often meet at lunch-time, eat our sandwiches together in a quiet corner of the dining-room and compare notes on the day or week, trading accounts of success and grievance.

Porters found themselves at the base of a hospital organization that valued medical skill, its management and delivery. We porters at Constance Hospital – 150 men in a workforce of thousands – were employed to ferry patients on beds, trolleys and wheelchairs around the extensive site, a job calling for physical stamina more than any other training. To the doctors, managers, clerks and nurses, the (male) porters

together with the (female) Domestics, were a relatively unskilled pairing whose carrying and cleaning were a background to the proper work (a kind of unholy family of ancillary labourers). It also meant that porters and Domestics tended to stick together, as confidantes and conspirators.

Roger had been a premature baby, he told me shortly after we had first met. This had given him certain physical characteristics. The tendons in his legs were short and that occasioned him to walk unusually, as if he were cross-country skiing: sliding across surfaces and not lifting his feet, knees bent and heels splayed out. He had taken up karate to help stretch his tendons and it became a major pastime: three times per week, consistently, for the past eight years. But his poor coordination remained – as did his dyslexia (another matter entirely). The other great love in his life, Roger told me, was music: Black Sabbath and Ozzy Osbourne to be precise, the epitome of ‘Heavy Metal’. While his feet would always mean he had a disadvantage in achieving karate excellence, in music – enjoying ‘Sabbath’, writing his own songs and singing them in his band – there were no limits. Ultimately, his life had no limits, Roger would insist to me with bravado. So: ‘Keep on rocking, Nigel!’.

While I remained a front-door porter at Constance Hospital, Roger was allocated to the operating theatres, an assignment he came to hate. It was boring, it was messy, and the people working there were officious automatons, he complained, who didn’t know the meaning of the word ‘fun’. He was also forced to clear up after medical operations without any proper training: bloody floors, bloody clogs and overalls, bits of bodies. It was as if he were employed as a Domestic. And he could catch a superbug. He was going to have to start telling his hospital bosses straight what he thought, Roger decided. (It was not as if his job at Constance were the real thing – or anywhere near as significant as his band, or having fun!)

Roger spoke repeatedly of two specific escapes that he planned. The first was to the annual Black Sabbath ‘Ozzfest’ in Milton Keynes, near London; the second was a possible karate tour of Japan, so that he might embrace further the manners, spirituality and perfect gentlemanliness of the Japanese masters. Meanwhile, Roger stuck it out at Constance, determined to hold his own. He was, he told me by way of a statement of character and life-project, ‘A wild child, with a heart of gold’.

An abiding image I have of Roger is of walking beside him down the long and wide public corridors of the hospital, en route to a fetching or carrying job. I am in my front-door yellow polo shirt, with ‘N.Rapport, Support Services’ stamped on the chest; Roger is in his operating-theatre greens. We walk side by side, Roger with his sliding-skiing gait (and me rather flat-footed). While we walk Roger insists on playing loud Black Sabbath riffs on an imaginary air guitar, to the bemusement of passers-by. Or else he practices his karate kicks, displaying to me and all others his hard-won athleticism – how he can stretch his legs wide apart and lift his kicking leg up high – and his potential dangerousness. He kicks his way through the various swing-doors on our route, he demolishes signs pinned to the official notice-boards that we pass, and he challenges himself against seemingly solid walls, undeterred by the impact.

Through Roger Weir I appreciate how the human capacity to kick out at the world might be put into operation, substantiated, to say and do particular, individual things. Rather than 'culture', I make the 'human' and the 'individual' polar terms in my analytical understanding. Universal human capacity exists in dialectical relation with the unique substance of individual lives. Roger is not essentially 'Scottish', 'a porter', 'White', 'masculine', whatever. These labels, or any such labels purporting to membership of categories and collectivities in a cultural classification and suggesting a profiling of consciousness and identity, are secondary, epiphenomenal. They do not explain: they are rhetorical or discursive acts of naming, defining and confining. The only defining I feel I am warranted to make as an anthropologist is a human-natural one. Roger Weir kicks out at the world around him: this is a human aspirational capability; and he is no more able to kick through walls than I am: this is a human limitation or liability we also share.

My anthropological aim must be to know how human capacities are substantiated in individual lives. I flesh out a *human* context, extracting Roger Weir from the accidental, contingent contexts of history, society and culture, in order better to know the human individual as an ontological reality: a context that is real in a sense in which the symbolic labels, classes and discourses of 'Scottish male hospital porter' are not.

Anyone in a global context

'The accident of where one is born is just that, an accident', Martha Nussbaum writes (1996:7): 'any human being might have been born in any nation'. I would make the argument that the processes of globalisation make the singularity of our humanity and also the individuality of human being ever more apparent. It also makes a communitarian rhetoric of historically determined and collectively limited identities housed in cultures more visible as ideology, a fiction. The idea, in other words, that selfhood is constituted by and forever tied to particular cultural milieux, particular beliefs and practices, particular histories, habits and discourses – and the related claim that individuals who exit such collectively secured life-worlds must find themselves ontologically devastated, without social anchor or cognitive guarantee – this is refuted by the growing evidence of individual lives whose home is movement and transition (Rapport & Dawson 1998). Traditional notions of societies identified with cultures conceived as complete wholes were always ideological conceptions, Marc Auge urges, fictions of both anthropologists and of the people studied. It is, however, the likely case, he contends (1995: 47), that no-one has ever been unaware of the illusionary nature of relativistic communitarian rhetorics. The image of a closed and self-sufficient world of culture and society was never more than a useful image, a provisional myth, even for those who identified with it: a semi-fantasy of nativism and of Maussian theory alike. The experience of globalism helps us rid ourselves of its like, however. The

global context of human practice no longer makes it possible to talk in ontological terms of totalizing cultures, localized societies, and stereotypical individuals (Amit & Rapport 2012).

This does not mean that the truth of our human nature – our universal human sameness and our universal individual difference – now has free reign. Indeed, we are witness to its vehement, even violent, repression in rhetorics of closure and communitarian exclusiveness, and often of the most fundamentalist and totalitarian kinds (Amit and Rapport 2002). People are commonly asserting themselves as peoples not as persons, as John Gray (1992: 14) phrases it. We inhabit an era of cultural identity politics in which people define themselves and others not in terms of their humanity and their individuality but as collective part-beings essentially constituted by their communitarian histories, traditions and affiliations. ‘Cultures are not options’, proclaims Bhikhu Parekh (1998: 206, 212), a significant voice in the lobby for British multiculturalism. Arguing for a ‘multicultural citizenship’ in Canada, Will Kymlicka (1995: 19) argues that ‘culture’ deemed a synonym for ‘nation’ or ‘people’: ‘a culture’ is an intergenerational community, institutionally complete, occupying a home territory, sharing a distinct history and language. James Tully, in his book *Strange Multiplicity* (1995), is more explicit still: it is natural, he writes, for human beings to find themselves and know themselves in groups that are clearly bounded, mutually exclusive and internally homogeneous. Cultures bespeak self-evident, quasi-biological collectives, maintaining traditions uniquely suited to members who thrive when they remain true to their traditions and their organic developments.

Such multiculturalism happily revisits counter-Enlightenment polemics and rhetorics, in short: notions of culture with which Herder or de Maistre would have been comfortable, notions which also characterised a pre-Enlightenment *ancien regime* of a ‘society of orders’. Here were rigid demarcations, of fundamental and hierarchical differences, between individuals as members of grades, classes, sexes, religions, ethnicities, nations and races, notions also commensurate with twentieth-century totalitarianism. ‘Cultures are not options’ (Parekh) is, however, a patent falsehood. Indeed, ethnography can be said to deliver refutations of each and every one of the above purportedly ‘natural’ characteristics of cultural groupings. Cultural groupings are *not* clearly bounded; they are *not* mutually exclusive; they are *not* internally homogeneous; they do *not* house consensual traditions which develop organically and are uniquely suited to their members’ thriving. Cultural tradition is always a matter of interpretation, always part of an argument; cultural belonging is always an act of negotiation and contestation; cultural practice is always a matter of particular and interested application. Cultural groupings always exist in a field: a particular culture is always an agonistic, competitive and contrastive statement vis-à-vis other cultures. ‘A culture’, in short, is a process, and only deliberate programmes of cultural fundamentalism may endeavour to fix, define and sanction its fluidity and claim the crystallisation of a set of ‘traditional’ givens.

The morality of capacity

I would characterise our human nature in terms of its openness: there is no determinate relationship between capacity and substantiation just as there is no determinate relationship between circumstance and capacity. Capacity and substance are ontologically distinct: there is no necessary way that individual human beings must live out their capacious species inheritance. In its operation or substantiation human nature is individual in nature. Yes, there are universal limits – no human body has the capacity to fly, to survive on a diet without water, to enter into another mind, to survive death, and so on – but to a wide degree, what the individual human being makes of his or her capacities is a matter of willing and effecting.

The slogan of multiculturalism (*après* Parekh), ‘cultures are not options’, is not only a false claim, it can also be said to be pernicious. If the relationship between human capacity and individual substantiation is an indeterminate one, then a particular moral position can be said to follow from this, and indeed one of ancient pedigree (found in Aristotelian ethics if not before). A morality that does justice to our natural capacity to determine the substance of our lives in individual ways would be one that deems it right and proper that individuals be given the space to exercise this capacity, to fulfil themselves, so that the substance of individual lives is so far as possible a matter not only of individual action but of individual desire, choice and satisfaction. There is no morally necessary way in which the nature of human capacity need be substantiated besides that which is voluntarily entered into by the individual human being.

Alongside the openness of globalisation, of individuals able to envisage their life-project in global terms, then we must be wary of the closure of cultural fundamentalism. Brian Barry (2001: 32), in what he calls an egalitarian critique of multiculturalism, goes so far as to describe a new ‘Dark Age’ that the discourses of identity politics might usher in. Globalisation, in Roland Robertson’s (1990) description, is something we must anticipate as a dialectic process: provincialism alongside the urbane, discrimination and exclusion alongside a human inclusivity, stereotyping alongside a disavowing of traditional categories of essential difference. In this context, an anthropology of human nature amounts to a powerful and necessary statement, possessing a cosmopolitan mission: to ‘recognise humanity wherever it occurs, and give its fundamental ingredients, reason and moral capacity, our first allegiance and respect’ (Nussbaum 1996: 7). The anthropologist insists that one is human *not* inasmuch as one inhabits different worlds of culture but *over and against* such symbolic and rhetorical fictions. Putting culture in its place one commits to human being, to Anyone.

Is Good Intention Enough to Be Heard?

On Appadurai's 'Capacity to Aspire'

Gudrun Dahl

Abstract

The point of departure for my contribution is a reflection over Appadurai's approach to hope in relation to the contradictions between the politics and moralities of recognition versus redistribution and the ascription of individualising or structural explanations for the predicament of poor people. The will to give recognition is perspectivalised in relation to contemporary developmental ideologies that make grassroots' connections a moral value. However, an emphasis on hope as a basically individual characteristic or a cultural trait is also problematized in relation to the arguments of traditional 'theories of ascription'. The explanation of other people's actions tends to stress their own characteristics rather than the situational conditions under which they act. This may be a constraint for how even well intended academic discourse is received, transforming cultural or individual explanations into static models of the "blame-the-victim" type.

Keywords: culture, individual, moral, recognition, redistribution, ascription

As social scientists – anthropologists or development communicators – we like to see that our research adds something useful apart from intellectual understanding of the phenomena we study. For the work to appear meaningful, we like to think that we can add to the hope of the underprivileged, and to the respect that they meet in society. Communication is however a tricky issue involving both the intention of the communicating subject and the frames of interpretation activated by the recipient audience. In the present paper, I want to problematize these issues taking departure in Appadurai's article "The Capacity to Aspire; Culture and the Terms of Recognition" (2004).

The explicit aim of Appadurai's paper is to argue for the importance of culture for achieving development and for reducing poverty. "*It is in culture that ideas of the future as much as those about the past are embedded and nurtured*". "*...in strengthening the capacity to aspire, conceived of as a cultural capacity, especially among the poor, the future-oriented logic of development could find a natural ally and the poor could find the resources required to contest and alter the conditions of their own poverty...*" More precisely, Appadurai asks, how can we strengthen the capability of the poor to have and cultivate voice – to aspire to be heard in the public sphere.

The introduction of the paper appears to suggest an audience comprised mainly of people sharing a horizon different from that of the poor, but placed in a position to strengthen the latter's capacities. By doing so, they will assist the latter to become better "partners in the battle against poverty". This gives a slight paternalistic tone to the text. Appadurai asks "how the poor may be helped to those forms of cultural consensus that may best advance their own collective long-term interests in matters of wealth, equality and dignity". Despite the author's apparent ambitions, it stands out as clear from the text that Appadurai sees a lack of ambition, an insufficient capacity to aspire, as a problem among the poor that needs to be combatted. *"If so it /this capacity/ ought to be a priority concern of any developmental effort and a priority component of any project with other substantive goals (such as health, food security or job provision) directed to the reduction of poverty."*

Having opened up the article with the ambitious and broad task to argue for "the importance of culture" in a rather nonspecific way, Appadurai consciously avoids giving any more narrow definition of 'culture' except for counterposing it to 'development' and market economics. As these are human phenomena that do not stand outside the influence of cultural assumptions (even if their self-reflective ideologies often emphasize universality and neutrality) it is a bit surprising that the author contributes to reify such a dualism. He states that he has decided to focus on one, underemphasized dimension of culture, the orientation to a future that is provided within a particular cultural setting. He wants to answer *"how collective horizons are shaped"...* *how they constitute the basis for cultural aspirations*". These questions are general enough, but further on in his paper he takes a look at a particular set of organizations in Mumbai, the Alliance, formed between a group of social work professionals, a slum dwellers' grassroots foundation and a women's organization focusing on urban poverty.

Using the Mumbai material, the mode of writing in this article is by illustrative and mobilising examples, largely leaving the reader of the article to herself in drawing conclusions in more explicitly theoretical terms. Appadurai explicitly locates himself in relation to three influential sets of ideas:

1. theoretical debates about recognition, notably between the philosophers Taylor (1992), Honneth (1995) and Fraser (2001)
2. Hirschman's (1970) writings about 'loyalty', 'exit' and 'voice' and
3. Fernandez' (1965) work on the role of ritual performances in creating consensus 'on first principles'

What Appadurai draws from recognition theory, is mainly the obligation to give moral cognizance to people from other social situations and despite cultural differences, affording dignity, respect and equality. Such recognition, in philosophical writings, implies to accept the other as "capable of undertaking responsibilities and exercising authority" (Brandom 2007:137) and is normally based upon mutuality.

However, Appadurai does not dwell on all the complications actualized by the philosophical debate between the quoted authors, which is a pity since it clarifies some of the problems involved in giving recognition to the underprivileged, and which can also be actualized by his own text. He relates to Nancy Fraser (2001), a text where she suggested that there is a significant difference between her idea of desirable recognition and those proposed by Taylor (1992) and Honneth (1995), the two other pioneers in the area of the philosophy of recognition. Their emphasis lies on the discursive rehabilitation of the connotations attached to certain identities, and on the importance of societal recognition for individual self-confidence and self-realisation... They see recognition as a fundamental condition for reflexive self-recognition, which in turn impacts on the agency and capacities of the members of the disprivileged group. Fraser stressed in the quoted text that most situations of injustice imply aspects of unfair resource distribution as well as that of cultural misrecognition. Worrying that identity politics were on the verge of ousting issues of resource based injustice from the political agenda, she argued that it was necessary to consider both aspects, but see them as partly independent. Central to Fraser is the justice of 'participatory parity' (Fraser 2001 P 27), that one is allowed to take full part in social life on equal terms on the basis of one's humanity and the rights tied to that. Her approach for overcoming subordination is to emphasize universal rights and justice rather than by a reform of discourse. She sees such identity politics, that as representative of Honneth (2005) and Taylor (1992: 26) Fraser was also concerned that identity politics that built on the positive discursive re-evaluation of the characteristics of particular categories would imply oppressive pressures toward homogenization and conformity. Appadurai, in contrast appears to see consensus as a critical asset in the struggle for recognition. Although he does not spell out the exact mechanism whereby consensus affects "the capacity to aspire", nor specifies on what issues consensus is necessary, he advises his audience to look for the rituals where consensus is established, following the lead of Fernandez (1965).

Fraser and Appadurai have a common interest in promoting the level to which the people they write about are given parity of participation. However, Appadurai is not clear on the side where Fraser presents herself as different from Taylor and Honneth. Fraser terms her own approach as a concern for 'status-based recognition'. The positive effects that external discursive recognition has on the self-images and self-confidence of the disprivileged group may be real, Fraser suggests (2001, fn. 5), but should not be *the* preeminent reason to promote recognition. Not entering into this discussion, Appadurai does not answer the question whether it is by getting recognition for their human rights or for their cultural achievements, discursively rehabilitated, that the poor of Mumbai gain in voice through the organisation studied. However, as the ethnography presented emphasizes public image making, he appears to give weight to the latter and hence side with Honneth and Taylor. Taking an interest in how cultural recognition interacts with politics of economic justice and distribution, he asks whether cultural recognition can be extended to enhance redistribution. The answer lies, one

has to assume, in the gains achieved by a strengthened voice, and by the practical skills of housing and infrastructure construction, that the Alliance mediates to its members.

The empirical contribution

The Alliance is described as a collective representing poor people, an organization which systemizes and appropriates very concrete forms of knowledge about the needs of the poor in relation to housing and toilets. They make themselves visible and gain recognition in terms of this knowledge. The organization deals with resource mobilization, cohesion-making and visibility work. From this description, we can learn something about mass formation and the development of voice. In his ethnographic description of the instruments of the Alliance, Appadurai also notes their emphasis on savings schemes and moral discipline and a skilful and patient strategic use of precedents to achieve progress over a longer time but in terms of small steps. This is the part of the presented ethnography that can be most clearly related to ideas of the future, since the points made obviously have a temporal aspect. Activism is regulated by notions of operating patiently, within long-term horizons, and a public vocabulary of hopeful planning is significant, suggesting patience in the face of emergency. However, Appadurai tells us little about the direction in which people would want future conditions to change. Expected futures may of course differ in content, but a more general set of dimensions for understanding images of the future, independent of content, might be that of desirability, predictability, likelihood and avoidability. Since Appadurai links ideas about future to the options of loyalty, voice and exit, he seems to say that ideas about desirable futures (whether taken as realistically attainable or not-yet-ruled out) define these options.

The strategies presented are strategies on the organizational level, dealing with organizational matters. However, since Appadurai also talks about cultural resources, we have to take him as also referring to the contributions made by the organization to good conditions for a general cultivation of aspirations among the poor, members or not. This is not how he expresses himself, but the achievement of the Alliance appears to be to establish new normative expectations in a series of quite concrete matters: secure tenure, adequate housing and access to urban, sanitary infrastructure.

How can the poor themselves work to achieve recognition? Appadurai's text is written much as if the successes are singularly the achievement of the organization, leaving aside the wider context of recognition, the public audience in relation to which this work is carried out. Recognition however requires a location, a recognising agent. Apart from the self, some social actor has to be affording the recognition, regulating access to the public arena and offering either the recognitional respect that is due to any human being or what the philosophers call 'esteem', the appreciation a particular person or group is afforded for their particular characteristics or contributions to the common good (see e.g. Fraser 2001: 39 fn 6). In Appadurai's article, the recognizer

is left anonymous: neither Appadurai himself nor the audience are posited as those who should offer recognition: instead the audience is supposed to support the efforts of the poor in working for recognition. The author does not problematize the cultural framework that is activated as a context for such agency, but notes that the poor have to speak within the idioms of the power-holders in order to be heard.

Intuitively, rather than by what is clear and explicit in Appadurai's presentation of data, we can read his ethnography to suggest that the Alliance, the organization he describes, is making a bid to the actors of the public sphere. They offer electoral numbers, provide insider insights to the material needs of the poor, and deliver moral credits associated with a grassroots connection. A local basis, participation by local people, is currency in the world of politics and international cooperation. The rhetoric of grassroots bases and participatory democracy provides a niche that can be matched by skilful and organized deployment of structured local knowledge by representatives of the underprivileged. It also forms a need among politicians and international organisations for supporting and illuminating examples.

It is difficult for a reader not to be impressed by the achievements of the Alliance movement. Yet, the critical and suspicious anthropologist always has to make full stop at the sight of eulogic descriptions. The text by Appadurai raises a number of questions when it comes to what voices, whose representation it is that we hear through the text. What is the general relation of membership in the Alliance to the fuzzy category of 'the poor'? What is the level of internal stratification within the organization? Are there differences within when it comes to the level and nature of aspiration? What is the level of participation felt among those who cannot afford going to New York when the movement makes an impressive exhibition of functional toilets in the lobby of the UN building? These issues further actualize some of the ethical problems of doing anthropology in a world of inequality and injustice: can we, as representing the better privileged, scrutinize the organizations that claim to represent the underprivileged and a good cause? Or are we silenced in our critical analytical task by our wishes to be on the side of the good?

We thus do not get to know much about the actual involvement of grassroots members in this successful alliance, seen relative to that of leaders and organizational entrepreneurs. Be that as it may, Appadurai quotes a number of valuable skills with which his interlocutors have empowered themselves as they engage in activities that ensure external visibility by performances in the public sphere) or putting commitments on public record. As mentioned, Appadurai's text is mainly concerned with recognition in the sense of getting access to the public sphere and not so much with identity issues, yet these pop up in the text in the form of internal consensus-making by rituals and external visibility work. The text describes how the organization develops linguistic and metaphoric tools and skills that can appeal to decision-makers and power-holders. These are practical tools and skills that can be used collectively both to directly address the practical problems of everyday life, and to make image-changing demonstrations of the potential skills of the underprivileged. What we learn

from the text is that voice is cultivated as a capacity to articulate, confidence to do so, capacity to be listened to, and a capacity to say relevant things in the right language. To make progress, the poor need to be able to appeal to other poor (“talk to peasants in the peasants’ way”) as well as by mobilising “ideologies, doctrines and norms” credible to the rich and powerful (“talking to learned men in Latin”). In Appadurai’s text, voice thus refers to discursive resources which are clearly cultural by nature, not independent of existing structures of unequal power: *“for voice to take effect, it must engage social, political and economic issues in terms of ideologies, doctrines and norms which are widely shared and credible, even by the rich and powerful”*. Appadurai also mentions practical skills of architecture and design meeting the immediate needs of the poor – tools both of changing the physical infrastructure and the imagery surrounding the poor themselves in the eyes of those who are endowed with more privileges. These are useful skills indeed, raising the issue of which practical skills can be the most valuable acquisitions of the poor. The link to aspirations and hopes is however not demonstrated in the text but taken for granted.

Some theoretical issues in Appadurai’s paper

As mentioned, Appadurai is in this text not much concerned by definitions: he abstains explicitly from defining ‘culture’ as well as ‘the market’. The text would have profited from a clarification of the relation between some other central terms, ‘hope’, ‘aspiration’ and ‘ideas of futures’. Hope is not so predominant as a term in this article, but it stands out clearly from the interview made by Ronald Stade, that the author has later moved in that direction. Despite that at least the two first terms are presented as central to the purpose and focus of the article, they stand out as relatively untheorized in the text. Partly, this is a reflection of the state of the field when the article was written. In the last dozen of years, the concept of hope has moved into a more central place in social scientific writing. One of those who have tried to approach hope as a theoretical problem is Richard Swedberg (2007). In a summarizing survey of sociological, anthropological, philosophical and economic references to the term, he notes the lack of a clear sociological definition of hope and problematizes its relation to other concepts such as expectation, trust, and desire. Like Appadurai, he emphasizes the collective nature of ‘hope’, although, following Durkheim, he uses the terminology of ‘social facts’ rather than that of ‘culture’. Swedberg cites the Oxford English Dictionary’s (OED 1989: 377) definition of hope as “to entertain an expectation of something desired, to look (mentally) with expectations”. Nevertheless, he says, ‘expectation’ implies a higher likelihood of realization than hope, and, unlike hope, does not have to be for a positively valued phenomenon or event. His own suggestion is simply that ‘hope’ should be defined as “the wish for something to come true”. Some of the other authors who have written about hope, and whom he quotes, discuss hope either in terms of it being linked to some measure of probability, or being cut off from a realistic and

rational assessment of the world and calculations of risk. I myself would like to suggest that hope can most fruitfully be seen in terms of a desire for “a possible positive outcome which is not yet ruled out”. Such a definition is not based upon the degree of probability, but on non-abetted possibility. Specifying hope in this way to a notion of desired future conditions, which have not yet been ruled out, differentiates it from the categories of expectation and probability but also from the notion of desire (Miyazaki 2004: 48, Crapanzano 2003: 19 and 26-27fn. 6)

Hirschman 1986: 173-174) has generally criticized sociologists for depending too much on probabilities in judging the future, proposing that they stay open to that unlikely events do happen. A blinding concern for probabilities stops the analyst from seeing the possible but improbable. Clinging to an as-if-future however, as long as it is not yet proven wrong, allows an actor to frame her stands and actions as meaningfully motivated. Swedberg (2007: 18) quotes Adam Smith’s opinion that hope makes people overestimate their chances of making a profit and underestimate their chances of making a loss” (Smith 1776/1976: 126) and links this to overconfidence theory (De Meza & Southey 1996), a body of literature concerned with how small business owners often badly overestimate their chances to succeed.

How should we then look at the relation between the concepts of *hope* and *aspiration*? In contrast to hope, the concept of aspiration instead points to a certain (moralized) realism in the ambition to realize a hope. Talking about aspiration is implying a scale of standards to be reached or superseded, standards stating what it is normal and legitimate to strive for. It is linked to the recognition of a possibility that improvement can follow upon effort: a reasonable, legitimate, just and attainable expectation. The connotation of standard against which an intention can be measured raises the difficult issue who it is that does the measuring, and what type of intentions are valid as aspirations – do we rely on an ‘emic’ or ‘etic’ definition here? A general problem is that what is counted as agency by the outside observer is also culturally determined, set in a particular context that is often taken for granted by the observer. Appadurai appears to argue that aspirations too are always set in particular cultural frames. Accepting this, we have to consider the possibility that aspiration, agency, innovation and so on in fact exist among the poor, but are directed towards other goals than those with which we as observers count. Does the author suggest that the poor need external support in redefining them? Or does he suggest that the poor are also weak in aspiring to attainable goals defined by their own available cultural repertoire, and need to get their ambitions boasted even in relation to this repertoire?

As a suggestion, we are here concerned with the standards of resource access, recognition and parity of participation that people set for themselves, culturally shared ideas of what constitutes a good life and with the ambition to exceed them. If we think of this as something which occurs at the individual level, this would correspond to the term ‘capacity to aspire’ used by Appadurai.

Talking about “collective aspirations” and “culture as a capacity” Appadurai assumedly refers to shared ideas about what is normal to expect of life and to aspire

to, rather than aspirations on behalf of the collective as such. He talks about shared notions of desirable objects and of the knowledge of the means to realize them, that is, about the social and cultural availability of models, in terms of both the plurality of actually existing possibilities and those which are only imagined. In an earlier article, Appadurai himself (1991: 197-198) has raised the issue of how such imaginations are spurred by mediated dreams and images of wealth, conveyed by media and the movement of people.

As mentioned, the leading philosophers of recognition offer a theoretical model where societal recognition is fundamental to individual self-realisation and self-esteem. Appadurai however makes no explicit elaboration as to the interrelations between on one hand the various cultural preconditions of aspiration that he suggests by quoting the example of the Alliance, and on the other individual levels or directions of aspiration or hope. Nevertheless, the concepts of hope and aspiration lead the thoughts to the individual level. They are both terms that primarily relate to individual directionality and intentionality. With their element of emotionality, they are difficult to separate from this individual basis, as noted by other sociologists and anthropologists who have written on the topic of hope (See Swedberg 2007: 22). For Appadurai "culture is a capacity" but he also states that people have a learnable "capacity for aspiration". Evoking the opportunity to train the capacity to aspire suggests an individual approach. If we instead think in terms of a repertoire of cultural models, collective dreams and locally available knowledge about possible ways of strategizing, the focus becomes put on what is shared within the collective.

The notion of learning, even the term 'capacity' in itself, suggests a subject, an agent, rather than points to the assets that the agent mobilizes. The question is thus whether hope and aspiration can at all be decoupled from psychological factors. There is also an unclear point here, shared by Appadurai and Swedberg, each in their independent coupling of capacity with other terms. Swedberg (2007: 23-24) links the notion of hope to the notion of individual capacity, stating that "hope may be understood as a capacity that people have...once destroyed...something important is missing in the individual". Swedberg therefore (like Appadurai) raises the question whether this capacity can be furthered, but he also talks of the capacity to hope. There would appear to be a difference of nuance here, between talking of the 'capacity to hope' and about hope being in itself a capacity for achieving something else, making different actions and stances possible. Swedberg's text is unclear here.

The individualistic bias is not contradicted by Appadurai's evocations of Amartya Sen's capability approach, which has been characterised as an individually based developmental model with little structural analysis at the level of unequal power (O'Hearn, op.cit.). Sen (e.g. 1989,1999) is an author of great influence in terms of ethics and economy, whose treatises on development are centred on freedom both as a means to development and as its principal end: it is through the putting into work of people's individual free agency that development is achieved. Sen has a broad view on what 'freedom' entails, including freedom from spiritual and material want,

political freedoms, access to economic facilities, social opportunities, guarantees of transparency and protective security. He has however been criticized for having a too tight focus at one side on purely individual capabilities and at the other on the enabling or disabling state, disregarding international trade inequalities and other structural problems (O'Hearn, *op.cit.*). Poverty is thus a matter of the individual capability to realize the life one wishes for: societal poverty becoming an aggregate of individual instances of lack of capability. And as it seems to be for Appadurai, capabilities reflect education and can be trained.

Appadurai's version of 'the capacity to aspire' is thus unclear as to whether the capacity is an individual or a collective one. Do we best look at it as in itself a culturally elaborated theme or is it instead a lack of positive cultural elaborations? Is there a collective lack of hope which reflects or aggregates the individual instances of a lack of motivation and aspiration, e.g. expressed as depression and the absence of a vision of future? Is there a non-equal distribution of the capacity to think in terms of aspiration? Is it the opportunities for practice and experience that are unfairly distributed? Or should we rather see the cultural resources as actually constituting the capacity?

The culture of poverty?

Since the topic of the article is the role of culture for enhancing the situation of the poor, the reader is easily led to associate to the idea of a 'culture of poverty', even if the emphasis in the text is on what could uplift the poor rather than what holds them back. Appadurai does not want to reawaken old conflicts over the controversial concept of 'culture of poverty', a concept first suggested by socialist sociologist Michael Harrington (1962), but made famous particularly by the writings of anthropologist Oscar Lewis, in his writings on Mexico (1959) and Puerto Rico (1966). Appadurai just discards the concept by saying that anthropologists have 'rightly' ceased to use it. He neither presents it nor criticises its flaws in more detail. However, since his own approach shares some of the characteristics that raised opposition against Lewis' model, one could have wished that he had engaged more explicitly with the shortcomings of the model and ventured into a debate on them. No doubt, in looking at the potential of Appadurai's approach, one can learn something from the reception and criticism of 'the poverty of culture' in Lewis' version. The idea of a 'culture of poverty' from the very beginning stood for a relatively unclear theoretical model, in which structural conditions or negative experience formed the assumed culture. Lewis argued that poor people, who failed to live up to the expectations of an individualist society nurturing the myths of possible success for all who make an effort, had to find ways of adjusting to the realities of limits to social mobility and repeated frustrations, making the best they could out of their meagre resources for existence. The poor were assumed to lack hope, aspirations and forward thinking. To these central traits in the 'culture of poverty' were added a large number of other traits such as "fatalism, group disinte-

gration, personal disorganization, resignation, fatalism and lack of purposeful action (Valentine 1968:77)” but also particular strategies of marriage, proneness to violence and so on. Oscar Lewis listed up to 70 characteristics, but saw them as intertwined and interrelated.

Similar to Appadurai, the issue of a lack of aspirations among the poor was posited as a central problem by Lewis. For both authors, the assumption of such a lack is presented as a taken for given, rather than as a statement of social realities that has to be proved before being explained. Both authors suggest that certain situational conditions generate certain cultural characteristics, or hinder the emergence of others. In delineating what the determinants of the assumed lack of ambition are, Lewis has seemingly a stronger emphasis on frustration, the effects of thwarted aspiration and learning by negative experience. Appadurai’s explanation for a lack of ambitions lies in that the poor lack opportunities to train the capacities and ambitions. Such opportunities, he says, are more varied for the richer, the wealthier get better training in aspiring. They have better access to the maps of practical strategizing. While we in the case of Lewis have the role of practice and disappointment of unrealizable goals, Appadurai thus emphasizes the role of practice and good experience from realistic goals.

The capacity to aspire, like any complex cultural capacity, thrives and survives on practice, repetition, exploration, conjecture and refutation (Appadurai 2004: 69).

In contrast to the main emphasis of Lewis’ analyses, the concept of ‘culture’ is not used by Appadurai to delineate the absences that supposedly characterize the poor. Culture is instead mobilised as the saviour from these problems. At the time of Oscar Lewis, the anthropological notion of culture was considerably more rigid than it is today, suggesting homogeneity and boundedness.

Appadurai attempts to evoke a less deterministic notion of culture for his analysis than that suggested to have represented Oscar Lewis and his time: cultures consist of interrelated items, they have leaky boundaries, they are always only partially shared, there is always dissensus within relative consensus, leakage and osmosis. Nevertheless, Appadurai still sticks to the ‘a culture’ and ‘cultures’ trope.

Lewis and Appadurai also show similarities in seeing the relation of the poor to dominant culture as ambivalent. Lewis talks about awareness and “partial allegiance” to middle class values, while Appadurai notes that the poor cultivate attitudes of irony and distance to dominating values, yet comply with their own subordination. Trying to operate within the structures of limited recognition that tie them back, they even have to contribute to the reproduction of their subordination. Both authors apparently see class or category consciousness, organization and access to mobilizing visions as the clues to breaking out from the fetters of poverty. Although this is not clearly spelt out, Appadurai’s concern for the rituals of establishing consensus may relate to the creation of such visions. Furthermore, while Appadurai connects to the politics of identity by suggesting that the poor are an increasingly self-aware group, Lewis tends to see them as cut off from wider insights into the structures of oppression and

exploitation, still mentioning class consciousness and mobilizing visions as offering potential openings (Valentine 1968: 71).

When the theory of a poverty of culture was appropriated by popular discourse, it was in terms of unchangeable cultural traits that reproduced poverty. Thus, the theory could function as a form of blaming the victims for their own poverty. What was picked up were not ideas about a constraining situation but essentializing ideas about the nature of the poor. Different writers on the culture of poverty put different weight on how static the culture of poverty was, but the popular reception appears to have been formed by interests supporting a discourse of a 'culture of poverty' that was socially shared and static in its consequences. Lewis' model, in its lack of clarity implied a logic contradiction. The experience of poverty was seen as able to create culture but the experience of increased opportunities would in contrast not be able to do so: in fact, as Charles Valentine (1968) observed, Lewis appeared to consider the culture of poverty to be more resilient to change attempts than poverty itself. Building on Bourgois (2001: 11905) Staffan Löfving has argued that much of the criticism was not concerned with Oscar Lewis original formulations but with the policy models inspired by it (Löfving 2006: 219). This was already noted by Valentine, one of the very early critics: "Much of the public impact of the 'culture of poverty' idea has of course been mediated by other channels including many secondary sources, specialized applications or misapplications and popularized discussions. Obviously such applications as using the poverty-culture concept to justify restricted educational opportunities must be understood and dealt with separately from the original work" (Valentine 1968: 67).

Just as Appadurai himself in his text comes through as a person with a sincere engagement for the people he writes about, Lewis' writings reflect an intention to contribute to progressive and humane community policies and better public understanding of the plights of the poor. (Valentine 1968: 49, 67). Nonetheless, his work allowed policy-makers to look in other directions than to the need for structural economic reform. In his summary of the criticisms against Lewis, Bourgois (loc.cit) notes that the emphasis has been on empirically disproving Lewis instead of "critiquing theoretically his psychological reductionism, his sloppy use of the culture concept and his failure to link in a dynamic manner macro-structural political and economic forces – including gender power relations – to ideology, culture and individual values." The carrying force behind the criticism is suggested by Bourgois to have been a wish to protect the poor from negative images, an ambition to discursive rehabilitation, in which political indifference, violence and self-destructive behaviour would be given less place. Valentine's early criticism pointed in particular to the mismatch between the abstract generalizations about political indifference and passivity that Lewis himself made, and the apparent picture conveyed by his own ethnographic material – of actively involved, agentive people. Bourgois however, suggests that many of the social phenomena included in Lewis very broad description of the culture of poverty are real, still existing empirical problems that only need another way of approaching them.

Descriptive rehabilitation

Appadurai's interest in recognition focuses mainly on aspects how the poor can achieve better terms of recognition in the society of which they are part. A particular aspect of this issue seen as an anthropological topic is however whether the very writing activities of the researcher contributes to recognition by reconstructing and redefining the identity of the described group and the values associated with it. Appadurai does not voice any such ambitions. Following from his suggestion of a lack of aspiring capacity, the paper itself is not an attempt at discursive rehabilitation of the poor, at least not in this aspect: Appadurai is not suggesting that the poor be reevaluated, but that they can develop tools to overcome their problems: their lack of aspiration is an unquestioned and somewhat epistemologically problematic part of the description of these problems. Problems of recognition and dignity-raising are central to him, but he partakes in a discourse that diminishes their agency and aspirations, central measures of dignity in a neoliberal ideology.

Morals of recognition have been a marked part of anthropological ethics since long before Taylor (1992) wrote about them, but on shifting terms. It is important to consider the relation between ideological fashions and the selection of concepts that are used for recognition. During the period of high modernism, the ethics of anthropological writing were characterised by the ambition to counter negative descriptions by discursive recognition in terms of rationality. During the neoliberal era, there has been a turn to formulate discursive recognition more in terms of the contemporary ideals of capability and agency (Dahl 2009). That is, if the subjects of our description and analysis are aspiring, hopeful and entrepreneurial persons they fit into this pattern of contemporary ideals. Hope and agency – in its double sense of both referring to a preparedness to act and actually having an effect on history and structure – are analytical terms but also represent ideological exhortations.

Recognition philosophers differentiate between the basic respect that should normatively accrue to any human being and appraisal-based esteem. The latter concerns individual attainment of merit according to capacities appreciated by society (Darwall 1977). Since recognition in the human respect sense should come in a bundle with human rights, achievement should according to these philosophers have no place in "changing the terms of recognition", only possibly the terms or 'esteem'. In real-life discourse, such distinctions are not all that clearcut. In a neoliberal ideology aspirations and agency (particularly as expressed in entrepreneurial work) are central measures of dignity, and people are seen as differing in the degree to which they fulfil them. Rather than taking it for granted that these values apply to all humans, that agency in the sense of willingness to act or choosing to be passive is universal, aspirations and agency are seen as rods for measuring varying levels of value. They come to take an intermediate position between the human universals supporting human rights and 'respect' and the achievements encouraged by 'esteem'. Hence the common rhetorical turn of claiming that "these people are not victims but agents", which became very

common in anthropological writings around the millennium shift. The emulation of agency, hope and aspirations and the positive call for the social scientist not only to describe the role of 'hope', but to add to it, suggests that there are people out there, who are 'passive', and lack hope and aspiration to a higher degree than their situations motivate, unprepared to make use of the opportunities available to them in order to change their situation.

Appadurai may care for recognition, but by his emphasis on a lack of aspiration he still risks to partake in a discourse that ascribes diminished agency and aspiration to the individual poor, and be read and heard just like Lewis once was read and heard. The two cases of Oscar Lewis and Arjun Appadurai – both well-intending humanists presenting unclear theoretical models – raise the issue how the writings and problematizations of social scientists are received by the general public and by policy-makers, and how they in themselves relate to widely circulated representations of the poor: in this case, the received wisdom that the poor lack in the capacity to aspire. How the power-holders and the privileged present subordinates and subalterns in derogative discourses which devalue the human values of the latter – and which are taken over by the latter in their self-concepts is a recurrent theme for example in post-colonial studies (and see e.g. Sen 1995: 218). The ascription of undue passivity and a lack of responsibility is a common part of power-legitimizing ideologies hitting poor subsistence farmers, pastoralists, forest dwellers and fishers as well as urban squatters and other disprivileged people around the world. It is so common that the first reflex of the social scientist coming across such descriptions should be to ask to what extent the ideas mirror reality or wishful and legitimacy ideas? To what extent do our analytical models reflect ideologies of the day? And whether they do or do not, what are the constraints of communication? Are we, like the urban poor in Appadurai's text obliged to speak in an idiom that the powerful understand, in order to be listened to at all? Of the things we say, what will be heard and what will not be heard? To what extent is what is picked up (from an unclear and half implicit analysis) shaped by the audience's precognitions?

What I worry is that in terms of the politics of recognition, the postulate that lack of aspiration is a widespread cultural trait among the poor, will be the message that is most easily transferred to policymakers. This holds even if the empirical material presented by Appadurai indeed points to groups that appear to be characterized by ambitions and agency. He fails to undermine the same type of criticism that hit Lewis – and which the latter himself found very disturbing (Bourgeois 2001:11905) the accusation of blaming the victims. Nonetheless, shortcomings in the form of a pessimistic attitude towards the possibilities of the future are easily rhetorically turned into personal shortcomings of the persons concerned. This risk is also central to Fraser's discontent with the thinking about recognition represented by her philosophical colleagues: *"When misrecognition is identified with internal distortions in the structure of self-consciousness of the oppressed, it is but a short step to blaming the victim, as imputing psychic damage to those subject to racism, for example, seems to add insult*

to injury” (Fraser 2001:27). She thus objects to exactly that which is central to Honneth and Taylor, raising a problem that was central also in the criticism that met the ‘culture of poverty’. Appadurai escapes the problem by not elaborating explicitly on the relation between the collective and individual levels, not even in terms of how bad self-confidence mirrors misrecognition. Concentrating on the hopeful side he however somehow implies that the collective can positively be mirrored in the individual.

Policy fashions (as part of power-based discourses) create a varied market for different interpretations, and also for empirical counterarguments, like in the case of the reactions to Oscar Lewis culture of poverty concept. Some narratives however tend to become so dominant that they submerge such empirical counterarguments, and even obscure the need for empirical testing of what is taken for given. Against the neoliberal wish for hope as a means leading to larger entrepreneurial risk-taking for example, we have to note that passivity is also created by realistic assessments of limited opportunities. Passivity may in itself be an active choice, and sometimes it is perhaps not actively chosen, but rather a protective mental and bodily reaction. At the most intimate individual level rather than at the level of what is collectively shared, depression, with its concomitant passivity and loss of sense of future has been read as an evolutionary adaptation at the individual level, a way of stopping engagement for unrealizable goals and slowing down the taking on of alternative projects (see e.g. Nesse 2000)

Lack of hope or ambition cannot be properly evaluated without a realist appreciation of actual resources and opportunities open to the individual or household, both in terms of the cultural context, as suggested by Appadurai, but also in terms of access to capital, time, labour and structures of legality. Among the factors which are unevenly distributed in this world are also disappointment, and the experience of thwarted ambitions.

Differences in resource access just like structural violence and misrecognition result in different levels of confidence in one-self and in the effectiveness of action. If we find such structural traits, what is the likelihood that we will be able to communicate that they influence the capacity to act? How can such imagery overrule the essentializing projection of the poor as inherently without aspiration? Within the tradition of social psychology, the classic ‘attribution theory’ (Jones & Nisbett 1971, Regan & Totten 1975) states that when we talk of others we think in terms of who they are, while when we explain our own behaviour we talk in terms of the situation we operate in. The ‘fundamental attribution error’ describes the tendency to overvalue dispositional or personality-based explanations for behaviour while under-valuing situational explanations (Sanderson 2010). The division between essence and situation as frameworks for understanding individual action is also there in terms of the interpretation of the concept of culture. That is, a cultural repertoire of ideas and symbolic forms may either be seen as a limiting or enabling set of instruments for human action in a particular situation, or as shaping the very nature of the acting subject him/herself in a deterministic way. However, insights both in the long history of linking denigra-

tion to social dominance and the peculiar contribution of 'attribution theory' offer signs of ethic direction. To take the perspective of the actor, we have to look at the situation rather than think in terms mainly of essence or identities that are reflected in behaviour. The quoted theories of recognition as well as the Foucaultian heritage about subjectivity teach us that in addressing agency, a very clear distinction cannot be undertaken between subject, self-images and situation. Looking close at the conditions of living in poverty, we should nevertheless be aware of the difficulties of conveying a real 'actors perspective' and the risk that our audience will always for political and other reasons listen best to explanations that tend to make the poor mainly responsible themselves for their predicament. It will not do to leave the question of the relation between individual action, culture and structures of resources unclear.

Hope, Fairness and the Search for the Good Life

A Slightly Oblique Comment to Arjun Appadurai

Thomas Hylland Eriksen

Abstract

This chapter argues that the good life has a number of commonalities which can be found cross-culturally. Material affluence is not one of them. Rather, the good life presupposes a sense of fairness, existential security and fulfilling social relationships, being needed by others, and – last, but not least – hope. The bulk of the chapter consists in a discussion of the category of hope; what it entails in diverse cultural contexts, and under which circumstances hope fades and disappears. The chapter, pitched as a comment to Arjun Appadurai's work on hope and poverty, builds on the author's book *Storeulvsyndromet* ('The syndrome of the big, bad wolf', not translated into English), which is mainly concerned with the search for happiness in an affluent society. Like the book, this chapter critically interrogates widespread assumptions about the conditions for the good life, outlining alternative parameters, where hope is a central concept.

Keywords: hope, poverty, affluence, good life, fairness, happiness

You and I, lucky enough to be alive at the outset of the third millennium CE, live – objectively speaking – in paradise. This particular 'you and I' does not, alas, refer to humanity *tout court*, but to the richest fifth of the global population, somewhat more than a billion people, us who constitute the global middle and upper classes, we who inhabit the leafy suburbs of the global village, who enjoy a fast internet connection and a remote control for our television set, who ask ourselves what we should have for dinner and daydream about a nice holiday. It is those 20 per cent of us who consume 80 per cent of the world's wealth, to which category everybody who reads these words belongs, but not the people Arjun has in mind when he speaks of hope as a political force. Hope is far less often mentioned in political contexts among the affluent than among the poor. Yet, never before in human history or prehistory have so many people had so much – so many things, so many opportunities for partaking in rewarding leisure activities, such good health, so much freedom of choice, such a high life expectancy. Entirely average people enjoy a material standard of living which in most respects surpasses that of the landed aristocracy in the mid-nineteenth century.

Granted, we do have fewer thoroughbred horses and crystal chandeliers, fewer private chamber orchestras and less silverware than nineteenth-century aristocrats.

But at the end of the day, that may not matter so much. In mid-19th century, statisticians estimated how thick the layer of horse droppings covering the streets of central London would be a century later, provided the current development continued. The scenario was alarming. The pessimists envisioned a future when the preferred footwear for crossing Piccadilly Circus would be wading boots or perhaps stilts. A few years later (in 1864), the Underground opened its first lines, and another few decades later, the horses had become a tourist attraction, analogous to the sperm whales of Lofoten (northern Norway) in the early 21st century. The sign had not changed its physical appearance, but suddenly it signified tourist titillation rather than economic utility.

At the end of the day, we who belong to the global middle class manage pretty well without two hundred crystal glasses and pompous, dusty and impractical chandeliers. Chamber orchestras, naturally, have since long been replaced by affordable Asian stereo systems capable of streaming music at virtually the same quality as the original, at any time of day or night.

Perfectly ordinary people who belong to the global middle class – and it includes the vast majority of us from the North Atlantic – live in spectacular luxury, regardless of the basis for comparison. We live in warm, bright, clean and not least spacious dwellings. (In 1946, a two-room unit with a kitchen and a bathroom was considered a functional European family flat.) On the whole, notwithstanding allergies and personal preferences, we can eat whatever we want to. The food is quality controlled and generally tastes good. (It is well known that the animals we sometimes eat do not always lead fulfilling lives, but animals were not necessarily happy in earlier times either.) Thanks to improved methods of production, an inexpensive wine from Australia or South Africa tastes as good as, if not better than, wines imbibed by royalty a couple of centuries ago. In contrast to 19th century aristocrats, we are also able to enjoy the exotic tastes of bananas, oranges and mangoes all year round, in addition to a range of foodstuffs they had never heard of.

Books, to mention another example, have become incredibly cheap. Many cost less than an average hour's salary, and the selection is unlimited. We can also listen to our favourite music whenever we want to, even when the musicians are asleep or dead. When North Europeans take our four, five or six weeks of annual vacations, millions of us can spend some of them at a pleasant hotel in a remote area. A hundred years ago, Norwegians in general had no holidays; fifty years ago, they went on a camping trip to neighbouring Sweden or Denmark; and by now, Thailand has become a standard destination for a family vacation. By 2014, more than 80 per cent of the Norwegian population went on at least one holiday trip abroad, spending on an average two weeks a year in a hotel.

When members of the global middle class have a spare moment – and they often do, since the number of working hours has decreased steadily in the last hundred years – they have many options. Some engage in various leisure activities, from golf to singing in choirs, but they can also be entertained or enlightened by others at whim. Concert halls, cinemas, sports arenas and theatres sell tickets within purchasing range

for most, and at home, practically everybody has one or several television sets with a varied selection of enlightening, distracting or entertaining programmes. During the last few years, the Internet has also become an important source of entertainment, distraction and enlightenment.

The level of education is increasing, and the proportion of jobs which are hazardous to health or physically exhausting is being reduced (or outsourced) by the year. The number of hours spent on housework among European women has decreased steadily since the Second World War, at the same time as the size of the dwellings has increased.

Moreover, we live longer than earlier generations, including the aristocracy, which had a tendency of dying prematurely from consumption or broken hearts. This is also the case with the materially poorer countries, except those African countries which are most affected by AIDS. Average global life expectancy in 1900 was 31; a hundred years later it was 66.8 (more than a doubling!), and in many of the richest countries it hovers around 80 (Morgan 2007). Many of you who read this may live to be a hundred. We stay healthier than earlier generations, thanks to medicines and vaccination programmes, better nutrition and changes in the world of labour. The dehumanising and dangerous jobs in agriculture, mining and industry have been humanised in our part of the world, and in the global middle class, it is uncommon that people are physically exhausted at the age of 40. Today, our kind of people – the wealthiest fifth of humanity – simply do not grow old the way they used to. Some years ago, a dear colleague and friend died, and his death was especially sad because he was so young, only 62. But as late as 1928, the American demographer Louis Dublin predicted that the ceiling on life expectancy would be reached at a national average of 64.75 years. He was in fact an optimist, as expected longevity in the USA at the time was 57 years. (Dublin himself lived to be 87.)

We have lived in paradise for some time now. Most of the denizens of our global middle class world only know absolute scarcity and poverty through stories from mass media. If they live in countries with severe inequality, they are nevertheless intermittently exposed to glimpses of poverty on their way to work or leisure activities. One exception are immigrants from poor countries and their children. Although their social mobility has in most cases been spectacular, they have vivid memories of scarcity, which remains a fundamental reality in the country of their close relatives.

Two general aspects of life in paradise deserve mentioning. First – and this is the case with all earthly paradises – it cannot last forever. Second – and this concerns our specific paradise – we now know that objectively paradisiac conditions do not necessarily make the inhabitants of paradise satisfied. Studies from the UK and the USA suggest that the subjectively experienced well-being ('SWB') has not increased noticeably since the 1950s (Offer 2005), that is a time without holidays in the sun, mobile telephones, colour television and Saturdays off. There is also influential and much-cited research that suggests that well-being is not correlated with income, at least for those who do not live in absolute poverty (see e.g. Easterbrook 2003). Researchers are not entirely agreed amongst themselves: Some claim that more money fails to

make an impact only for the richest 25 per cent, while others have argued that most people in fact do not enjoy a higher level of well-being with an increase in material welfare, provided they had enough to begin with.

‘We have everything, but that’s all we have,’ said the Norwegian folk singer Ole Paus some years ago. Although this observation was later quoted by two prime ministers in their televised New Year’s speeches, it has not led to perceptible shifts in politics. Even in incredibly rich Norway, it would have amounted to political suicide to propose reduced consumption and a reduced material standard of living – in spite of the fact that it is now fairly widely known, and not least experienced, that increased well-being or happiness in an affluent society depends on other things than an ever higher material standard of living.

The view that it is necessary to reduce carbon emissions, and thus energy consumption, and indeed economic growth, in order to halt climate change, is not universally held, but it is widespread and influential. There are few objections from politicians or editorialists whenever the IPCC presents conclusions to the effect that energy consumption and lifestyles in the affluent countries have to change. The need to be serious about the threat of irreversible global warming frequently figures in public speeches; yet, next to nothing is being done about the issue, and so far, few vote for politicians who sincerely promise to contribute to developing a post-extractive or carbon-neutral society. Nearly everybody, moreover, agrees that money, power and fame do not make you happy, and yet exactly such values govern both the workplace and the economy as such. Most members of the global middle class would say, if asked, that we are a single humanity who have to find ways of living together, yet there is considerable intolerance towards culturally different groups. The most significant contradiction, or double-bind, however, is that which exists between growth and sustainability. One cannot have it both ways in the long run; through our spectacularly successful and comfortable way of life, we are simultaneously undermining the conditions for our own existence. Perhaps it is true that in the global middle class, we have everything, but ultimately that’s all we have.

What is missing? Perhaps the short answer is hope: Arjun is completely right in emphasising a politics of hope as crucial. It may well be argued that unlike the societies he speaks of, contemporary affluent societies lack hope. To most people belonging to the global middle class, life after death is – at most – a vague notion. It is far too weak to provide sufficient hope to live by. Material scarcity has been left behind, at least for now, and there is little indication that it will return in our lifetimes. The dream of satisfying material needs, in other words, is not a source of hope either. With a minimum of security precautions, we North Atlantics can move safely wherever we might wish to in our near surroundings, without having to fear attacks from wild animals or gangs of bandits. If we become ill, we may reasonably expect to recover. Throughout the history of humanity, the struggle for survival has been a major topic and a major source of hope. This is no longer the case among the privileged classes. Hope is no longer necessary to keep us going; life now runs on an autopilot.

Syndrome of the big, bad wolf

For this condition, I propose a diagnosis I label the syndrome of the big, bad wolf. The foundational story is as follows. The voracious and always hungry Zeke Wolf, who lives in a dense forest not too far from the dwarfs' quarry and Cinderella's stepmother's mansion, has one big, overarching project in his life, namely to capture, cook and eat three delicious, pink pigs who live less than a mile away in the same forest. For this reason, he gets up every morning and lays his dastardly plans after consuming a frugal breakfast (usually oatmeal porridge). He develops original disguises (a favourite being the elderly, gangrenous woman with a stick and a basket of apples) and builds sophisticated traps, conjures up labyrinthine routes through the forest as if he were a master chess player, and lies in hiding with great patience near paths he knows the pigs often take. He subscribes to the local press in order to follow news of public events such as fancy fairs, where the pigs might be present; he becomes an actor, an engineer and an athlete, all for the sake of capturing the pigs.

Usually, the pigs are one step ahead of the wolf, but on at least one occasion, he succeeded in catching them. The details elude me, but I remember him bundling the three plump pigs together with a length of rope and dropping them in his big iron pot. The water began to warm up as Zeke Wolf chopped up onions and carrots, adding them to the water along with a few pinches of salt, and it seemed as if all hope was gone for the pigs. It was at this point that Practical Pig, the smartest of the three (the one with the blue dungarees and cap), turned towards the wolf and asked him: 'So, Zeke Wolf, what are you going to do tomorrow, then?'

The wolf was visibly shaken by the question. What on earth was he going to do tomorrow? For a moment, he pondered the issue at hand, gazing emptily in front of himself, and turning away, he released the pigs – an act he immediately regretted, but by then they had already made their escape through the window.

In a rare glimpse of self-consciousness, Zeke Wolf realised that his entire *raison-d'être* rested on the project of catching, killing, boiling and finally eating the three little pigs. Without the pigs on his horizon, he would have no reason to rise from bed in the morning.

We the affluent are Zeke Wolf on the day of the hangover. Overfed and giddy, we lie on the sofa asking ourselves what we should do tomorrow. Depending on his class identity, the wolf might have spent the rest of his life with a remote control and a sixpack in front of the television, or on a terrace in southern Spain near a golf course, with a glass of white wine. Briefly, there are strong indications that we need some new pigs to hunt.

The serpent in this earthly paradise may be called hopelessness. It is tautologically true that you may lose hope in the end if you are hopelessly poor, but you may also lose it if you are hopelessly rich. There is no surplus of excruciatingly difficult, but urgent and deeply necessary collective projects around here for the time being. Dreams tend to be small, private and generally realistic. If you spend November evenings dreaming

of an emerald lagoon on a tropical island, and you end up going there already next February, the dream is too puny and too realistic. (You end up disappointed anyway, as the island turns out to be a sleepy and uneventful place with inedible fried food, high waves and mosquitoes.)

Being healthy with a long life expectancy helps, but it is not enough. It also helps to be able to read Dickens and listen to Mendelssohn (or, for that matter, Ludlum and Springsteen) whenever you wish, and to eat your fill of first-rate food daily, but that's not enough either. It certainly helps to live in a society where nobody needs to go hungry to bed, but after a while, we take this for granted as well, following the law of diminishing returns, and it scarcely occurs to us that we ought to be grateful for all this. The good life, and the good society, is, somehow, something else.

Colonisation of the Future

The planet has a poverty problem and an environmental problem that cannot be solved by one state alone, and in an important sense, we are in the same boat. We live in one world; we are one humanity. Where I sit, typing, in the extreme north-west of the Eurasian continent, we are chronic victims of boredom, and it is due to the fact that we lack a big, hairy, future-oriented, collective project. It is as though all problems have been solved. The Nordic countries and similar places, from the Netherlands to New Zealand, have overachieved. We've developed the most well-organised, decent, materially rich and wholesome societies seen throughout world history. However, I have already mentioned that earthly paradises do not last, and ours is fast being dethroned by its inherent contradictions. There is an increasingly visible gap between Norway, the world champion in global solidarity and promoting sustainability abroad, on the one hand, and Norway, the filthy, disgusting country addicted to oil, a country responsible, through its petroleum exports, for three per cent of the world's CO₂ emissions although it has less than 0.1 per cent of the total population.

It is no longer easy to argue against the view that something ought to be done about the way of life predominating in the global middle class. Anything else would be short-sighted, cruel and indecent. The colonisation of the future by the present has become a colossal problem.

Research on happiness and 'subjective well-being' has not led to the formulation of a set of general laws of happiness. Yet, as our discussion with Arjun suggests, along with a few thousand years of sustained philosophical, religious and artistic reflection on the place of humanity and the quest for the good life, a few provisional conclusions might be appropriate:

- Human beings are simultaneously driven by a desire for equality and community (the fairness instinct) and a desire to stand out as individuals (the competitive instinct). In a good society, the two impulses keep each other reasonably well

in check; too much community deprives the individual of freedom, while too much individuality leads to accelerating inequality.

- Great discrepancies in prosperity and opportunities for self-realisation make people unhappy and discontented. In enormously unequal societies, the rich fear the poor, and the poor hate the rich. The less the differences in actual (not just formal) life opportunities, the better (Wilkinson 2005).
- A great deal of the subjective well-being or life-satisfaction experienced is partly caused by inherited tendencies, yet both our cultural surroundings and the events we go through contribute to our well-being. It is possible, as some American psychologists claim, to learn how to think positively, but this exercise may not help if you find yourself at the bottom of the ladder in a hierarchical, highly competitive society.
- Human beings, moreover, desire recognition, to be respected – on a good day admired – for what they are and what they do. There are many ways of achieving recognition, from driving a boat really fast in a competition with others who also drive their boats really fast; by taking care of children in a caring and humorous way; by publishing erudite papers or cooking the world's best pasta, or in one of a thousand different ways. Although some universal tendencies are embedded in our evolved nature, culture and history decide how they can best be expressed. A century and a half ago, a man in his forties could garner great respect in the American South if he owned many slaves, had a dignified paunch and a good hand with the whip, and kept his daughters' honour intact until they were married off. Today, similar ideals would scarcely gain anybody widespread respect anywhere, and certainly not in Alabama. Values, in other words, change. One day, perhaps in a not too remote future, people will obtain other people's respect and social recognition through ecologically sustainable ways of behaving.
- Finally, experience and history tell us that large-scale collective projects may satisfy both the demand for equality and solidarity, and the need individuals have to prove themselves. When involved in such projects, you do something with others, and you have the chance to display yourself at your best. You hope that your life, society and – why not – the world might get better.

Gross national happiness

Life satisfaction is almost certainly less unevenly distributed between societies than material affluence. This is an area where a genuine democratisation of the means of communication could have made a real difference. The jaded rich might have learnt a lesson or two from the Bhutanese, who live in a country where the authorities have

decided on 'gross national happiness' instead of the Western standard 'gross national product' as a yardstick for measuring how well the country is doing. Unlike Pol Pot, they do not massacre people who can read, and unlike Stalin, they are not obsessed with beating the Americans in childish competitions within sport, chess or space travel. In South America, the popular movements associated with the concept of *buen vivir* (living well), based on local, often indigenous, notions of sustainability and the good life, follow a similar logic (Escobar 2013), with growing success locally in countries such as Ecuador, Colombia and Bolivia. In our part of the world, a growing proportion of the global middle class not only believe that it is necessary to reduce consumption, but positively yearn for a life bringing them into closer contact with themselves and the ecology of which they are part. More equitable communication could help making this happen. Not only could it lead to a more democratic and happier world, but – importantly – an ecologically responsible one. For this to come about, hope is not sufficient, but it is certainly needed.

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NORDICOM's activities are based on broad and extensive network of contacts and collaboration with members of the research community, media companies, politicians, regulators, teachers, librarians, and so forth, around the world. The activities at Nordicom are characterized by three main working areas.

- ***Media and Communication Research Findings in the Nordic Countries***

Nordicom publishes a Nordic journal, *Nordicom Information*, and an English language journal, *Nordicom Review* (refereed), as well as anthologies and other reports in both Nordic and English languages. Different research databases concerning, among other things, scientific literature and ongoing research are updated continuously and are available on the Internet. Nordicom has the character of a hub of Nordic cooperation in media research. Making Nordic research in the field of mass communication and media studies known to colleagues and others outside the region, and weaving and supporting networks of collaboration between the Nordic research communities and colleagues abroad are two prime facets of the Nordicom work.

The documentation services are based on work performed in national documentation centres attached to the universities in Aarhus, Denmark; Tampere, Finland; Reykjavik, Iceland; Bergen, Norway; and Göteborg, Sweden.

- ***Trends and Developments in the Media Sectors in the Nordic Countries***

Nordicom compiles and collates media statistics for the whole of the Nordic region. The statistics, together with qualified analyses, are published in the series, *Nordic Media Trends*, and on the homepage. Besides statistics on output and consumption, the statistics provide data on media ownership and the structure of the industries as well as national regulatory legislation. Today, the Nordic region constitutes a common market in the media sector, and there is a widespread need for impartial, comparable basic data. These services are based on a Nordic network of contributing institutions.

Nordicom gives the Nordic countries a common voice in European and international networks and institutions that inform media and cultural policy. At the same time, Nordicom keeps Nordic users abreast of developments in the sector outside the region, particularly developments in the European Union and the Council of Europe.

- ***Research on Children, Youth and the Media Worldwide***

At the request of UNESCO, Nordicom started the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media in 1997. The work of the Clearinghouse aims at increasing our knowledge of children, youth and media and, thereby, at providing the basis for relevant decision-making, at contributing to constructive public debate and at promoting children's and young people's media literacy. It is also hoped that the work of the Clearinghouse will stimulate additional research on children, youth and media. The Clearinghouse's activities have as their basis a global network of 1000 or so participants in more than 125 countries, representing not only the academia, but also, e.g., the media industries, politics and a broad spectrum of voluntary organizations.

In yearbooks, newsletters and survey articles the Clearinghouse has an ambition to broaden and contextualize knowledge about children, young people and media literacy. The Clearinghouse seeks to bring together and make available insights concerning children's and young people's relations with mass media from a variety of perspectives.



“**Voice and Matter** is an outstanding collection that will reinstate the centrality and urgency of Communication for Development as an area of research and a field of practice. Hemer and Tufte’s vast expertise in the field of ComDev shines through in the volume’s multidisciplinary approach, methodological and theoretical advances, and inclusion of contributions from diverse world regions (i.e. Latin American schools of participatory communication and recent African Ubuntu-centric epistemologies, among others). Drawing from the lived experiences of collectives and individuals who use media and communication to work toward emancipation and social justice, the chapters in this volume make important contributions to how we think about voice, power, technology, culture, and social change. Taking on the challenge of interrogating the development industries and their inability to detach from market forces and confront power inequities, this volume repositions the agency of subjects who use their own voices and their own media on their own terms – taking matters into their own hands.”

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