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Alternative Visions of Change: Jigsaw Funding, Patchwork Professionalisation and Rural NGOs in a Neoliberal Era

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Alternative Visions of Change: Jigsaw Funding, Patchwork Professionalisation and Rural NGOs in a Neoliberal Era

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This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Geography, Durham University.

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CONTENTS

Statement on Paul Johnson's research contribution

Thesis title: 'Alternative Visions of Change: Jigsaw Funding, Patchwork Professionalisation and Rural NGOs in a Neoliberal Era'

Supervisors: Cheryl McEwan and Marcus Power

Introduction

Paul had extensive research interests and experience in Tamil Nadu prior to registering for his PhD in Geography at Durham. He was also, from his time as an undergraduate at Northumbria University and a Masters student in SGIA (Durham University), an active member in various academic networks focused on international development issues. Paul was Postgraduate Representative on the north-eastern Developing Areas Research Network (Newcastle-Durham-Northumbria Universities); he was the Volunteer Manager of a development education project – a collaboration between Northumbria University and CIRHEP (the Centre for Improved Rural Health and Environmental Protection) which was the NGO he also worked with throughout his PhD; he was also involved in a new community interest company that aimed to harness the potential of sport as a tool to promote human development.

For two years, Paul also played a significant role working alongside Professor Joy Palmer-Cooper on *Project Thailand*, a community support project run by Durham University's International Office. In an email to his supervisors, Professor Palmer-Cooper sums up Paul's contribution to the project thus:

> "Paul was instrumental and sincere at the task of preparing students for community work in Thailand. He was totally dedicated to this task and gave so much of his time and experience to enabling student participants to gain so very much from their experiences. He was absolutely wonderful at helping to prepare students for a totally different culture."

Paul taught Durham students to understand the principles of respect, solidarity, and to appreciate what they could learn about the resilience and capabilities of people materially less fortunate than themselves in poorer countries. He applied the same principals to his own ESRC-funded research, which while being intellectually ambitious in aiming to re-shape social science debates about the role of NGOs in neoliberal contexts, also sought to make material difference to the people in Tamil Nadu with whom he worked. Paul was an exceptionally gifted fieldworker who was able to work ethically and collaboratively. He made friends and forged genuine intellectual connections. He shared his knowledge and experiences with other postgraduates at several departmental workshops and presented his research findings at international conferences.

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Thesis structure and intellectual contribution

Paul's PhD research was motivated by a number of core concerns including the contemporary nature of the non-governmental sector (with a specific focus upon community-based organisations in the South) and his desire to critically engage with debates about 'participation' in development; what is understood by what he referred to as the "characteristically intangible concept" of neoliberalism; the mounting anxiety between 'expert' and 'local' knowledges in the context of neoliberalism's increasing pervasiveness in environment-development initiatives; and the tensions and associations between the processes of professionalization and local activism. The thesis abstract he drafted in 2011 captures the focus and objectives of his study very succinctly:

"**Abstract**: Study of civil society networks bound within the wider neoliberal restructuring project has impressed upon development discourse an appreciation of the encroachments of neoliberal processes and practices into every aspect of grassroots activism. Perhaps more importantly, of late it has also highlighted the ability of local activists to 'work' the spaces created by neoliberal governance to contested ends. This thesis unpacks the ways in which professionalisation, theorized at the specific site of its operation, co-opts, constrains, supports and depletes activism, and, most importantly, how the professional subjects shaped through these processes occupy the opportunities created. Specifically, the thesis will investigate how the professionalisation of an ecologically-centred and community-based NGO shapes its staff's ability to 'exist, speak and act as development alternatives' (Bebbington et al., 2008) and how their ecological focus alters this process".

In total Paul planned to include eight chapters in his thesis which were to be subdivided into three sections. The first 'lead-in' section was to contain three 'background discussion' chapters including the introduction, the theoretical and conceptual framework chapter that synthesised Paul's engagement with the literature, and the methodology. The second 'core section' was to include four chapters of 'applied analysis' in which "the several distinct themes uncovered during the project are linked to preceding literature and form a composite discussion of the wider themes and theoretical implications of the project" (third year report, 2011). The final 'lead- out' section would then include the conclusions chapter. A detailed outline of each chapter was contained within the 'third year report' that Paul had prepared in 2011 (also attached with this submission). Please note that Paul's plans for the organisation of his thesis and the numbering of his chapters had evolved since the submission of this document, with an additional chapter (Chapter 2) setting out the conceptual framework after the Introduction and before the Methodology (now Chapter 3).

At the time of his death in April 2012 Paul had completed full drafts of three of these chapters (two from the 'lead-in' section and one from the 'core section'). These were as follows: (1) a theoretical and conceptual framework chapter that synthesised his

engagement with the literature and sought to theorise activist professionalisation (chapter two) (2) the research methodology (chapter three) which argues against considering 'NGOs' as development aggregates and argues for a case-based approach to NGO studies whilst seeking to reflect upon the postcolonial potential of ethnographic research and the pitfalls and drawbacks of participatory research in this context and (3) the first empirical chapter (chapter four) that provides an "organisational biography" of CIRHEP and considers where it sits on the professionalisation spectrum. Paul explained the purpose of this chapter in the following way in his third year report:

"The rationale behind this [chapter] draws from a discussion started in the preceding chapter. It is my belief (formed in the process of producing this thesis) that the major flaw of the existing literature on southern-based NGOs is the neglect of their tremendously varied and heterogeneous nature let alone the diversity within the organisations themselves. Like the division within development biopolitics (Sylvester, forthcoming) these bodies are rarely depicted in detail as fully formed, dynamic and individual but, to adapt a concept from Sylvester, as a childlike drawing. Through arguing for a case-study approach to NGO research and presenting this organisation with as much detail and specificity as I would expect in any other organisational study, this chapter and the thesis more broadly attempts to counter this trend".

In December 2011 Paul had also written an academic journal article (that he had planned to submit for review) which articulated his reflections on the nature of 'participation' entitled 'From Dependence to Empowerment and Back Again: Adopting the 'Magical Negro' in Participatory Development' (also included within this submission). In this paper Paul's critical engagement with Marxist thought is clearly evident and he innovatively links this to a focus on the performative nature of participation in development. Paul's engagement with Marxism was also evident in other areas of his PhD research – he had planned to use Marx's concept of the 'metabolic rift' as an original theoretical framework to study the professionalization-activist dialectic. Paul sought to argue that neoliberal restructuring, via professionalization, creates an analogous 'rift' in the form of a professional-local divide. As he put it in his outline of chapter five: "[h]ere professionalization constitutes the extraction of locally-based rural activists into the professional sphere in which their newly attained abilities and understandings are principally used to satiate the requirements of external donors".

In addition to the above we also include a document Paul wrote after returning from fieldwork entitled 'drawing out the themes' in which he outlined the themes he wanted to explore in the thesis following his empirical work. We also include the progression paper that Paul wrote during his first year of study (that introduces his work and his aims and objectives in his own words) along with two progress reports he wrote during the last two years of his research.

We have organised these documents in such a way as to accurately reflect the main components of Paul's intended thesis. While there are clearly gaps in the thesis

(especially chapters 5 to 7, which were not completed), we feel that together these documents give a sense of Paul's intended thesis and its intellectual contribution. In summary, the chapters are organised for submission as follows:

- Chapter 1: Introduction. As this is usually one of the final pieces of writing in a thesis, Paul had not yet written the introductory chapter. However, he wrote several papers/reports that included material that would have been reworked into this chapter. Therefore, we include the First Year report to set out the rationale, conceptual framing and, most importantly, the aims and objectives of the thesis. The Second Year Report sets out the fieldwork element of the research. The Third Year Report contains the outline of the thesis.

- Chapters 2 to 4 are included as Paul intended them to appear in the final version of the thesis. The initial, incomplete draft of Chapter 5 contains an important diagram of CIRHEP's activities, which formed the empirical basis of Paul's innovative reflections on 'patchwork professionalism' and 'jigsaw funding'.

- Chapter 6: Conclusions. Again, since this is usually one of the final pieces of writing in a thesis, Paul had not yet written the conclusions. However, his paper 'Drawing out the themes' is a substantial summary of his key findings and gives a sense of the kinds of conclusions he was working towards.

- Appendix: Draft paper on 'From Dependence to Empowerment'. This is included to represent the ways in which Paul was developing material from his thesis and wider thinking for publication. It contains his thinking on Participatory Development, which emerged out of his own methodology and his critical responses to the debate about representation.

Conference papers and publications

From early 2011 onwards Paul began to present his research findings at international conferences. In July 2011, for example, Paul presented a paper at the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague entitled 'Professional Practice, Environmental Concerns and Alternative Visions of Change: Community-based NGOs in a Neoliberal Era'. Paul's burgeoning engagement with an international geography audience is evidenced by the fact that his name was posthumously included on three papers at the RGS-IBG Annual Conference in Edinburgh in June 2012:

- "The Rising Powers and South-South co-operation for low carbon development" in a session on: Theorising 'd/Development' in an age of rising powers: implications for Geography (with Marcus Power)
- "Low Carbon energy technologies in the construction of the green economy in the global South" in a session on 'The geographies of the green economy' (with Ed Brown and Jon Cloke)

- "Geography, communities and renewable energy (in)security: the case of solar in the global South" in a session on 'Geography, communities and renewable energy (in)security: theorisation and geographical understanding' (with Ed Brown and Jon Cloke).

All three papers were the result of Paul working (from November 2011) as a part-time Research Associate (RA) on a project that sought to set up a UK wide Network around the theme of Low Carbon Energy for Development (The *Low Carbon Energy for Development Network* or LCEDN, http://www.lcedn.com/). Paul played a crucial role in helping to establish the Network which is a collaboration between the University of Durham and four other partners: Imperial College, the University of Sussex and the Energy Research Centre (UKERC) along with the Midlands Energy Consortium (which includes the Universities of Loughborough, Birmingham and Nottingham). The project was funded by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) in December 2011 and seeks to bring together scholars, policymakers and practitioners from around the world to discuss the use of low carbon energy in 'developing' economies of the global South. Though it is centred on the UK the Network has members in a wide range of countries from Brazil and Guatemala to India and Bangladesh, South Africa and Nigeria. Paul designed and maintained the project website and helped to organise the first major Network conference – held at Loughborough in April this year. More generally Paul brought people together around the theme of low carbon energy for development both at Durham University (where he was very active in organising workshops, discussion spaces and reading groups) but also across the UK and far beyond.

Publication record

Paul wrote a small number of short 'think pieces' as contributions to the activist and practitioner literature, both of which were (indirectly) relevant to his PhD research. Both of these were published in popular environment and development magazines:

(2009) 'Norman Borlaug: another subjective obituary', *New Internationalist*, http://www.newint.org/contributors/paul-%20johnson/

(2008) 'The Greener Revolution', *Permaculture Magazine*, 48, Winter 2008, http://cirhep.linghag.se/?page_id=143

Latterly (as mentioned above) Paul was seeking to publish his work in international peer-reviewed journals. In addition to the paper he had written on the performative nature of participation ('the Magical Negro') he had also published a small number of book reviews such as his 2011 review of Madeley, J (2008) *Big Business Poor Peoples: How Transnational Corporations Damage the World's Poor*, Second Edition (London: Zed Books, 2008), in the *Review of International Development*, 23, pp162-3.

As his supervisors we both felt that his conceptual framework was significant and, as written in Chapter 2 of his thesis draft, was almost publishable with some slight 'topping and tailing'. Indeed, in early 2012, he had been commissioned by the

Editors of *Geography Compass* to publish this chapter as a journal article entitled: "Metabolic Rift and the Longue Durée of Activist Professionalisation". As his supervisors we are convinced that this paper has the potential to re-shape debates on professionalization of NGOs within development geography and development studies more broadly, and intend re-drafting the chapter in Paul's name for publication.

<u>Predicted research impact</u>

Paul was beginning to disseminate his conceptual and empirical findings and his thesis promised to make significant impacts in both geography and development studies. The original contribution of his work is focused specifically on his concept of 'patchwork professionalization', which he sought to demonstrate as a pragmatic response by NGOs to a neoliberal managerial and funding context. Unlike many studies of NGO adaptation in developing world contexts, Paul did not accept that neoliberalism – and specifically the drive towards professionalization that is often seen as a consequence of this – is uniform and entirely hegemonic in its effects on NGOs; nor did he see a neoliberal context as one in which NGOs could no longer deliver their more radical objectives. Rather, Paul sought to demonstrate the existence of a disparate funding landscape – what he referred to as 'jigsaw funding' – some of which is formal, works around set notions of accountability, and requires training and professionalization within NGOs, and some of which requires none of this formality. He also sought to demonstrate through his case study of CIRHEP that in response to this disparate funding landscape, NGOs are adopting a strategy of 'patchwork professionalization' to maintain their funding streams and support their activities. In the case of a grassroots NGO, such as CIRHEP, this means ensuring that certain individuals are trained in the more managerial aspects of NGO work (funding applications, reporting, accountability and so on), while others apply their expertise in grassroots activist work that often requires rather different skills sets (in the case of CIRHEP, knowledge of local communities, promoting sustainable environmental practices and knowledges, and so on).

Paul's understanding of the approaches being pursued by grassroots NGOs – from new forms of political cosmopolitanism to 'patchwork professionalization' – meant that he was able to paint a more optimistic picture of grassroots activism in the global South than is often apparent in critiques of neoliberal governance. Indeed, he was keen to argue through his case study that NGOs are able to speak, convey and understand their individual agendas within changing governance and funding structures, and by these means challenge neoliberal hegemony, strengthen their political positions and pursue development alternatives. Thus, although Paul's research was case study-based, his work had far greater application in challenging some of the accepted wisdom about NGO professionalization and its perceived negative effects on grassroots activism. His supervisors are confident that these findings are highly significant, both conceptually and empirically. Paul was on track to produce a coherent thesis containing material that would have been publishable in mainstream international geography and development studies journals. This is evidenced in the quality of Paul's writing in the chapters that were completed, and in

his nascent writing for publication. Together, we feel that while Paul's written thesis is incomplete, there is enough evidence of a coherent and significant academic contribution based on original research to merit consideration for the award of PhD.

Paul H. Johnson

First Year PhD Progression Paper

Alternative Visions of Change: The Agricultural Landscape of Activist Professionalisation in Tamil Nadu.

Supervisors: Dr Cheryl McEwan & Dr Marcus Power

Contents

Identification of Research Aims

Owing to the steady decline of public expenditure on development assistance and the expansion of global neoliberal reforms, it has been demonstrated that the NGO sector has benefited markedly from taking up the service-delivery function and associated funding that it has been ascribed. At the same time however, NGOs, as representatives of civil society, are argued to be a well-situated channel through which official agencies can promote 'political pluralism'. This begs the question; can NGOs simultaneously facilitate state departure from basic service provision and also claim to represent and speak for the poor? From this, geo-economic investigation is increasingly identifying ways in which newly professionalised subjects go on to occupy and occasionally subvert the opportunities and spaces that neoliberalism opens. Within this context, the development of ecologically-centred organic agriculture in Tamil Nadu, promoted by grassroots NGOs, has progressed dynamically. Organic farming is increasingly a central tenet of rural-based grassroots development organisations. More and more activist networks promote withdrawal from chemically intensive and prohibitively expensive farming practices; practices typically controlled by private, often Western, biotechnology corporations, and as implemented during the 'Green Revolution' of the 1960s. This research aims to pull together these largely isolated debates through interdisciplinary dialogue, in order to consider how NGO professionalisation can be conceptualised in the context of Tamil Nadu's organic agricultural revival.

The research has the following priorities:

- To establish the penetration of neoliberal governance into local activism through examination of the relations-in-practice of Tamil Nadu's NGO networks internally and externally.
- To examine any co-optation, incorporation and neutralisation of alternative discourse under neoliberal governance, with particular reference to NGO professionalisation (including activists).
- To offer insights into the de-agrarianisation of the rural Global South from this specific context.
- To provide new perspectives on the inherent tensions between traditional rural life, organic revival, neoliberal economic governance and space/place.

These aims will be assessed directly through the following research questions:

- What spatial practices constitute professionalisation in Tamil Nadu?
- How are these practices implicated with neoliberal governance?
- How might approaches to rural empowerment and localised food systems vary with other key environmental, socio-economic and political characteristics of the region?
- How are these practices implicated with rural agricultural production?
- How do these practices shape the re-invigoration of ecologically centred organic agriculture in the region?
- Do these practices benefit the poor? If not, why not?

Theoretical Foundations

This study follows Mann (1986) in seeing society as comprising interconnected and overlapping networks of social power, centred around command over a number of key resources (to Mann's list, this study adds knowledge as a contemporary and increasingly 'commanded' resource). The research also considers the approach adopted by Donnelly (2007:108) in which politics is caught up in all processes of the production and reproduction of social life and hence, is synonymous with the study of the distribution of resources is also considered. Following this, the theoretical approach adopted in this research is, to all intents and purposes, agropolitan.

Agropolitan theory (as pioneered by Douglas & Friedmann, 1976) formed part of the radical critique of development and was based on the premise that '...the functional integration of peripheral and marginal areas into national and supranational systems in a weak and dependent manner contributes fundamentally to their relative economic backwardness' (Parnwell, 2002:112). To overcome this, agropolitan theorists saw that the local must be prioritised over the national. Through this it was asserted that autonomous development may proceed, able to deliver basic needs, social equality, and, most importantly, a solid foundation for future growth (Ibid: 114); its focus upon Friedman's 'collective-consciousness' saw precedence given to local democracy and participation in the decision making process (particularly in relation to agriculture, where 'rural urbanisation' through site specific technology was given centre stage). These theories have once again become popular in development discourse in the form of grassroots development and postcolonial theory,

informed by critical development theory concerning participation,[1] and will be integrated in order to provide a theoretical basis for this research.

The Key Concepts

A familiar characteristic in the existing literature is the need for conceptual clarity. Concepts must be defined if scholars are to converse effectively. If not, '...each begins their analysis from a particular assumption that determines the kind of question they ask and therefore the answer they find' (Strange, 1995:16). Defining the three key concepts of this project, organic *agriculture, neoliberalism* and *professionalisation*, is therefore crucial.

Organic Agriculture

Defining 'organic agriculture' raises two interconnected questions: What is the meaning of the term, and which agricultural and ideological processes constitute it? A brief review of the theories of organic agriculture identifies a variety of interpretations. Mannion (1995), for example, defined organic cultivation as representing a holistic view of agriculture aiming to reflect the profound interrelationship that exists within the ecology of every farm. Elsewhere, Schofield (1986) similarly characterised it as more than the management and application of living materials but laid emphasis on the concept of 'wholeness'. For Lampkin (1994:5) it stands "to create integrated, humane, environmentally and economically sustainable production systems, which maximise reliance on farm-derived renewable resources and the management of ecological and biological processes and interactions, so as to provide acceptable levels of crop, livestock and human nutrition, protection from pests and disease, and an appropriate return to [the environment]".

It is notable that these definitions generally centre on the ecological aims of organics rather than the social or political causes and consequences. Certainly, theorising the latter has

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[1] See Cooke & Kothari (2001) etc.

developed into a separate discourse (Bicker et al., 2003; Shiva, 1991; Shiva, 1993; Sadowski, 2001 etc.). However, the distinction is a false one and, arguably, oversimplifies the debate. Moreover, as Lampkin (1994:5), and later Rigby & Caceres (2001), argue, modern-day organic farming has developed from a number of debatably diverse perspectives and contexts, which have merged over-time to produce the current school of thought. As such, seeking to provide *the* definition of any of these perspectives will always be complicated.

Consequently, as its implication changes through space and varies over time, it is necessary for this thesis to define organic production within a rural South Indian context. Drawing on the work of Lampkin (1994), Shiva (1991; 1993), Rigby & Caceres (2001) and the identified priorities of several Tamil NGOs, while modifying the definition offered by the World Board of IFOAM (Information and Resources for Developing Sustainable Organic Sectors) (IFOAM, 2009), it is possible to construct an economic, moral, political and sociological framework within which the organic agriculture can be defined:

A production system based on deliberate course of action and that sustains the health of soils, ecosystems and people; one that relies on ecological processes, biodiversity and cycles adapted to local conditions, rather than the use of synthetic inputs with adverse effects. Organic agriculture combines tradition, innovation and science to benefit the shared environment and promote fair relationships and a good quality of life for all involved.

Neoliberalism

Harvey (2005:2) describes neoliberalism as *'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade'*. The role of the state, he argues, is to 'create and preserve and institutional framework appropriate to such practices', and nothing more. Indeed, deregulation, privatisation and the withdrawal of the state from countless areas of social provision is now widespread. However, neoliberalism, as an overarching global descriptor of economic and geo-political circumstances, does not lend itself easily to precise definition.

En route to his socialist critique of capitalist humanitarian action, Middleton (2006) pinpoints the crux of the neoliberalism-NGO debate in arguing that NGOs find that accessing their vital funding is made easier if their objectives can align with those of neoliberal ideology. For example, the relatively recent popularity of microcredit initiatives among grassroots NGOs can be understood within this context. The proliferation of microcredit initiatives, facilitated by NGOs, is unmatched in rural South Indian development initiatives – and, arguably , throughout the 'global South'. Through these measures, the state no longer has responsibility for creating employment as it now rests in the hands of each individual's 'entrepreneurial freedoms'.

Consequently, this study will also follow Kamat (2004:170), who recognizes that this adaptation of empowerment invariably results in the marketisation of social identities and relations; through individualizing the idea and practice of empowerment, neoliberal governance 'reduces the concept of public welfare to private gain'. Thus, traditional notions of democracy, where public welfare takes precedence over private gains, are undermined and the neoliberal 'privatisation of the public good' is complete.

Nonetheless, Harvey's approach, informed by Kamat, Middleton, requires thinking of neoliberalism as a single process as if addressing 'it' from an Archimedean perspective. While this may not be completely feasible, with sufficient reflexivity '...one may continue to aim for a focus upon a particular object 'in an objective way', meaning that there is a wide degree of inter-subjectivity' (Robertson and White 2007:55). As such, the Harvey paradigm can be seen as the direction in which the world of NGOs and civil society (as a whole) is moving, and will represent the starting point for clarifying the values, policies and implications of neoliberal governance in the view of this project.

Again, it is crucial to look at these issues contextually. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the verb 'professionalise' as giving a person, occupation, activity, or group professional qualities or characteristics. A logical next-step from here is to ask who is giving these 'professional qualities or characteristics', to whom are they giving them, and what attributes the giver deems to be professionally desirable. Given that neoliberalism (as defined above) has been identified as the 'giver', or, as is the case, the benefactor of professionalism, and the grassroots Tamil NGOs, through their professional and budgetary ties, are the recipients then all that remains is to identify the attributes associated to 'profesional qualities' in the eyes of neoliberal donors in the context of small NGOs. This study will follow Noel Castree's (2000) definiton of professionalisation (originally applied to left-wing geographical academics). By professionalised this research implies that most independent 'grassroots' Tamil NGOs are, or aspire to be, what Roger Kimball (1991) labeled 'tenured radicals': that is to say, 'fully paid-up (and paid) members of global civil society. Like Castree (and unlike Kimball), this study does not invoke the term professional in any pejorative sense, and does not wish to begin its examination with an inherently positive or inherently negative view of the professionalisation of grassroots activists. Consequently, like Castree, this research will simply seek to highlight a process – one that is very much context dependant. This process involves five dimensions. These dimensions, adapted from Castree's analyasis of leftist geographers, will serve as this project's definitional starting point.

Ngo professionalisation can be seen as the pursuit or attainment of tenure through contractual agreements with private funding bodies, within which inter-network socialisation – wherein NGO staff must learn the rules and mores of their new institutional framework - is acquired. Professionalisation incorporates disciplinary socialisation, where, like all members of civil society, grass roots activists come to think of themselves as much a development worker in general as a social activist in particular. Professionalisation entails a claim to expertise and a

'comcomitant monopolisation' of development practice. Here, the activist develops, then defends, a specific development competence (for example, watershed management) and in so doing, asserts the right to be uniquely qualified to advise on its application. Finally, professionalisation revolves around accreditation; that is, gaining recognition through the successful promotion of approved development strategies and, in so doing, securing further funding and tenure.

NGO Professionalisation

The literature on NGO professionalisation is, of course, multifaceted. In an attempt to go beyond customary understandings of NGOs and their many roles in poverty reduction strategies, current studies have tended to focus on topics such as the accountability and political participation of NGOs (Jordan & van Tuijl, 2006), the tensions and associations between activism and the processes of professionalisation in relation to neoliberalism (Laurie & Bondi, 2005) and the demands of NGOs on their 'business partners' (namely, national and international funding agencies) in creating a 'cosmopolitan democracy' (Yanacopulos & Baillie Smith, 2008). In view of that, research on NGO professionalisation can, broadly, be seen to inhabit one of three main perspectives: that of beneficial collaborative support, that of subordination and that of subordination and resistance.

Beneficial Collaborative Support

Samuel Paul's contribution to the 1991 World Bank *Regional and Sectoral Studies Paper* suggests that poverty reduction requires three elementary components: resources, the capacity for adaptation and 'a strong performance orientation' supported and directed by the intended beneficiaries (Paul, 1991:1), and argues, quite rightly, that neither NGOs nor 'developing country' governments inherently constitute of all of these components. Paul (Ibid:2-3) highlights the shortcomings of governments in poverty reduction, and underlines difficulties in

responding and adapting state services to the needs of the poor, weak public accountability, and the aversion of bureaucrats to the mobilisation of public demand as significant inadequacies. This, he argues, is where the attributes of NGOs require further enquiry. He identifies NGOs' capacity to enhance the access of the poor to public services and the ability to augment political power through organisation as central assets. Moreover, he recognises that NGOs are, by and large, effective catalysts for change on many levels and, almost by definition, responsive to the needs and problems of intended beneficiaries. Combine this with their dedication, local knowledge, small size, and proximity to the local communities and it is clear that they often make up for their deficiencies in financial resources and access to research, technology and other infrastructure. In the context of development, the author contends that the state, the market, NGOs and other grassroots initiatives have 'different but complimentary' strengths, and argues therefore that there is a clear case for a division of labour that exploits such comparative examples[2].

More recently, Vandana Desai (2008:528) reaffirmed the opportunities afforded to NGOs through partnerships with traditionally professionalising/capacity building bodies such as the state and international donors. Like Paul, Desai catalogues the numerous benefits that a small NGO-large governing body affiliation brings, yet on the whole, it would seem that these advantages have a propensity to favour the latter (participatory approaches, community organising, stakeholder ownership strategies – all possible because of the predisposition and ability of small NGOs to be innovative, adaptable, cost-effective and aware of local conditions).

 '*NGOs strengthen the state through their participation in improving the efficiency of government service, acting as strategic partners for reform-orientated ministries, filling the gaps in service provision and helping the government to forge ties with the grass roots*' (Ibid).

 Not to be subjective, Desai also identifies the benefits for NGOs in these partnerships: governments, she states, give NGOs the space and autonomy to organise, network and campaign. She goes on to acknowledge that this situation creates a position of dual

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[2] The use of the word *exploit* may have been more appropriate than Paul had originally foreseen.

accountability, in which NGOs are required to answer to their intended beneficiaries (downward accountability) and to their donors or governing bodies (upward accountability). Desai sees this accountability as a positive feature of the increasing donor – NGO professional relationship. In conclusion, the paper poses a question – one that holds much relevance for the professionalisation debate: how will NGOs adapt to the current global changes? It can be seen then, that NGOs are increasingly finding financial support in the form of large donors such as states and official aid agencies for seemingly logical and advantageous reasons. If this is the case, then the next logical step is to ask what deeper impact this movement has upon NGO accountability and ability to achieve their goals.

Subordination[3]

One of the first observers to offer a conceptual framework of the restraints imposed upon southern NGOs by their attachment to, and subsequent dependency on, international development agencies and governments was Ann C. Hudock (1999). In her text *NGOs and Civil Society: Democracy by Proxy?,* Hudock argues that while healthy democracy and development is reliant upon an active and robust civil society, the conditions in which many North-South NGO relationships operate are not conductive to effective development assistance. She highlights the all-to-often situation where southern NGOs, playing the role of intermediary for their northern partners, have been 'proxy' for the beneficiaries that they were originally intended to assist.

Similarly, Hudock (Ibid: 111) recognises that because the prevailing development ideology is that of '…state disengagement, privatisation, competition and grassroots participation' southern NGOs are seen as the central factor in this endeavour. However, increased interaction with multinational funders often means a reduction in influence over activities and policies. This is exemplified in Hudock's (Ibid:50) application of Nelson's (1995) study of 304 World Bank projects that involved southern NGOs between 1973 and 1990, in which only 76 featured interaction with the southern organisation beyond the implementation stage of the project.

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[3] See also: Markowitz & Tice, 2002:941-958, Mohan, 2002:21 125-154

Undeniably, southern NGOs receive increasingly high levels of capacity building assistance by funders due to their perceived comparative advantages in reaching marginalised intended beneficiaries (as Paul (1991) bears out). However, for Hudock, this can be seen to compromise the ability of the NGOs in question to 'respond flexibly to these groups, empower them to articulate their needs, or give voice to their needs'. As a final point, the author sees that 'The disproportionate emphasis on southern NGOs rather than beneficiaries has skewed civil society development strategies. Rather than contributing to the consolidation of democracy, southern NGOs have largely created democracy by proxy' (Ibid).

More recently, using the case of Bangladesh to illustrate and explore the complex interaction between NGOs and state authorities, Shelley Feldman (2003) argued that social movements invariably become institutionalised through professionalisation in ways that 'compromise their promise as agents of change' (Ibid, p22)[4]. This, she sees, stems from the growing penchant of 'mobilising money instead of people' (Ibid) within civil society (resulting from the constant need for funding, staff salary and activities that ensure quantifiable results). Accordingly, NGOs become preoccupied with covering costs and consequentially find themselves agents of concession rather than confrontation, allowing the structural and institutional problems that contribute to poverty and inequality to go unchallenged.[5]

Shelley uses the example of Bangladeshi NGO participation to demonstrate NGO memberships that are segmented and consistent with the organisational needs and interests of funding agencies. That is to say, these networks are increasingly centred on bureaucratisation, measurable service-delivery and satisfying the needs of donors. The research attempts to show that NGOs now act as 'brokers speaking on behalf of their members rather than mobilising people to speak on their own behalf' (p22), thus serving as 'buffers' between citizens and states and allowing new relations of self-responsibility and reliance to take precedent rather than offsetting the neoliberal vision of economic development. In sum, Shelley argues that this shift does nothing to counteract the structural conditions that reinforce poverty but serves to direct

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[4] See also: Kothari, 2002 & 2005:425-446.
[5] See also: Totton, 1999:313-324 & Witz, 1990:675-690

priority away from the opportunity of self-representative politics that was once situated at the fore of NGO mobilisation strategies.

Rubby Dunpath's (2003) research on NGO 'corporatisation' in South Africa adopts a micro-approach to the study of NGO professionalisation. Dunpath attempts small-scale psycho-social analysis of NGO executives in order to evaluate the impacts of the, now common, 'instrumentalist' managerial view upon the development work of their respective organisations.

Dunpath finds that the instrumentalism that has come to characterise numerous development enterprises is seen by many NGO leaders as contradictory to the values and principles that regularly underpin their founding statements. This, the author suggests, perpetuates the 'jetting-in and jetting-out' model of intervention and follows the pattern of symbolic-rather-than-substantive development which, in-turn, provides a further source of de-motivation for NGO staff.

Dunpath (Ibid: 1116) concludes that more often than not, NGOs are altered to be 'development sub-contractors' with no greater mandate than to fulfil the multiple objectives and accountability procedures of their diverse funders. Consequentially NGO programme managers' and directors' energies are expended 'in satisfying the whims of paternalistic technocrats rather than devoting them to managing quality learning'.

Sangeeta Kamat's (2004) work exploring NGO discourse in a 'neoliberal era' takes this traditional 'professionalisation equals depoliticisation' argument and focuses the study upon the 'privatisation of the public good'. Through a review of the policy discourse on NGOs, Kamat (Ibid: 156) seeks to illustrate that the reorganisation of democracy within a global reform context, as exemplified in the efforts of global policy institutions to regulate the 'third sector' in ways that interlink with neoliberal economic reform, requires 'the regulation of NGOs at specific sites of their operation'.

The author argues that the apolitical and managerial notion of development (also highlighted by Nelson, 1995) fostered in the current donor-NGO climate draws upon the neoliberal notion

of empowerment – wherein the intended beneficiaries are persuaded to be entrepreneurial and find their own resolution to their problems – and this, she argues, is wholly different to the understanding of empowerment for social justice that typified the work of community-based NGOs in the post-war development era.

<u>Subordination and Resistance</u>

Nina Laurie and Liz Bondi's (2005) edited collection *Working the Spaces of Neoliberalism* presents accounts of how neoliberalism incorporates, hinders, co-opts, and reduces activism; *and* how 'professional subjects' (i.e. subordinant NGOs) occupy and occasionally subvert the opportunities that neoliberalism creates. Rebecca Dolhinow (2005) for instance, in her account of the roles of grassroots community-centred NGOs in women's activism on the US-Mexico border, again highlights the 'growing demands of professionalism' forced upon small southern NGOs.

Dolhinow (Ibid:165) christens the detrimental neoliberal effects the 'disabling of activism' and identifies two central processes that contribute: The first addresses donor demands upon NGOs that require NGOs to validate and account for projects in increasingly onerous ways. These demands, Dolhinow argues, 'drive a wedge' of ceaseless bureaucracy between organisations and their intended beneficiaries. The second process develops the problem of donors creating distance between NGOs and beneficiaries but focuses on the problem of competitive funding. This describes the common situation of NGOs following donor agendas in order to secure increasingly competitive financial support, as NGOs press for further 'fundable' projects they necessarily move away from community needs towards neoliberal interventions.[6]

Nonetheless the research seeks to show that these dangers *are* preventable. In order to maintain their alternative social justice agendas, drawing on Gramsci and Foucault to theorise civil society as a dynamic space that is not innately liberating or oppressive, but has great potential for both, Dolhinow (Ibid:173) describes how grassroots NGOs in the Mexican colonias

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[6] See also: Cannon lorgen, 1998:323-339; Lebon, 1997

have developed into localised neoliberal spaces. In these 'local neoliberalisms', and in the case of the colonias, 'more and more commonly, NGOs must transform themselves into market competitive organisations in order to acquire funding. To compete they must present themselves as experts, create a unique niche, and defend their territory'. The power of NGOs to contribute to more traditional forms of activism lies in the ability of NGOs to understand their roles in the processes of neoliberalism and to 'look for opportunities to diverge from the desires of the neoliberal state' (Ibid:182).

Townsend, Porter and Mawdsley (2004) however, offer a somewhat different view of the origins of resistance within civil society. Drawing on extensive work with NGOs in Ghana, India and Mexico, their research questions this predilection that under new neoliberal processes of governmentality NGOs have lost their ability to elaborate and pursue 'alternative' notions of development. The authors draw on Fisher (1997:449) in viewing NGOs as 'an arena within which battles from society at large are internalised'. That is, through the 'fluid, contradictory web of relations' in which they operate, Townsend, Porter and Mawdsley (2004: 872) suggest that NGOs are able to make possible an 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' while being simultaneously approved by global bodies such as the World Bank.[7]

Through investigation into the relations-in-practice of NGOs in Ghana for example, the authors point to significant spaces of resistance within the non-governmental arena. Both NGOs and their intended beneficiaries are active within neoliberal development and are able to employ intricate combinations of compliance, strategic subversion and resistance to achieve, in part, their aims - therefore making contributions, however small, to alternative visions of change.

Drawing Conclusions from Conclusions

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[7] Laure et al., 2003:463-491.Laurie suggests that achieving professional status provides one of the few mechanisms by which Andean indigenous people can overcome racial discrimination – the 'whitening effect' of becoming professional.

If writers agree on any one point, it is that there has been a significant shift in the organisational character of southern NGOs and the nature of their work. This is summarised by Kamat (2004:167)…

'[C]ommunity-based NGOs have moved away from education and empowerment programmes that involve structural analysis of power and inequality and instead adopt a technical managerial solution to social issues of poverty and oppression…Donor monitoring and accounting systems require NGOs to implement social and economic projects in an efficient and effective manner'.

While the professionalisation of southern community-based NGOs is a common thread that runs throughout the reviewed literature, the authors are less than concurrent in their appraisal of the depoliticisation of NGOs. Professionalisation is, then, essentially challenging the study of NGO activism; the contributors to the literature individually, and collectively, tackle the inconsistencies *and* possibilities of activism in an era of neoliberal governance and professionalisation. As Cindi Katz (2007:227) attests, professionalisation literature focusing upon NGOs raises some key questions for the understanding of the social, political and economic relations of neoliberalism in various locales and across scale. Of the three broad categories offered in this short summation, it can be argued that those writers exploring the issue of 'subordination and resistance' offer the most prospective for further study. These are the authors that ask who the subject of professionalisation is and how these subjects are produced in the course of neoliberal restructuring (as, indeed the vast majority of writers on the subject do), but then go one step further in asking how such professional subjects go on to occupy and occasionally subvert the opportunities and spaces that neoliberalism opens. Through this, the literature challenges the reader to consider the broad implications of professionalisation and local activism and, all told, as Power (2007:209) suggests, highlights the global similarities and convergences in response to neoliberalism as opposed to the customary categorising of 'Global North' – 'Global South', thus raising further avenues of potential enquiry into the 'unidirectional' nature of the flow of ideas and resources.

Moreover, as the literature has developed into a search for spaces of resistance within the fairly well documented realm of activist professionalisation, the need for work that exceeds the once customary generalist work of contemporary development 'experts' is created by the increasing need for specialist knowledges within each case-specific locale (Ibid:210).[8] Another significant issue that warrants further exploration, and is found, sometimes unintentionally, in the majority of professionalisation literature is the tensions and power struggles between 'professional' and 'local' knowledges. For example, the work of Andrea Nightingale (2007: 186) examines the professionalisation of community forestry in Nepal, and draws out the seemingly inherent tensions between the purportedly less valuable knowledges of locals and the more professional 'scientific' knowledge of 'experts' in the context of neoliberal governance's ever-increasing prevalence in environment-development programmes (Power: 2007:215).

Authors have explored the polarisation of NGOs and their intended beneficiaries, the appreciation of local knowledge but the devaluing of local expertise, the need for NGOs to engage with donors' funding discourses and development ideologies and the increasing disengagement with those living at the 'grassroots'. In the process, the more politicised or 'radical' goals of NGOs, it has been argued, regularly become concealed and, or, diluted. Ultimately, through outlining the literature on NGO professionalisation, it can be seen that there is a broad and consistent line of enquiry that indicates a desperate need to understand the practical problems faced by grassroots activists in negotiating the complexities of the increasingly formalised development sector. This review has simply touched the surface of a huge body of work, and attempts to unpack some of the implications of professionalisation at the scale of grassroots development activists.

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[8] See also the work of Janet Townsend.

Methodology

The issue of localism in this study is central. Taylor's (1999) writings on this subject are an under-utilised resource in geo-economic spatial study, and this project adopts them to stimulate creative questioning of the 'processes of professionalisation' and 'politicised local activism' impasse. Taylor asserts that the challenge for social science is to ensure that the nameless spaces of neoliberalism are made into identifiable, secure and enabling 'places'. The theoretical issues raised by Taylor allow the empirical setting of this study to transcend the customary abstraction of 'spaces' and simultaneously highlight the relations of its particular 'place' with the previously identified concepts.

Rural South India represents this study's 'value-laden place' – and for good reason. An estimated 65 percent of India's land is degraded is some way, requiring governments to repeatedly rethink the country's heavy chemical use, celebrated during the Green Revolution of the 1960s, that has left much of the agricultural production reliant upon synthetic pesticides and fertilisers. Tamil Nadu (TN) exemplifies this position. Encompassing the southern tip of the world's fourth largest economy, Tamil Nadu annually loses up to 30 percent of its agricultural output due to soil degradation. The region also hosts a thriving NGO community – and supports numerous organisations that focus primarily upon revitalizing the natural, organic agricultural output of India's past. This study centres upon the work of three environmentally focussed NGOs based in Pudukottai, Dindigul and Tiruchirapalli (districts within TN); namely, *National Environment and Education Development* (NEED), *The Centre for Rural Health and Environmental Protection* (CIRHEP) and *Rural Action for Co-operation and Economic Development* (RACE) respectively. Taking CIRHEP as an example, a central tenet of the NGO's work is the improvement of the health of society, conserving the environment coupled with uplifting the rural community by providing education, empowering women and promoting income generation schemes. Their major focus is on the conservation of the rural landscape through watershed development, environmental education and organic / bio-dynamic agriculture.

CIRHEP, like the others, also boasts a long-running relationship with various global and corporate funders. Accordingly, this study focuses upon the implications of neoliberal governance for these local, agriculturally centred, political activist networks in the three districts in which the selected NGOs facilitate organic agricultural production (referred to hereafter as 'the region').

Through ongoing working visits to the region, and existing contacts within NEED, CIRHEP, RACE and their associated organisations, this study already holds access to and cooperation from the development community. This sets a solid base upon which to build a robust methodological structure. In order to both explore the processes of change and to offer a normative framework to guide change in this area, this study will employ an integrated mixed-method, deductive response to Humble and Smith's (2007) call for development research that is defined systematically rather than geographically. This methodology contrasts with discourses of qualitative research in which an intuitive sense of understanding, derived from the broad scope of 'development studies', is used, such as references to researching issues of the 'Global South' in government policy literature and much academic work. Instead, this study will move beyond such ideas and focus upon one of the central strengths of qualitative approaches to development (Smith, 2007:2), the capacity to engage with the diverse meanings and definitions of development. Methods will necessarily be flexible, to adapt to opportunity.

The opening method employed will be a bespoke Participatory Rural Appraisal with the selected NGOs. The NGOPRA results from the epistemological perspective that people construct social meanings, and that every individual is capable of research analysis and planning. This leads to the ideological assertions, reaffirmed by Beazley and Ennew (2006), that in practice:

- People should be active agents in their own lives.
- Research should respect participants' own words, ideas and understandings.
- Researchers and research participants are equal.

- Research methods should be flexible, explanatory and inventive.
- Both researchers and research participants should benefit from the research.

The NGOPRA is customised in that it will seek to directly access the understandings of, and reduce the power disparity between the researcher and the NGO staff in the region as well as the affected communities. This is in distinction to the traditional PRA focus upon marginalized rural communities alone, and will explore the relationship between activist professionalisation and organic agricultural progress while offering a response to the charge of the de-politicalisation of activists under neoliberal governance. Methods used will be cost/time effective participatory approaches. *Social Network Diagrams*, in which participants are individually questioned, will allow a facilitator to draw maps of the networks in which participants are engaged. *Matrix Ranking and Scoring* group exercises, involving a guided brainstorming session followed by importance and frequency ranking, will allow the severity and regularity of interactions and consequence to be measured. *Time Transects,* where activists individually draw a representation of how their working week is spent on a time line/24 hour pie chart, will permit investigation of governance and time allocation as an effect. *Causal Flow Analysis* will investigate grounded perceptions of the issues and their causality. Finally, *Focus Group Discussions* will promote the identification of community priorities and appraisal, while harnessing the results of the preceding activities to establish suitable focus points for a large-scale survey. All results will be shared immediately with the participants and NGOs to ensure NGO commitment to the PRA.

While of course, the use of any PRA, if administered effectively, opens up at least some ways in which research and policy can be influenced by the more marginalised members of the community (Holland & Blackburn, 1998), it is important to acknowledge Staples' (2007:150-151) suggestion that the functionalist basis of the majority of the existing NGO-management research should be challenged in order to move away from the habitual bias of overlooking the multiple, and often contending, agendas of individual actors *within* NGOs. Accordingly this project will attempt to follow Staples (Ibid) in not assigning agency to the organisations themselves, but rather to see them as interconnected networks of practices and relationships

between people and ideas. From an anthropological and agropolitan perspective this will, hopefully, move towards filling the gap in the literature that neglects the individual cases of development actors and the relationships within which they operate within their territorial unit while under the influence of national and supranational systems.

The second method will be a quantitative survey based upon the official records, project audits and annual reports of the associated NGOs. First, it will be necessary to explore the data sets to test reliability. If this is satisfactory, the survey, directed by the prior methods, will tabulate the organisations' diverse involvements and activities with CIRHEP et al., and the levels of organic agricultural activity of their respective communities. Using these secondary data sources to compile a statistical data set is highly desirable in evaluating development progress and making comparisons. It would allow the research to complete *binary/multiple regression* and *orthogonal rotation statistical analysis* and matrix the factor loadings for each variable onto each factor. That is, the project would be able to fit a predictive model to the data set and use that model to predict values of the status of organic agricultural output from numerous independent variables. This would provide the research an ability to explore and, to some extent, predict important aspects of economic, social and demographic rural change in the area allowing this study to more accurately evaluate development trajectories and the impacts of neoliberal economic and social policies on one of the area's most important resources.

Finally, *semi-structured interviews* will be held with selected respondents and with key informants from outside the NGO networks[9]. The interviews allow respondents to articulate the usually unspoken, assumed or customary structures of professionalisation and rural change. Through interrogating inconsistencies and contradictions in the results, both the researcher and respondents will be encouraged to critically consider the relationships between professionalisation and ecologically centred agricultural production.

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[9] i.e. academics, official donors, competing NGOs etc.

The use of semi-structured interviews seeks to enable different accounts to be balanced and compared whilst allowing a greater understanding of the subject through its reflexivity. Interview participants will be selected on the basis of experience, knowledge and professional proximity of the subject as well as a willingness to contribute. Analytically, a number of methodological issues are likely to be encountered: As the selection of some of the interviewees will be guided by my 'gatekeepers' (i.e. prominent activists and NGO managers within the region), there is the chance that they will guide the research towards particular individuals, so leaving out certain sections of the group or community. In addition, interviewees may feel under pressure to answer in a particular way when introduced like this (Willis, 2006:147). The partial solution to these problems will be careful abstraction, analysis and data triangulation and the ability of interviewees to refuse to participate at any time.

The Originality and Relevance of the Research

This research seeks to be an original contribution to knowledge in several senses: It is the first to investigate the effects of NGO professionalization upon environmental NGOs promoting organic agriculture – not to mention the first to apply an agropolitan approach to the study of both of these topics. It studies both the managerial policies and agricultural activities of several NGOs for the first time and adds to the diminutive bank of literature on TN agriculture and NGOs. The subject of this research is also topical. Geo-economic investigation into professionalisation and civil society networks bound within neoliberalism (Laurie & Bondi, 2005) has impressed upon development discourse an appreciation of the encroachments of neoliberal processes and practices into every aspect of local activism. Moreover, it has highlighted the ability of local activists to 'work' the spaces created by neoliberal governance to contested ends (Townsend et al., 2004). Meanwhile, DFID's Research Funding Framework has highlighted time-and-again the inadequate levels of attention that international research has afforded to the agricultural output and ecology of developing countries, while highlighting participatory techniques as indispensable for identifying the practical issues. There is

mounting pressure to prove the effectiveness of initiatives that claim to lead to more sustainable development. Monitoring and accountability are high on the agenda of NGOs and those in TN are no exception. Through participatory methodologies, it is possible to actively combat the problems with which both the researcher and the relevant NGOs are concerned. It is possible, therefore, and indeed advisable, to prepare a separate report for the NGOs involved that focuses more on the practical evaluative issues than the final thesis itself.

Natural resource management systems that work for the poor have been directly highlighted as priorities for government, civil society and local communities, yet the work of the NGOs of TN remains an untapped academic resource. This project will be dynamic, flexible and responsive while simultaneously addressing DFID and The Consulative Group on International Agricultural Research's investigative priorities of sustainable biodiversity, agricultural diversification, natural resource management and the poor. The invitation from the Department For International Development for research to fill the gap in developmental thinking on the influence of civil society upon agricultural production (DFID, 2004), in addition to the observations of Rigg (2001:7) on the intrinsic 'tensions' between agricultural production, economy and space, indicate the need for a reassessment of de-agrarianisation and political activism in lower income countries. This project will investigate the social, spatial and economic milieu left in the wake of these tensions. Simultaneously, this will open up a wider research agenda, through which the continually evolving geographies and politics of professionalisation, and its inherent 'knowledges' in the context of rural change, can be studied.

PhD Programme

	0-6 Months	6-12 Months	12-18 Months	18-24 Months	24-30 Months	30-36 Months
Literature search.						
Methodology refinement.		*Post-pilot refinement.*				
Research schedule planning.		*Post-pilot refinement*				
Fieldwork.		*One month pilot study.*	*Ten month fieldwork visit.[10]*			
Preparation of project report for NGOs[11].						
Analysis of empirical data.						
Application of statistical procedures.						
Project write-up.	*Continuous writing and peer re-appraisal.*				*Final thesis write-up.*	
Journal & magazine article writing.						
Conference & seminar presentations.						

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[10] Through transcribing interviews and analysing them through NVIVO while in Tamil Nadu there would be the potential to inform further fieldwork. For this reason as much analysis as possible will be carried out in the field. This will include a daily diary and interview transcription.

[11] In addition to the final project report, short briefing notes will be provided at intervals for the organisations involved.

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2nd Year PhD Intermediate Progress Report   **Paul H Johnson**
Supervisors: Dr Cheryl McEwan & Dr Marcus Power

Work Completed

The initial six months of the PhD were spent developing and refining the original research proposal. This required in-depth literature searches, conceptual exploration and clarification, methodological improvement, and engagement with the academic and 'development' community, both in the department and throughout the region.

In preparation for the first year panel interview and progression paper I, alongside my supervisors, identified the core themes of the thesis that I was least familiar with, and set about writing a detailed literature review. This developed into an investigative review of the emerging themes surrounding the 'NGOisation' and institutionalisation of development, and the professionalisation of social movements under neoliberal models of good governance.

Alongside this (and emerging from this work) I spent time analysing and developing the project's research questions. Through narrowing down the concepts of the thesis through literature reviews and adapting the research questions accordingly, the questions were better suited to specifying what I will later use as indicators during the data collection stage of the project. That is to say, for each question it is now clear what data will be required to answer it. Consequently, the requirements of the methodology became easier to define.

Working on concepts, questions and methods in the first six months was not unintentional. In dealing with the substantive issues of what the research is trying to find out, then moving on to formulating methods to answer those questions, the thesis is able to align each component

and, in turn, strengthen the internal validity of the whole study (Punch, 2000:30). Of course, work on both research questions and methodology is on-going, but beginning this at an early stage remains a crucial step in the pre-empirical process.

During this time I also instigated meetings with the academic 'development' community in the region and further afield. Notably, I strengthened and formalised my links with the Developing Areas Research Network (DARN, based at Newcastle University), where I was asked to sit on their Steering Committee as Postgraduate Representative for Durham. I also strengthened my links with past colleagues at Northumbria University as well as arranging meetings with staff and visiting academics in the Department at Durham such as Jonathan Rigg and Ben Wisner. Through developing links with such academics I have, and continue to, develop excellent working relationships that allow for productive discussions about my ongoing work.

The second half of my first year was devoted to building upon the methodology and research design. This began with a three week pilot study in Tamil Nadu (TN), South India. While there I sent time with the three Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) selected for the research. Essentially, this was a 'filling in the blanks' exercise. I was there to familiarise myself with each NGO and to find answers to the gaps in my knowledge about each individual organisation. Through this investigation I was able to ascertain whether each of the three proposed NGOs would be suitable for study. I used the information and contacts gained during this trip to adjust my methodology and contextual basis.

Following these stages, an initial outline of the conceptual and methodological framework for the thesis was presented at the Department's Postgraduate Research conference and my

expanded research proposal – in the form of a first year progression paper - has now been formally approved through a progression panel.

Work Underway

My current focus can be divided into three elements: developing the macro structure of the thesis; writing and developing the contextual chapters; and planning my research and research visits.

In developing the structure of the PhD my initial aim is to create a formation that is accessible for the reader and one which allows a sequence of chapters that is logical and culminative. I have also found through past writing assignments that setting loose parameters in the form of sections/chapters/sub-headings etc. and writing around that 'skeleton' is my most comfortable and productive working process.

In order to devise an original and significant conceptual framework I have engaged with the relevant contemporary conceptual debates and continue to refine my knowledge base. In doing so I have applied three questions: What literature is relevant to this project? What is the relationship of the study to its relevant literature? And how will the study use the literature? Through positioning the project in the context of previous work, I am attempting to explain and justify the decisions made for the thesis (Punch, 2000:44).

I have also spent time considering the research design and methodology, and have begun to access and engage with a wide variety of literature on research in 'developing' countries and participatory approaches. This has led me to engage with participatory research specialists

within the department such as Rachel Pain and other PhD students considering comparable methods, in order to share information and learn from their experience.

Following this I have begun planning for my two large research trips to South India which will take place between March and August 2010. There are two notable points associated with these plans. First, that the research trips have been scheduled later in the academic year to allow for more detailed preparation. And, second, that the trips will be split into two. This will allow for reflection and amendments following the first full trip. For example, through transcribing interviews and analysing them through NVIVO while in TN then discussing these findings with my supervisors upon return from the first trip, there will be the potential to inform further fieldwork. For this reason as much analysis as possible will be carried out in the field. This will include a daily diary and interview transcription.

Remaining Research Work Planned

The remaining work will be split into five parts: completing all conceptual and contextual work; the final planning and preparation before the research trips in March; the research collection itself; producing a practical project report for the associated NGOs; and the writing-up and dissemination of the findings. As for the immediate future, I will continue writing around the 'skeleton' and produce first drafts of the thesis' initial chapters. The logic behind this is simply to produce work where there once was none, '...to get something written, to get the elements [I] have in play more or less defined, even if only in a preliminary way and often in the wrong order' (Dunleavy, 2003:136). From this I hope to be able to follow through a logic of organising the text in a coherent fashion in order to influence my thinking on the topic, and make clear aspects of the various themes that I could not know in

advance, in order to weigh, test and sift the changing levels of commitment I have to different propositions (Ibid: 136-137).

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Paul H. Johnson

Annual Progress Report: 3rd Year PhD

Supervised by: Dr Marcus Power & Dr Cheryl McEwan

Thesis Title

Alternative Visions of Change: Jigsaw Funding, Patchwork Professionalisation and Rural NGOs in a Neoliberal Era.

Thesis Abstract

Study of civil society networks bound within the wider neoliberal restructuring project has impressed upon development discourse an appreciation of the encroachments of neoliberal processes and practices into every aspect of grassroots activism. Perhaps more importantly, of late it has also highlighted the ability of local activists to 'work' the spaces created by neoliberal governance to contested ends. This paper unpacks the ways in which professionalisation, theorized at the specific site of its operation, co-opts, constrains, supports and depletes activism, and, most importantly, how the professional subjects shaped through these processes occupy the opportunities created. Specifically, the paper will investigate how the professionalisation of an ecologically-centred and community-based NGO shapes its staff's ability to 'exist, speak and act as development alternatives' (Bebbington et al., 2008) and how their ecological focus alters this process.

Thesis Structure

My aim is to produce a thesis structured in a way that is both coherent and cumulative. Consequently the narrative, comprising of eight chapters, will be subdivided into three sections (See Fig. 1). The introduction will provide the first of three background discussions. It will contain a short specification of the research trajectory synoptically framed in terms of immediately relevant literature and essential background information (Dunleavy, 2003). Material covered will include the contemporary nature of the non-governmental sector with specific focus upon community-based organisations in the South; neoliberalism and what I understand by this characteristically intangible concept; the mounting anxiety between 'expert' and 'local' knowledges in the context of neoliberalism's increasing pervasiveness in environment-development initiatives, and the tensions and associations between the processes of professionalization and local activism.

Chapter One: Introduction	'Lead-in' Section
Chapter Two: Methodology	
Chapter Three: CIRHEP: An Introduction	
Chapter Four: The Metabolic Rift in Community-based Rural Activism	Core Section
Chapter Five: Jigsaw Funding and Patchwork Professionalisation	
Chapter Six: Working the Spaces: A Very Local Cosmopolitanism	
Chapter Seven: Self-presence and 'Voice' in Community-based Rural Activism	
Chapter Eight: Conclusions	'Lead-out' Section

Fig .1: Thesis Meta-structure

A discussion of the knowledge gathering process will follow. In order to avoid an unnecessary (and potentially monotonous) descriptive essay of the 'mechanics' of the research process, the chapter will offer its own research contribution in the form of an explanation of the postcolonial potential of ethnographic research, the pitfalls and drawbacks of participatory research in this context and a call for case study-based research in NGO studies. Where necessary this chapter will be supplemented with detailed information on the precise methodological and logistical decisions that were made prior to and during this time.

The final component of the 'lead-in' section (Dunleavy, 2003) of the thesis will be a succinct chapter introducing CIRHEP and placing them within their unique institutional, political and ideological context. The rationale behind this draws from a discussion started in the preceding chapter. It is my belief (formed in the process of producing this thesis) that the major flaw of the existing literature on southern-based NGOs is the neglect of their tremendously varied and heterogeneous nature let alone the diversity within the organisations themselves. Like the division within development biopolitics (Sylvester, forthcoming) these bodies are rarely depicted in detail as fully formed, dynamic and individual but, to adapt a concept from Sylvester, as a childlike drawing. Through arguing for a case-study approach to NGO research and presenting this organisation with as much detail and specificity as I would expect in any other organisational study, this chapter and the thesis more broadly attempts to counter this trend.

The second section will be four chapters of applied analysis in which the several distinct themes uncovered during the project are linked to preceding literature and form a composite discussion of the wider themes and theoretical implications of the project. Chapter four employs Marx's concept

of the metabolic rift as an original theoretical framework to study the professionalization-activist dialectic. In short, neoliberal restructuring, via professionalization, creates an analogous 'rift' in the form of a professional-local divide. Here professionalization constitutes the extraction of locally-based rural activists into the professional sphere in which their newly attained abilities and understandings are principally used to satiate the requirements of external donors.

Chapter five will focus upon the way in which CIRHEP inhabits the spaces created within this process and thus navigates and manages the aforementioned extractive process. It will focus upon the pragmatic and highly creative institutional configuration adopted and its resulting effects that my case NGO has developed - what I have christened 'Jigsaw Funding' and 'Patchwork Professionalisation' respectively - and evaluates both the benefits and shortcomings of this organisational structure while considering the level to which an ecological focus allows this level of autonomy.

Chapter six will highlight the grounded cosmopolitan character necessary for rural community-based NGOs to adopt a jigsaw funding structure and navigate the practical and ideological tensions of organisational survival. This chapter will highlight 'the normative political senses in which cosmopolitanism can be deployed... [identifying the] commitments within cosmopolitan political theorizing that offer an analytical frame for considering the ways in which NGOs are or can contribute to the formation of development alternatives' (Baillie Smith and Yanacopulos, 2008: 304). Specifically, it I will use 'the organisation' as the unit of analysis to map out the ways in which CIRHEP adopt a ecologically-driven cosmopolitan identity as a coping mechanism to engage with the numerous and multi-scalar affiliations and loyalties that contemporary grassroots development NGOs encounter – in sum, it will chart their capacity to engage multiplicity (Harvey, cited in Vertovec & Cohen, 2002:I).

Chapter seven, the final chapter in the thesis' core section, will focus on the concept of self-presence through the act of giving account of one's self as a central element of NGO sovereignty. Drawing on Couldry's (2010) engagement with 'voice', the chapter will highlight the means by which CIRHEP is able to speak, convey and understand their individual message and by these means challenge neoliberal hegemony, reinforce their cosmopolitan political position[1] and pursue development alternatives.

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[1] Numerous authors identify 'dialogue' and, by default 'voice' as the cornerstone of the establishment of cosmopolitan values. See for example, Calhoun, 2002 & Linklater, 2002.

The final section consists of a single chapter – the conclusion. This chapter will draw in and integrate the conclusions from the preceding analytical chapters, each of which covered a distinct-yet-correlated aspect of my research findings. The chapter will then offer a limited opening out from these results back towards the wider body of literature in all providing an ending to the thesis which balances wider theoretical concerns with practical considerations while proposing possible future avenues of research on these themes.

Basic Thesis Timetable

December 2010	Development of analytical framework(s).
January 2011	Writing-up: Chapter Three.
February 2011	Writing-up: Chapter Four. Review of previous chapter.
March 2011	Writing-up Chapter Five. Review of previous chapter. Review of argument synthesis.
April 2011	Writing-up: Chapter Six. Review of previous chapter. Review of argument strength.
May 2011	Review of previous chapter. Review of analytical chapters' synergy. Word level edit of 'raw text' (to remove mis-spellings, grammar mistakes, word repetition etc.)
June 2011	Writing-up: Chapter Seven: Conclusion. Review of thesis cohesion and flow.
July 2011	Writing up: Chapter one: Introduction. Review of conclusions. Final word-level edit. Produce first draft of thesis. Review of organisation and presentation.
August 2011	Amendments to first draft. Final review of organisation and presentation.
September 2011	Produce final draft of thesis.

N.B. This timetable represents the 'bare' components of the writing-up process. Throughout the next ten months I will undertake continuous writing, editing and peer re-appraisal. Likewise, I will attend one or more supervision meetings per month in order to clarify ideas and guide progress. As such numerous previously unforeseen elements will, no doubt, be added to this initial plan.

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CHAPTER TWO

Professionalisation, Metabolic Rift and the *Longue Durée* of Grassroots Activism

'This production of the 'professional' development expert, identified as such not solely because of the extent and form of their knowledge but often because of who they are and where they come from, legitimises and authorises their interventions by valorising their particular technical skills and reinforcing classifications of difference between, for example, the "developed" and "developing"...'

(Kothari, 2005:32)

2.1 Introduction

International development is a stratified arena consisting of subaltern aid recipients in the South through to northern heads of state and intercontinental administrations. As such, 'classifications of difference' are manifest at multiple levels. The most recent plane upon which a near-binary classification has taken hold is the community-based non-governmental sector of the Global South. As chapter one explains, this 'intermediary' level is now the conduit through which funds flow from donor to intended beneficiary. As such, the important yet ill-defined role of facilitator presents fertile ground for the monopolisation of expertise and authority. This chapter builds upon the preceding account of shifts in development discourse and practice toward a multitude of institutionalised, bureaucratised and market-orientated practices (Kothari, 2005:32; Hintjens, 2009; Laurie & Bondi, 2005), and argues that these occurrences are better understood as stages of a larger process of activist (and therefore activism) professionalisation. The culmination of this is an irrevocable rift between subaltern communities and the realisation of democratic, 'alternative' visions of change.

To begin, the chapter provides a synthesis of the academic literature on professionalisation with a particular – though not exclusive – focus upon the professionalisation of community-level development activists in the Global South. Drawing on this, the chapter then proposes that professionalisation is best understood in terms of a three-stage *longue durée* of local activism as grassroots professionalism gives way to institutionalisation and subsequently NGO professionalisation. Then, using Castree's (2000) analysis of the 'academicisation' of left-wing, western geographers, a definitional conceptualisation of the third stage of activist professionalisation is proposed in order to further interprate this process and identify its central traits in this particular circumstance. The chapter then examines the conceptual (re)construction of the Marxist theory of metabolic rift en route to employing the theory in the specific context of community-based rural activism. The professionalisation process, it is thus argued, evolves with activism and, on occasion, within activist groups and culminates in an extractionary and inherently

exploitative arrangement that limits the potential and scope of local development activists to act as agents of 'alternative' development.

2.1 Theories of professionalisation

There exists a widespread body of literature concerned with the increasingly formalised nature of third sector development interventions (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2011:170). Indeed, academia boasts considerable pools of scholarship in the professionalisation of numerous fields, yet these pools are rarely brought into conversation or related back to earlier theorisation.

Theories of professionalisation and professionalism can be traced back to the early 1970s. Early works typically focus upon gaining professional status in recognition of particular forms of employment. Accordingly, most studies highlight occupation-level processes (as opposed to organisational or individual) and two parties – the aspirant group and the state[1] – as central to the process. Theories are divided between those that approach professionalisation from a perspective of demand and those that suggest a supply-based process (De Vries et al., 2009). Demand theories customarily view professionalisation as an attempt by an aspirant work-related group to achieve 'occupational closure' and, consequently, protection from the labour market[2]. However, this line of thought is criticised for its inability to explain the low success rate amongst such groups (Dingwall & Fenn, 1987). In response, 'supply theories' underscore and elevate the role of the state. For supply theorists:

 'Recognition as a profession occurs only when it suits the state. This may be a reaction to what economists would term market failure, that is, that the market has not been able to supply the type of people or service required by the state at that point. But the 'market shelter' [protection] would only be created when it coincides directly with the interests of the state'.

(Timmons, 2011:339)

Larson (1977) proposes that an occupational group seeks two things: a monopoly in the delivery of its service (termed 'market shelter' by Freidson, 1994), and enhanced (group and individual) status (Timmons, 2011:339). This self-serving (Totton, 1999:320) 'project' is enabled by the emerging profession's experience, expertise (technical knowledge) and resulting protection and licence by the state. Abbott's (1988) incorporation of competition to the analysis appends a necessary dynamic to the process and adds emphasis to the impetus behind securing a 'professional jurisdiction' or, 'a

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[1] As 'only the state can licence professions' (Timmons, 2011:339).
[2] Often under the premise of protecting the public (Friedson, 1970; Larson, 1977).

specific area of activity and knowledge controlled and defined by the professions' (Timmons, 2011:339). Yet, in these early stages of theorisation, few studies consider the importance of other competing professions in the establishment of new ones (Abbott, 1988; Timmons, 2011:339), and the impact of competing groups within the same occupational bracket seeking to 'carve out a distinctive jurisdiction' (Abbott, 1988).

Occupationally-specific studies of the processes and effects of professionalisation in the West increased in number and momentum from the early 1990s. 'Lower level medical occupations' were a central focus of this work, with nursing (Keogh, 1997), midwifery (James & Willis, 2001) and complementary medicine (Cant & Sharma, 1998) providing focus for debates surrounding the gaining and maintaining professional status (Jenkins, 2010:142). In his examination of psychotherapy and counselling in the UK, Totton (1999:317) builds upon earlier works to suggest two central tenets that define a profession in this respect. The first is the possession of 'expert' knowledge and the second is the use of political strategies to establish a small, elite group that controls its own boundaries. These suggestions highlight a vocational professionalism and are developed and conjoined in response to the observation of 'radical' lengthening and widening of training, the technicalisation of work, and the creation and insertion of new levels and meta-levels of expertise and qualification.

Here, 'expert' knowledge is differentiated from 'local knowledge'. Like the global effect of western science and capitalism on indigenous knowledge systems (Totton, 1999:319-320), the notion of standardisation is vital to this distinction. That is to say, following the process of professionalisation, every individual or organisation within that profession 'is in some sense doing the same thing' within a standardised and accredited economy of uniform understanding (Totton, 1999:318-319; Shiva, 1993). As Totton (1999:320) summarises:

'Professionalisation has its own self-motivating dynamic: once a group decides to carve out a niche as a profession, it inevitably seeks to make boundaries around itself and to control admission. Perhaps the only way to achieve this is by laying claim to a body of expert knowledge. The fundamental motivation involved is, quite simply, one of self-interest. However, like many social phenomena... the drive to professionalisation is not conscious of its own dynamic: it holds false beliefs about its own motivations. The primary conscious belief is that professionalisation is for the good of the client'.

McClelland (1990:170) identifies a two-part motivation to professionalise. The first is described as professionalisation 'from within' and involves successful manipulation of the market by the group or individual in question. The second is a professionalisation 'from above' and typically entails the domination of forces that are external to the group or individual in question (Evetts, 2003). In the case of the former, when the appeal to professionalism is made and used by the occupational group itself, the returns can be substantial:

'In these cases, historically the group has been able to use the discourse in constructing its occupational identity, promoting its image with clients and customers, and in bargaining with states to secure and maintain its (sometimes self) regulatory responsibilities. In these instances the occupation is using the discourse partly in its own occupational and practitioner interests but sometimes also as a way of promoting and protecting the public interest'.

(Evetts, 2003)

The conceptualisation of professionalisation that is developed in these studies is rigid. And, despite their ever more nuanced portrayal of professionalisation, early theories are routinely based on an overtly formalised and managerial understanding of the process and an assumption that to be 'professional' is a desirable goal (Jenkins, 2010:142; Timmons, 2011). Nonetheless, a growing collection of studies offer contemporary examples of ambivalence and dissent within the process (Timmons, 2011). Such work indicates the ways in which the attainment of professional status as a result of professionalisation can, more often than not, have explicitly negative effects due to aspirant groups' weakness in relation to the state and other dominant actors (Timmons, 2011:348). This contemporary understanding signifies an era in which the sense of professionalisation centres on the friction between autonomy and regulation.

2.2 Professionalisation and development studies

The view of professionalisation as a regulatory tool is also a growing strand of development and NGO studies. This relatively recent body of work builds upon the larger, existing pool of literature that identifies the mounting institutionalisation within development, and the concurrent formalisation of the non-governmental sector (Gendron et al., 2008; Townsend, et al., 2002; Kamat, 2004; Ebrahim, 2005; Holmén, 2010) as well as work that links professionalisation to colonial oppression. Within critical geography and contemporary development studies more broadly, the inherently positive analysis of professionalisation is upturned and frequently rejected. For many, the formalised and managerial positioning of the professionalisation process echoes the discourse that

was produced in much of the Global South through colonial constructions of educated, white, male elite groups (Jenkins, 2010:142; Totton, 1999:319). Correspondingly, parallels are drawn between modern day perceptions of professional status and the 'white', scientific knowledge that was extoled in the late 19th Century as a remedy to the (allegedly inherent) negative traits of people of colour, and has since been suggested to have contributed to a colonial 'silent racism' (de la Cadena, 1998).

Historically, gaining professional status has been shown to contribute significantly to social reproduction in the Global South (Laurie et al., 2003). In many cases, professionalisation shapes the social ambitions of traditionally-subordinate individuals and groups, as well as their future economic strategies. This often rests upon the 'whitening' effect that professional status can confer and, it is argued, mirrors the racist colonial geographies of nation building that linger in scores of present-day development programmes (Laurie et al., 2003: 465). Then and today, elitism is fashioned by reasserting and, thus, reaffirming dichotomies in which the 'traditional' culture and societal processes of the 'developing' are (re)presented as 'outmoded and in need of succession by generic, more "modern" and inevitably Western attitudes and practices' (Kothari, 2005:33-34). As Kothari (2005:33) elaborates:

'Development is predicated on the assumption that some people and places are more developed than others and therefore those who are "developed" have the knowledge and expertise to help those who are not... These often unspoken assumptions are highly problematic but continue to prevail in development thinking and are embodied in the ideas and practices of the professional'.

In this vein, the practices of the modern-day development professional and prerequisite 'principles of authority' (in which 'experts' recurrently identify and categorise problems as justification for later interventions), entail the creation of mechanisms and procedures that position subaltern societies within pre-existing models that exemplify the structures and functions of modernity (Escobar, 1995; Escobar, 1997:91). These new, culturally-imperial practices and their associated labels of 'expert', 'expertise' and, of course, 'professional', are not neutral classifications however, but are 'reconfigured by neoliberal development imaginaries' (Kothari, 2005:34). As such, ideas of professionalism are 'absorbed by neoliberal thought and operationalised in development practice' (Kothari, 2005:34).

2.3 Professionalisation and neoliberalism

The divide between northern- and southern-based professionalisation literature is bridged and given unified focus in a 2005 special issue of *Antipode* and its subsequent edited collection (Laurie &

Bondi, 2005). The texts – both individually and collectively – explore the ways in which 'actually existing neoliberalism' (Brenner & Theodore, 2002) is bound up with the processes of professionalisation and illustrate how these practices link to and extend neoliberal sensibilities in a number of direct and indirect ways. Here, professionalisation is explored through an analysis of the fractured-yet-pervasive neoliberal restructuring project and subsequently highlighted on an organisational and individual level as a central tool in the production of globalised spaces of neoliberal governance (Power, 2005).

Of neoliberalism's innumerable characteristics, perhaps the two most relatable to professionalisation are its diverse successes in colonising swathes of global economic and cultural life, and its capacity to coexist with seemingly opposing political ideas (Bondi, 2005: 105). Indeed, as chapter one indicates, sufficient evidence exists of neoliberal ideologies within social policies from across the political spectrum to produce a rendering of an innately flexible phenomenon 'capable of being marshalled in relation to both social and economic policies, and capable of hybridising with both authoritarian and social democratic ideas' (Bondi, 205:106). In this sense, and through the interpretive lens of Foucauldian governmentality, professionalisation can be understood to function through 'installing a concept of the human subject as an autonomous, individualised, self-directing, decision-making agent at the heart of policy-making' (Bondi, 2005:106). In such cases, individuals become enlisted into neoliberal forms of governmentality whilst simultaneously resisting some or all of its effects.

It is little wonder then that the rise of claims to professional status ran largely in parallel to the ascent of neoliberalism. Central to this association (and its applicability to development studies) is the persuasive suggestion that professions are useful technologies for 'governing at a distance' (Fournier, 1999; Bondi, 2005:108). Professional status confers an element of autonomy upon on occupational groups and individual practitioners alike who embody the knowledge and, perhaps more importantly, conduct required of professional practice and is remunerated. Thus, professionalisation – in the North or the South – recruits practitioners into modes of action that express agency whilst also submitting to disciplinary mechanisms, and is perhaps best articulated in Larner's (2000:6) conception of neoliberalism as 'a political discourse about the nature of rule' and sits comfortably alongside warnings of a 'new imperialism' in which NGOs, social capital and good governance become instruments used to promote the reach, ethics and laws of the market (Mawdsley et al., 2005:872. See also, Harvey, 2003; Townsend et al., 1999; Molyneux, 2002, Abrahamsen, 2000 and Petras and Veltmeyer, 2002).

Voluntary sector counselling in the UK, for instance, exhibits three central and ostensibly-neoliberal features of professionalisation. In this field, professionalisation entails 'the development of systems of voluntary self-regulation', 'the "academicaisation" of training programmes' and 'the growth of labor market opportunities' for those involved (Bondi, 2005:115). Occupational technicalisation and the operation of technologies of calculation (numeralised evaluation etc.) are likewise identified as two processes through which alternative processes are conscripted in to wider discourses and practices. In the South, the rise of income-generating micro-credit initiatives, for example, also supplies an effective mechanism for providing measurable results alongside the neoliberal predilection for jobs created by the individual rather than through the social obligation of the state or private sector (Feldman, 2003:16).

These processes contribute to neoliberal governmentality and subject formation and, in their many ambivalences, constitute but two of the 'messy actualities' (Larner, 2000:14) of this process (Bondi, 2005:105). The proliferation of professionalisation is then perhaps best understood as symptomatic of global assimilation into neoliberal forms of governmentality, and emblematic of the contradictory character of neoliberal subjectivity. Assessing the tensions and connections between activism and processes of professionalisation in relation to neoliberalism allows a greater understanding of the messiness, unevenness and hybritity of neoliberal ideologies in practice (Power, 2005:209). It also provides a much needed framework to analyse the parameters of political agency and the appropriation of so-called 'alternative' approaches to development under the cloak of the neoliberal restructuring project (Bondi, 2005).

2.4 Professionalisation and development activism

Within development studies, the examination of professionalisation has largely centred upon the professionalisation of activists and, of late, has taken a more actor-centred approach than past, occupation-focussed work. This literature broadly fits three categories.

The first and most established of these is covered in chapter one and encompasses studies that examine the formalisation, registration and accreditation of once-informal or voluntary movements and networks. Of the three, this branch of literature echoes the profession-level focus of earlier theorisations and is often referred to as institutionalisation or 'NGOisation'. The second comprises studies that examine the mounting paperwork, procedures, hierarchies, bureaucratisation and accountability of Southern-based NGOs and their staff. This work is often blurred or confused with the first due to the fact that the processes described in this second body of literature are largely the

consequence or product of the processes described in the first. The final and, in many ways, most recent category covers work that investigates the professionalism of voluntary workers and relatively informal grassroots development groups and often seeks to use professionalisation as a means of conceptualising the role of grassroots activists in development.

The sections that follow consider the causes, defining characteristics and implications of the phenomena that are explored in the second two branches of this literature.

2.4.1 NGO Professionalisation

As described in chapter one, the 1980s and 1990s were the decades of globalisation, economic liberalisation, structural adjustment and managerialism (Desai & Imrie, 1998; Roy, 2011:588); they witnessed the amalgamation of innumerable networks, organisations, activists and volunteers into mainstream development discourses and practices (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2011) and positioned them firmly within the 'public service contractor' model of service delivery (Ebrahim, 2005:39; Lewis & Knaji, 2009:92; Roy, 2011:588). Accordingly, new and evolving relationships exist between northern and southern, local and national, and large and small development actors that require participants to identify and adopt appropriate working customs, identities, expectations and organisational practices (Mawdsley et al., 2002:15). With the take up of this new mantle, and as the 'junior partner' of such relationships, southern development activists face mounting pressure to assume more 'professional' and 'corporate-style' working practices and cultures (Mawdsley et al., 2002:15).

The nature of North-South NGO affiliations dictates that, in most cases, structural changes affect the latter disproportionately. Indeed, to eliminate inequality from a system based upon stratification is unattainable (Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006: 124). The reason for this is that global funding shifts reduce the role of government in 'development', and, ironically, amplify its function in the international non-governmental sector (Goonatilake, 2006:23). In consequence, northern, 'donor' agencies are now largely reliant upon external, state-level resources (Duffield, 2006:54; Clark, 1991). It follows then that if the reliance of northern NGOs upon government contributions is great, the dependency of their southern counterparts is, at best, equal (Goonatilake, 2006:23). It is not, however, reciprocal, and accordingly the motivation to conform to donor requirements is cemented and operates in a largely unilinear fashion. This in itself triggers a new series of inequalities (Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006:125).

This new relationship creates a multi-level, dual accountability, in which NGOs answer to both their intended beneficiaries (downward accountability) and their donors or governing bodies (upward

accountability) (Desai, 2008:528; Townsend et al., 2004; Mawdsley et al., 2005). Equally, NGOs are externally accountable to organisations, networks and individuals with which they affiliate and internally accountable to beneficiaries, donors, boards of directors, trustees and advisory committees (Desai, 2008:528). The topic of NGO accountability is crucial for development activists, as their actions are built upon their credibility and reputation (Desai, 2008:528). As such, the dialogue on the subject has spent the past quarter of a century existing as a derivative of the prevailing paradigm regarding the non-governmental sector and its function in development (Jordan & van Tuijl, 2007:9). As the focus and perceived importance of this topic shifts, so does the accountability debate. This is best presented in Jordan and van Tuijl's (2007:10-12) syllogistic history of NGO accountability (See, figure, 2.1).

At this scale, and in this evolving geo-political context, professionalisation has come to entail numerous universal (Townsend & Townsend, 2004), interlinked and not necessarily divisible processes and shifts in organisational and individual behaviour that are largely aligned to the technical demands placed on organisations in the name of good governance, capacity building and regulation (Mawdsley et al., 2005:78; Markowitz & Tice, 2002:947)[3].

As a result of southern NGOs' acquiescent-but-key position and northern NGOs' ever-present anxieties around misappropriation and waste, the systemisation and bureaucratisation of organisational structures and procedures are often the most apparent changes for community-based, intermediary NGOs. In effect, a code of conduct is fostered within the NGO community in response to increased pressures of accountability. Depending upon the northern NGO's level of concern for answerability, value for money, performance and impact, this can be as simple a process as a southern NGO opening a bank account, or as extensive as re-hauling the smaller organisation's reporting and communication structures (Mawdsley et al., 2002:15; Ebrahim, 2003).

PERIOD	PREVAILING PERCEPTION (SYLLOGISM) OF THE ROLE OF NGOS
1980-1989	Complementing government: 1. Governments are not good at delivering public services

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[3] Some studies make a distinction between professionalisation and accountability. They are, however, inherently linked and not necessarily 'dual issues'. As is explained in this chapter, increasing financial probity and transparency are constituent parts of the professionalisation process for many organisations and contribute to their progression towards 'accountability'.

	2. NGOs are closer to the public 3. NGOs are good at delivering public services
1989-1995	The rise of civil society: 1. Civil society is necessary for democracy 2. NGOs are civil society 3. NGOs are good for democratic development
1995-2000	The rise of good governance: 1. Good governance is necessary for development 2. NGOs are not different from other organisations in civil society 3. NGOs need to apply principles of good governance
2002-Onwards	The return of state supremacy: 1. Government is essential to ensure safety and development 2. NGOs' influence is not proportional to their credentials 3. NGOs need to be kept in check by legitimate government frameworks
2002-Onwards	A rights-based approach: 1. There is no democratic global governance supporting universal human rights 2. NGOs assert and solidify human rights in different political arenas and regardless of the state of governance 3. NGOs contribute to democratic governance by articulating public policy needs and practicing solutions resolving public needs.

Figure 2.1, The evolution syllogistic evolution of NGO accountability. Adapted from (Jordan & van Tuijl, 2007:10-12)

Increasingly scrutinised relationships with funding agencies require southern NGOs to submit to detailed work plans, deadlines and performance indicators. In fact, their very legitimacy as development actors and their capacity to attract support – and therefore survive – has long since been seen to rely upon them (Edwards and Hulme, 1995). An 'audit culture' now exists within which the exponential and continuing rise in the demand for paperwork from northern funding agencies dominates the non-governmental sector's North-South divide (Mawdsley et al., 2005:78; Mawdsley et al., 2002:16).

In practice, the demands that this puts upon community-based NGO staff and volunteers is that individuals – particularly senior staff – are continually tasked with record keeping, abstracting, objectifying and quantifying their work (Markowitz & Tice, 2002:948). Thus, contemporary document-based practice and its associated computer technologies, paperwork and communications require that community-based NGOs conceive and describe their work through externally-defined categories (Markowitz & Tice, 2002:948) and often in unfamiliar languages (Mawdsley et al., 2002). In addition to these requirements, funding agencies – or third parties employed by funding agencies – periodically evaluate facilitating partners. This generally requires additional staff time, resources and financial complexities (Markowitz & Tice, 2002:948). As a result, within academic literature on NGOs, documentation has become the poster-child for contemporary professionalisation critiques.

These comparatively recent requirements necessitate two qualities that community-based NGO staff must possess or develop. The first is proficiency in proposal development, accounting and evaluation procedures (Markowitz & Tice, 2002:948). In this vein, and to compete in an increasingly globalised market, organisations often tailor their usual data collection norms and procedures to fit that of their Northern counterparts. The second is linguistic assurance and aptitude. In many cases this trait takes the form of a fluency in technical or scientific language and terminology. Often, this is equalled by an increasing requirement that NGO staff document and converse in English or, to a lesser extent, French or Spanish (Mawdsley et al., 2002:17).

In all, the ever-increasing quantification and measurement of development activism through the exportation of private sector management techniques furthers the 'new managerialism' of civil society (Townsend et al., 2002:831; Clarke et al. 2000a). Here, development features as the latest stage of an ostensibly-neoliberal project intended to limit costs and improve efficiency and transparency in the public sector:

'These techniques were...exported in the 1990s through foreign policies and aid. From Durham University to Chiapas in Mexico, the same managerial approaches were then readily extended from the public sector NGDOs funded by governments, multinational agencies or foundations'.

Townsend et al., 2002:831

Another aspect of the professionalisation process in the nongovernmental sector is the creation of social and professional hierarchies. In effect, managerialism and the prioritisation of technical knowledge, 'world' languages and, ultimately, 'donorspeak' divide those with such competencies

from those without (Townsend et al., 2002:836). Here, unfamiliarity with jargon, buzzwords, log-frames, certain languages or application procedures exclude many NGOs (or certain staff within NGOs) from vital components of contemporary funding structures (Mawdsley et al, 2002:17-18; Markowitz & Tice, 2002:941; Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006:112) and result in financial resources being diverted to pay the (higher) wages of computer-literate graduates from outside of the local project areas. It is not unusual for a junior office worker with a higher level of formal education to receive a higher salary and travel allowances than an established 'field worker' (Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006:114). This has driven the almost-defiant axiom 'we are not educated, we are made' to grow popular amongst NGO field staff in the Indian sub-continent (Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006:114). Naturally, in an Indian context this normative system is slanted in terms of education and, therefore, class and caste meaning that access to the development 'information loop' is easier for some than others. In this case, the 'others' are invariably those that occupy the 'grassroots' (Markowitz & Tice, 2002:951; Townsend et al., 2002:836-837; Clarke et al., 2000b).

Organisational specialisation is another contributor to the internal- and external-division (and therefore hierarchy creation) of modern day NGOs. Like the multifaceted, service-based professions highlighted by Larson (1977), when faced with a near-saturated market, individual community-based development NGOs have found success in concentrating their focus and developing a body of specialised knowledge (Mclelland, 1990:170; Keogh, 1997:302; Totton, 1999:317). That is to say, faced with a veritable 'boom' in the numbers of comparable organisations and the reduction of available funding channels (Lewis & Kanji, 2009:92), many in the South's non governmental sector have found relative success through specialising in a smaller number of activities or competancies. Likewise, the number and roles of NGOs in contemporary development practice are such that the quality of NGO work is highly varied across the sector. Specialisation allows individual organisations to develop a stronger capacity to implement projects in a timely and practised manner.

New operational demands can generate occupational security and stability on both the organisational and individual level; they also catalyse inter-organisational specialisation in the form of pay inequalities, authority and hierarchical divisions of labour (Lang, 1997). This change is attributable to the increasingly formalised and technicalised institutional practices and organisational outreach of this branch of the non-governmental sector which requires individuals possessing certain skills or capacities – capacities 'typically consonant with privileged class background and higher levels of formal education' (Markowitz & Tice, 2002:950; Feldman, 2003:16; Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006:117). Again, these individuals are rarely from the local area and are invariably paid more than their colleagues. The middle-classes, professionally-credentialed,

university-educated and from an urban background, typically occupy 'higher' levels of the organisational structure. Likewise, driven by the need to balance organisational visions and donor specifications, the 'middle' and 'lower' levels of the organisation are often inhabited by a assortment of volunteers, project staff and 'professionally-qualified' individuals employed on a temporary basis (such as accountants, engineers etc.). Of course, the effects of the abovementioned processes are not neutral.

Knowledge is central to this process. Indeed, knowledge is central to development, and increasing numbers of aid programmes aim to facilitate its circulation, often in the process of encouraging 'new knowledge regimes' (Nightingale, 2005:186; Sivaramakrishnan & Agrawal, 2003). However, the professionalisation of the community-based development actors in this process has generated a form of 'Knowledge Economy' in which uneven geography, social status, and resources produce an arena that is dominated by a relatively small number of voices. Mawdsley et al. (2002:7) present a three-part typology of knowledge (Figure 2.2) to illustrates this. Here, the multiple forms and sources of knowledge are identified. Each of which is valued differently by different actors at all scales of society. In this economy, ideas, understandings and information are exchanged, traded and discussed on a variety of platforms by numerous development actors. Access to and expressions of these forms of knowledge cannot be divorced from contexts of power[4]. So, the NGO that lacks a fluent English speaker, or has no one that is able to fill in a log-frame may be denied a voice, so to speak, in the broader conversation.

The commitment to institutional reproduction and staff employment security (arguably the most influential manifestations of professionalisation at the grassroots level) has several further effects that shape the relationship between the activist group and their intended beneficiaries. In taking on the role of intermediary, non-governmental groups frequently build long-term capacity as service providers and an atmosphere of dependence between them and their end users (Feldman, 2003:18). Accordingly, activities designed to address the wider structural causes of poverty and inequality (the conditions that generate their services), are passed over as institutionalised and professionalising activist groups mediate donor and intended beneficiary requests in ways that accommodate both sets of interests (Feldman, 2003:18). Of course, overlap between needs is partial, and as such beneficiary interests are easily appropriated by established community-based groups that work on their behalf. The result of this is the formation of parallel institutions that speak for the disenfranchised rather than an arena in which multiple actors at all scales are given voice (Feldman, 2003:18). Ultimately, trends show that the materialisation and solidification of new neoliberal

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[4] This process is further hierarchicised in terms of gender, class, caste, race, religion and so on. (Jenkins, 2009a:880).

relations of individual responsibility and self-reliance shift NGO priorities away from 'the collective' (Feldman, 2003:22) whilst producing a non-governmental 'buffer' between citizens and states.

Technical Knowledge The 'nuts and bolts' of *doing* development	• government laws and regulations • Technical and scientific procedures
Local Knowledge Insights into beneficiary groups and project areas	• Needs and specific circumstances of the recipient community • Where and how to 'hear' beneficiary voices
Organisational Knowledge Capacity building tools	• Funding availability and whereabouts • Competencies expected/required to compete, progress and grow

Figure 2.2 'Knowledge Economy' table. Adapted from Mawdsley et al. (2002:7-8).

Throughout the sector, funding models, staffing concerns and the prioritisation of activities that deliver measurable results create situations in which money is mobilised before, or instead of, people (Eade, 2000; Feldman, 2003:22). At a national level, genealogies of professionalised grassroots NGOs identify a sector-wide focus on generic coverage rates in place of long-term commitments to individual members, and on compromise in place of challenging the wider structural causes of poverty and inequality (Feldman, 2003:22). In this role, professionalising NGOs – faced with growing commitments to bureaucratisation and target fulfilment – take the part of 'broker' in that they speak on the behalf of their constituents rather than mobilising people to speak for themselves (Feldman, 2003:22). In response to recurring and mounting administrative concerns such as office expenditure, bookkeeping, staff payments and base line operating costs, NGOs may endeavour to reach those groups that can guarantee measurable (and positive) results. Of course, these groups are not always those most in need:

'Under these conditions, the pressure to sustain programme outcomes requires reducing uncertainty, a choice often accomplished by supporting those who are self-selected and less risky – in short, those less likely to be the country's poorest'.

(Feldman, 2003:14)

This absorption of 'alternative', often conflicting voices (Bondi, 2005) has reduced the spaces of alternative activism within development and other avenues of social, political, economic and cultural life. It has also altered the perception held about local activists from being seen as grassroots groups delivering the voices of the poor to experienced local development 'experts' (Jenkins, 2009a:881).

2.4.2 'Grassroots Professionalisation'

Tensions that surround the creation and prioritisation of 'experts' within community-based activist networks in place of 'everyday' voices are of particular relevance to a consideration of the effects of professionalisation at all levels. While seemingly at odds with the traditional development emphasis upon western knowledge and consultation, grassroots formations of 'expertise' are now commonplace. The latest sphere within which this has been documented is that of voluntary[5] and informal development activism.

Studies of voluntary female grassroots health workers in the Peru (Jenkins, 2008:147; Jenkins 2009a; Jenkins 2009b) and feminist activist groups in India (Roy, 2011) indicate that activist professionalism at this scale is constructed through mobilising discourses of vocation and personal sacrifice that stem from an internal sustained and self-driven involvement in community activism. Such studies respond to earlier calls for an expansion or rethinking of the use of 'professional' as a category (Markowitz & Tice, 2002:952) through an insightful exploration of the knowledge economy less formal local activism. In this very community-based context, distinct local-level constructions of knowledge and expertise are profoundly affected by the interplay between 'hands on' experience and the training and accreditation process that sits at the heart of professionalisation and are perpetuated by the knowledge economy.

Consequently, one of the most valued elements of professionalisation for community-level voluntary activists is the opportunity for accredited learning and education (Jenkins, 2008; Mawdsley et al. 2002). The sense of legitimacy and worth felt upon the completion of training programmes, whilst being basic to many activists' roles, is highly valued as a symbol of social, economic and occupational progress (Jenkins, 2008). Equally, however, individuals in this position often downplay the

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[5] As Jenkins (2009b: 23) notes elsewhere, 'Anheier and Salamon (1999: 51-52) characterize voluntary work as having three different dimensions—time (full time vs. part time), economic remuneration (paid vs. unpaid), and a social dimension (formal vs. informal work environment). They conclude that 'the combination 'unpaid, formal and part-time,' which comes closest to a conventional understanding of volunteering, captures only one particular aspect that may be typical for industrial countries only. In contrast, the combination, 'informal, partly paid and part-time activities' might well be characteristics for many developing countries''.

importance of 'formal' qualifications such as university degrees and underline the importance of practical experience and its resulting knowledge as the mechanism though which their position and abilities were established (Jenkins, 2008:149; Jenkins, 2009:883).

At the core of this internal conflict is a balancing act in which community-based activists must situate themselves as both a part of the local recipient community (in order to validate their position as intermediary) and as trained experts (Jenkins, 2008:150). The situation stems from the attempt by the individual or group to maintain their place as a member of the local community whilst also accessing, managing and commanding a range of specialist knowledges. The ambiguous professional status and conflation of 'local' with 'expert' in this manner is underlined by Jenkins (2008:150):

'A particular tension was evident throughout... discussions., between perceiving themselves and wanting to be seen as part of the community – something with which being an expert was seen to be incompatible'.

The perceived-incompatibility of 'local' and 'expert' is used as currency within the knowledge economy as actors exploit the distinction that is seen to be between them (Nightingale, 2005:205). The result of this professional/non-professional distinction is that scientific or expert knowledges undermine and/or overpower the promotion of democracy within the production or implementation of development projects (Nightingale, 2005:205) and distance those exploiting such differences from their status as 'locals'. The standing and, to an extent, success of informal grassroots activists within their communities is reliant upon their being 'local'. This in turn is implicitly equated with being non-expert. Thus professionalisation, in which development actors come to feel that they have acquired the knowledge and training to qualify them as experts in their field, generates contradiction and tension (Jenkins, 2008: 153; Bondi, 2003). Nonetheless, this process can facilitate the transition of community-based actors to 'higher' levels of the development arena as '...new indigenous professional careers have been forged in political and development administration, as people are recruited and trained for careers in governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)...to assume advisory and leadership positions in indigenous organizations that are increasingly transnational in scope' (Laurie et al., 2003:464). Thus, grassroots professionalism and professionalisation is intertwined with and contingent upon specific representations of social roles and relations and inseparable from the antagonism between 'passion' and 'profession' (Roy, 2011: 593) that is found at many scales of development activism, but is perhaps most prominent here.

Whilst the academic output on activist professionalisation remains more diverse than is fully reviewed here, and whilst studies such as those highlighted above enable a further understanding of

the complexities of professionalisation and activism, what is remarkable is the extent to which the two distinct camps of enquiry highlighted in the preceding sections close down potential for wider understanding.

2.5 The longue durée of community-based, development activism

In each of the two bodies of literature described above, professionalisation – be that at the relatively recently exposed individual, voluntary-level, or at the more regularly scrutinised organisational-level – is depicted as a particular 'brand' of the phenomenon. Moreover, each instance is presented as being exclusive to the actor(s) experiencing it. In each case, the form of professionalisation in question is conceptualised as a separate, distinct process. This is unmistakable in current studies of Peruvian health promoters (Jenkins, 2008:13), for example, where the process occurring within local voluntary groups is framed as, 'a particularly grassroots professionalisation' that is 'unlike other instances' and 'stands in opposition to' other forms of professionalism. There are many other examples, and, combined, they decribe several, disparate and often incompatable processes being enacted across the Global South at multiple scales. However, as chapter one explains, when considering the individuals and groups that enact it and the overall effects in a certain locale, activism is best understood as an ongoing and interlinked process. Here, Amin's (2002) case for a 'non-scalar' interpretation of global processes is of use:

'...the growing routinisation of global network practices – manifest throught mobility and connectivity – signals a perforation of scalar and territorial forms of social organisation'.

(Amin, 2002:395)

As such, conventional spatial distinctions are destabilised (Rigg, 2007:20-21) and scale as a basis upon which to differentiate is rendered ever more problematical as the associations between different types, forms and levels of spatiality advance.

'...when we look at the local we are getting an insight into far more than 'just' the local and are being inevitably drawn, through the networks and circuits that link people and activities, into other scales. The same is true when we purposively look at higher scales; they inevitably incorporate the local'.

(Rigg, 2007:21)

Accordingly, to allow for a much richer conceptualisation of professionalisation in this context, it is necessary for each instance – as defined above – to be viewed as a distinct-yet-interlinked *episode* of

a wider process. That is to say, to truly access the richness of the evolution of local development, the diachronic must stand alongside the detailed. In order to do this, community based activism must be understood contextually (in terms of geography) and longitudinally (in terms of time). In doing so, the increasing number of micro-histories is counterbalanced and provided with a framework with which to examine organisational change in the non-governmental sector and realise the full meaning and implications of each distinct stage. This *longue durée*[6] of community-based, development activism, if you will, is the multifaceted site of professionalisation and is most usefully considered in three stages.

The first stage is that which is currently documented in grassroots development workers that occupy the tenuous position of being semi-formal, nominally paid and with varying hours (Anheiner & Salmon, 1999: 50-52; Jenkins, 2009b:23). Mirroring the 'voluntary'[7] status of this form of activism, stage one centres decidedly more on personal vocation and positionality than the use of external drivers but is not caused exclusively by the former and cannot therefore be considered 'from within'[8]. It is primarily observed in those in their first role in community development and those considered long-term volunteers and, as such, can be justifiably set up as the first known instance of the process.

As earlier sections describe, the reason for the process taking hold at this juncture is the status of the individuals in question and the distinctive attributes that they are perceived to possess (Jenkins, 2008). Namely, they are generally believed to have flexibility, commitment, cost effectiveness, proximity to intended beneficiaries, practical experience, accumulated expertise and some degree of acceptance by the local communities as both local and professional (Lewis & Kanji, 2009:93). This is not the only time within development studies that such traits are highlighted, however. These are also the qualities that are cited time and again as the catalyst of institutionalisation. That is to say, it is precisely these traits that single out such groups to be 'adopted' as project facilitation agencies.

As chapter one describes, institutionalisation (also known as 'NGOisation'), is traditionally considered to be the precursor of NGO professionalisation due to its creation and prioritisation of

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[6] *Longue durée* is broadly translated as 'long term' and denotes the longitudinal approach to the study of histiography that was popularised by the French Annales School and prioritises slowly evolving historical structures over individual events.
[7] As Jenkins (2009b: 23) notes elsewhere, 'Anheier and Salamon (1999: 51-52) characterize voluntary work as having three different dimensions – time (full time vs. part time), economic remuneration (paid vs. unpaid), and a social dimension (formal vs. informal work environment). They conclude that 'the combination 'unpaid, formal and part-time,' which comes closest to a conventional understanding of volunteering, captures only one particular aspect that may be typical for industrial countries only. In contrast, the combination, 'informal, partly paid and part-time activities' might well be characteristics for many developing countries''.
[8] It is important to stress that such examples are derived from research with groups that are no less part of the wider development hierarchy and engaged in multi-level relationships – not an organisational or relational vacuum – and, as such cannot be considered exempt from the effects of external professionalising influences entirely.

hierarchical working relationships, formalised working practices and bureaucracy, which culminate in the (limited) legitimisation (Kamat, 2002:23) of activist groups as partners of the state and international donors. It follows then, that this process serves as the bridge between the two previously identified instances of professionalisation and, as such, can be understood as an episode of this wider process in itself.

It should be noted that individual activists or activist groups will not necessarily experience every phase of this process. Indeed, activists/activism can begin the professionalisation process at any point. For example, a community-based NGO may attract the attention and support of a larger funding body after years in operation. The resulting contracts and accounting machanisms that are required within this relationship thrust the NGO in question into the relevant stage of the process. The sequencing, however, is fixed.

The sequencing of this process can be broadly (if somewhat simplistically) laid out as follows: local individuals are stimulated to become involved in activities (often outside of the private, domestic arena in which they usually operate) that promote, hinder or direct social, political, or environmental change. These activities are invariably 'voluntary' in nature, meaning that they are informal 'occupations' that may be part-time and low-paid if they have agreed hours or payment at all. Over time these activities become organised, scaled up and thus encourage support from professional 'outside' organisations. If they have not already done so, the newly legitimised group or individual is then encouraged or internally motivated to register as a non-governmental entity or work for one and thus become a legitimised and accredited member of civil society. From here groups increase and develop their complex web of relations with the view to funding and therefore fuelling their activities. Within this setting, the third stage of professionalisation begins.

2.6 Development activism and the third stage of professionalisation: forwarding a definition

Though it is suggested that definitions in this field of study are perhaps less important than they were once thought to be (Evetts, 2006; Timmons, 2010), the preceding reviews of the development activism, NGO and professionalisation literature highlight several central tenets of the third stage of the process that, when overlaid with Castree's (2000) exposition of professionalisation, provide a constructive basis upon which to define and, therefore, *delimit* this particular phase.

Castree's (2000) definition is originally drawn from (and applied to) the experience of left-wing, 'critical' academic geographers in the Global North and is employed here as a template. In many ways the evolution of leftist geographical scholarship is not unlike that of community-based

development activism in the South. Both groups evolved from movements that were 'at once firmly left of centre, unpretentious, action orientated, grass-roots focused, democratic, and antiestablishment, [and] emerged out of a set of specific economic, social, and political conditions' (Castree, 2000: 956). Likewise, within (and sometimes outside of) their own spheres of activity, both groups have expanded exponentially and their activities and interests diversified with few limits in the past three decades [9]. Although the usefulness of Castree's definition to this study does not rest on the links between these groups, the fact that they share common attributes and heritage strengthens its aplicability to this study.

Like the experience of leftist geographers, professionalising is understood here to imply that southern, community-based development activists are, or aspire to be, what Roger Kimball (1991) labels 'tenured radicals'. That is to say, activists within this phase are, need to be or wish to be fully paid-up, salaried members of global civil society. Like Castree (2000:961) (and unlike Kimball), this study does not invoke the term professional in any pejorative sense, and, despite largely negative readings of the process within the development literature, will not begin its examination with an inherently positive or inherently negative view of the professionalism within development activism, but as a state of being or objective with both opportunities and constraints. Accordingly, like Castree (2000:961), this characterisation simply seeks to highlight a process – one that is multi-faceted, very much context dependant and is adapted from Castree's analysis of leftist geographers and informed by the aforementioned literature. It will serve as this project's definitional starting point.

The third stage of activism professionalisation can be seen as the perpetual pursuit, attainment and/or upholding of tenure through contractual agreements with private funding bodies, within which inter-network socialisation – wherein NGO staff must learn the rules and mores of their new institutional framework - is acquired. This stage continues and cements the disciplinary socialisation of activist professionalisation, where, like the volunteers of the grassroots before them, NGO staff come to think of themselves as much a development worker in general as a social activist in particular. In The third stage entails a claim to expertise and a 'comcomitant monopolisation' of development practice. Here, the activist develops, then defends, a specific development competence (for example, watershed management) and in so doing, asserts the right to be uniquely qualified to advise on its application.

In forwarding a stipulative definition of professionalisation in the specific context of community-based development activism in the Global South, this chapter conveys the fundamental character of

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[9] For Castree (2000, 956) this growth is a four-fold process that entails quantitative growth, disciplinary insinuation, thematic diversification and political pluralisation.

this phase of the phenomenon and guides further discussion. To extend this understanding however it is necessary to theorise the process in action. The theoretic framework with which this will be realised is that of the metabolic rift.

2.5 The Metabolic Rift

Karl Marx and Frederick Engels were of the belief that humankind is an evolutionary product of natural processes. Equally, they argued, humans – as social beings – act back on nature in order to alter it to better fit their purposes (Parsons, 1977:9). Marx developed this dialectical, ecological stance in denunciation of Hegelian idealism (in which the sphere of nature is alienated from human self-consciousness) and in opposition to atomic materialism (wherein the natural world is conceptualised as consisting of discontinuous, particulate individuals) (Parsons, 1977:10). As natural beings he concluded, humans are both active and receptive.

The theory of metabolic rift can be seen to have evolved from this perspective. For Marx and Engels the hypothesis centred on 'the ecological moment of the antagonistic relation between town and country under capitalism', in which ever more globalised relations overtake traditional, localised relationships in the nutrient cycling of local ecosystems (Moore, 2000:125). The theory provides an analysis of the depletion of soil fertility within capitalist, industrial agriculture which is (and was) considered by many to be the foremost environmental crisis of Marx's day (Foster, 1999:373).

In recent, western scholarship, the metabolic rift was first introduced by John Bellamy Foster (1999) in his paper, 'Marx's Theory of Metabolic Rift: Classical Foundations for Environmental Sociology'. Foster (1999:378) highlights the influence of German Chemist, Justus von Liebig upon Marx's understanding of industrial farming. Liebig's work suggested a contradiction intrinsic to capitalist agriculture. For Liebig, the depletion of natural soil fertility is inevitable within industrialised farming processes. Marx's interest in this work – which coincided with the writing of *Capital* – culminated in the creation of a systematic critique of the exploitative disposition of the capitalist-natural environment relationship. Much of this critique appeared in *Capital's* first and third volumes under his evaluations of large-scale agriculture and capitalist ground rent respectively. It is worth citing here at length:

'Capitalist production collects the population together in great centres, and causes the urban population to achieve an ever growing preponderance. This has two results. On the one hand it concentrates the historical motive force of society; on the other hand, it disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth, i.e. it prevents the return to the soil of its constituent

elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; hence it hinders the operation of the

eternal natural condition for the lasting fertility of the soil. . . . But by destroying the circumstances

surrounding that metabolism . . . it compels its systematic restoration as a regulative law of social

production, and in a form adequate to the full development of the human race. . . . All progress in

capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil;

all progress in increasing the fertility of the soil for a given time is a progress toward ruining the more

long-lasting sources of that fertility. . . . Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques

and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the

original sources of all wealth-the soil and the worker'.

(Marx 1976: 637-38, in Foster, 1999:379)

And later...

'Large landed property reduces the agricultural population to an ever decreasing minimum and

confronts it with an ever growing industrial population crammed together in large towns; in this way

it produces conditions that provoke an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of the social

metabolism, a metabolism prescribed by the natural laws of life itself. The result of this is a

squandering of the vitality of the soil, which is carried by trade far beyond the bounds of a single

country. (Liebig.) . . . Large-scale industry and industrially pursued large-scale agriculture have the

same effect. If they are originally distinguished by the fact that the former lays waste and ruins the

labour-power and thus the natural power of man, whereas the latter does the same to the natural

power of the soil, they link up in the later course of development, since the industrial system applied

to agriculture also enervates the workers there, while industry and trade for their part provide

agriculture with the means of exhausting the soil'.

(Marx 1981: 949-50, in Foster, 1999:379)
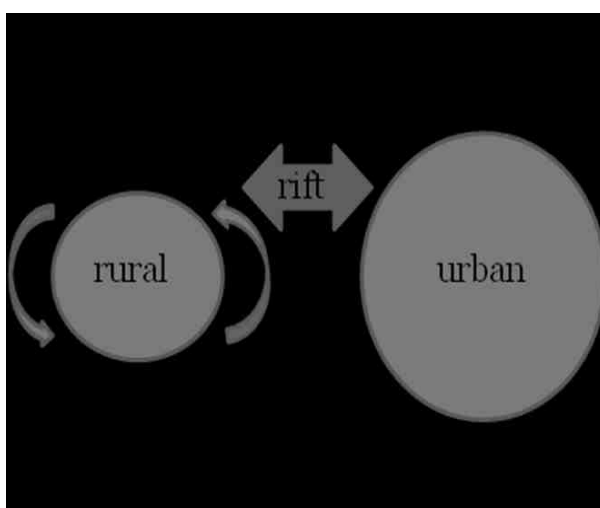
In sum, the theory describes a disturbance or 'rift' in the interaction between society and the earth as a result of the ongoing capitalist transformation of agriculture. This transformation sees agriculture grow from a

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Figure 2.3, The Metabolic Rift. Source: Author.

metabolic activity linking humankind and nature, to a commodity-based driver of capitalist expansion (Wittman, 2009:808) (See figure 4.1). That is to say, within pre-industrialised societies, the constituent elements of the soils that are extracted and used for, amongst other things, food, clothing and building materials are largely reincorporated into the soils from which they came. With the growth of agriculture, industry, labour markets and the commodification of land (as a result of a shift to capitalist modes of production and the simultaneous 'town-country 'social' division of labour'), human beings are progressively alienated from these processes as rural producers become ever more distanced from urban consumers (Wittman, 2009:806; Schnieder & McMichael, 2010:464). In the capitalist system, nutrients continue to be produced in rural areas but are extracted to emergent urban centres where they are consumed and deposited as waste. The result is that the cyclical nature of traditional nutrient recycling is irreparably disrupted as urban populations consume agricultural produce without generating it. For Marx, the consequence of this system was antagonistic core-periphery relations (Moore, 2000:125; Wittman, 2009:806), social and environmental exploitation and, ultimately, ecological crisis (Foster, 2002:159).

There are, however, two very different ways of thinking about the metabolic rift: one is relationally/dialectically, through the town-country divide (Moore, 2000; Moore, 2011a; Moore, 2011b)[10]; the other (York, 2007; Clark & York, 2008; Clark & Foster, 2008) focuses upon a form of Cartesian binary, positing a "rift" between "nature" (without humans) and "society" (without nature) 'within which nature and society exist in a mechanical rather than mutually constituting relation' (Moore, 2011a:1; Moore, 2011b). Likewise, there is disagreement as to the periodisation of this process between those who believe the metabolic rift should be situated in the context of nineteenth-century industrialisation (Foster, 1999), and those who argue it is correctly viewed in terms of the sixteenth-century transition to capitalism (Moore, 2000). In the case of the latter, the process is more appropriately viewed as a string of rifts specific to each stage of capitalist advancement (Moore 2000, 128), as opposed to Foster's original historically-specific reconstruction (Schneider & McMichael, 2010:462). Nonetheless, all, to an extent, agree upon the general material and relational concept of the rift as both a reconfiguration of humanity's relation with the rest of nature[11] under capitalism and overall nutrient cycle disruption. Moreover, both conceptions offer

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[10] It should be noted that Moore's position on the metabolic rift is one inclusive of human nature. Hence, it incorporates extra-human "nutrients" and also human bodies (as in the African slave trade, or the forced labour drafts of 17th century Peru). As such, this position can be viewed as the dialectical opposite of a rupture in human-nature relations. That is to say, the metabolic relations are reconfigured through – and as – commodification, such that human life is more deeply integrated into modernity "as world-ecology," albeit integrated in an alienated form. (See: Moore, 2011a and Moore, 2011c).

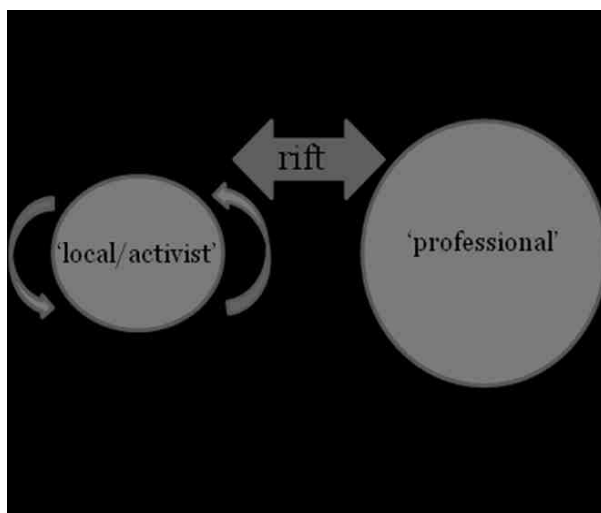[11] As humans are, in many ways, constituent parts of the natural world and, therefore, not easily extracted from it, the notion proposed by some commentators of a 'human-nature' rupture can be seen as problematic and somewhat idealist (Moore, 2011b). Nonetheless, the reconfiguration of the rift characterised in terms of "rupture," or "degradation," etc., is a reasonable enterprise, but requires a supporting

illustrative insights into capitalism's ecological dimensions (Clark & Foster, 2008) and a constructive concept to explain the links between contemporary crises in nature and the politics of increasingly long-distance global agricultural trade (Schneider & McMichael, 2010:465). Perhaps unpredictably however, the theoretical architecture of this concept presents an equally heuristic apparatus with which to understand the effects of professionalisation upon rural, community-based NGOs experiencing the third stage of activist professionalisation.

2.6 The Professional Rift

A comparable process and 'rift' are present in the course of community-based activist professionalisation. A rift – originating in stage one's 'particularly grassroots professionalisation' and culminating in stage three – exists in the form of a professional-local divide in those rural locations served by a community-based NGO. Here, professionalisation constitutes the extraction of locally-based rural activists into the professional sphere in which their abilities and understandings are principally used to satiate the requirements of external (often international) donors. Thus, where educated or politically active members of the local population traditionally 'bettered' themselves in service of their community, professionalisation generates a 'rift' in which

Figure 2.4, A 'metabolic' rift in community-based development activism. Source: Author.

local relations give way to increasingly globalised relationships, subsequently perpetuating and reinforcing inter-organisational hierarchies and increasingly technicalised activities (Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006:112). Consequently the dominance of the 'developed' economic or industrial centres is secured, while the potential of local development alternatives is depleted.

Due to their inherent qualities, local activist groups become attractive partners due to their closeness to the 'end users' of their services. However, it is precisely this attribute that is first to be

theory. As yet, this is largely absent from the literature (Moore, 2011b). Consequently a reconfiguration of relations may be more appropriate.

lost within the *longue durée* of development activism and the accompanying process of professionalisation (Seckinelgin, 2006; Lewis & Knaji, 2009:93-94). As the Sangtin Writers[12] attest:

'The world of NGOs is becoming a confusing vicious circle for organizational workers like us. On one hand, we find ourselves ever more articulate and refined while participating in discussions about equity and equality. On the other hand, we cannot turn away from the reality that we, and other NGO workers like us, are becoming more and more distant from our rural worlds with respect to our lifestyles and aspirations as we try to become more impressive in the NGO society'.

(Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006: 113)

Thus a cyclical institutionalised preponderance is initiated – and driven by activist professionalisation and community-based activists that are increasingly defined by their 'local' and 'expert' knowledge – in which the potential of community based activists to contribute to more contextual, socially-just 'alternative' forms of development is gradually reduced and the widened the 'gulf' (Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006:113) or rift between them and the intended beneficiaries of their actions is widened. When linked with the aforesaid relationships between professionalisation and neoliberal ideologies, the question shifts from one of NGOs' ability to provide development alternatives, to whether they, in the current system, are able to pursue development futures at all. In the words that inspired Marx, 'A field from which something is permanently taken away cannot possibly increase or even continue equal in its productive power' (Liebig, 1859: 175). All three stages of the professionalisation process are bound up in personal and collective (altruistic?) ambition, skills acquisition and external and internal validation and yet productive power is siphoned away with every advance. There exists a 'deep contradiction and double standard existing in the foundation of NGO structures' (Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006:113) but one that, arguably, a contemporary NGO could not continue without.

2.7 Conclusions

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[12] Text that is cited as 'Sangtin Writers & Nagar' is taken from a 2006 book titled *Playing With Fire*. The book – an updated, English edition of the 2004 Hindi publication *Sagntin Yatra* – is written by a collective of eight female NGO workers from Sitapur District in the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh and US-based academic Richa Nagar. It is a work of feminist and postcolonial praxis as it is written in the collective voice of women employed by a large non-governmental organisation in India and is based on diaries, interviews, and conversations among them. Through anecdotal exploration of activism, sexism, casteism, and communalism, the Sangtin Writers seek to reveal larger themes and questions of development, empowerment and women's lives in the Global South.

Professionalisation is a multi-faceted and context-specific process with various manifestations at a range of scales. It materialises in a number of specific (organisational- or individual-level) shifts and processes that are determined by the political, social, economic and cultural organisational situation of the organisation or individual in question. Criticism of the effects of professionalisation at this level typically stems from the view that, in going through the process, the ability of NGOs to complete their (sometimes prescribed) role of contributing to or providing 'socially just, context-specific forms of development' (Bebbington et al., 2008) is disrupted or neutralised. Likewise, the bureaucratisation of the sector and increasingly hierarchical staffing structures of even the smallest NGO create disparity amongst NGO staff between those that have the financial and cultural capital to challenge organisational or donor decisions and those occupying the 'lower' strata (often those that are paid directly from specific project funds), that do not. Therefore, despite providing access to much-needed funds, professionalisation is a principal challenge to development 'alternatives' (Bebbington et al., 2008). Relations of dependence that are inherent within the bureaucratisation process of professionalisation transform 'a *movement by NGOs* for political and social change into *organisations of NGOs* that provide employment to a growing number of... graduates' (Feldman, 2003:17, original emphasis).

When taken together, the works of Castree alongside Marx, Engels and, later, John Bellamy Foster, offer a useful analytical construct and, therefore, multiple constructive insights into both the processes and effects of NGO professionalisation at this scale. If the analytical focus of activism-professionalism research is shifted towards an understanding of professionalisation as a multi-stage process that affects activism through activists, then different kinds of explanatory theory become available. As a result, professionalisation can be considered in greater relative detail as an influential (if somewhat ambivalent) mechanism of social change and control at multiple levels. This includes the manifold organisational relations, contexts and conditions that NGO studies require and allows professionalisation to be understood as more than 'a final, fixed and irreversible moment' (Murdock, 2003: 525). The process by which these considerations were examined and documented in situ, however comes with its own set of dilemmas and considerations.

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CHAPTER THREE

Methodology: A North-facing Narrative

3.1 Introduction

I've just come back from dinner with Mohan and Nala. We ate dosas at a desolate little roadside restaurant just outside of Batlagundu. I jokingly likened it to a Little Chef I used to visit with my grandparents in Bedford and asked if they were still serving the Olympic Breakfast – they didn't get it. What struck me today was that during that meal, as the patron-starved waiters circled our table, we talked about the projects; over lunch I went over a funding bid with Ramesh; I conducted interviews all morning, and now I'm back in the training centre with some staff that are working late. We're chatting about the watershed reports. My bed is about six feet from their desks. What <u>doesn't</u> count as research out here?

Monday 27th Sept. 2010

Figure 3.1 Fieldnotes: 27/11/10

At its core this chapter is about strategy, the epistemological foundation upon which it is based, and the way in which that groundwork translates into a functioning process. It introduces the specific research methods employed in this study and the methodology that underpins them whilst exploring the theoretical and practical considerations of performing academic research in the Global South. In addressing the multiple negotiations that took place prior to, during and after the overseas 'fieldwork' and situating these deliberations within a wider discussion of research, development studies and postcolonial theory, this chapter maps the sometimes confusing, regularly absorbing, occasionally depressing but always rewarding process that was experienced.

The chapter begins by considering positionality, reflexivity and identity within development research with particular attention to academic research and the dual issues of (re)presentation and responsibility. Then the chapter considers the effect of the study's theoretical basis – postcolonial theory – upon a methodological approach, and examines the extent to which it is possible to

opperationalise a postcolonial method in North-South development research. A discussion of the knowledge gathering process follows in which the 'mechanics' of the research are identified and some personal reflections on the process are offered. This includes a discussion on the shortfalls of participatory techniques in this context and the potential of ethnographic research in enabling and accessing postcolonial knowledges. In drawing to a close, the chapter puts forward a further theoretical contribution in the form of a call for a return to contextualised, case-based research in the study of grassroots development activism.

3.2 Power, privilege, location and authorship – or, discomfort, a crisis of legitimacy and the disabling angst of development research

Research aligned with development remains rooted in numerous overlapping philosophical approaches and their allied epistemologies. This reflects the many 'political, economic, social, cultural, ethical and even moral' objectives that shelter under the umbrella of 'development' (Desai & Potter, 2006:6). As such, the boundaries and borders of 'development research' are fluid, blurred and at times contradictory (Smith, 2007a; Humble & Smith, 2007a). There are, however, unifying principles and, arguably, one overriding theme: today, research on, in and for (Smith, 2007b:1) development is almost exclusively considered to be that which takes place 'out there, beyond Europe's borders' in the low-income countries of 'the South' (Jones, 2000:237; Humble & Smith, 2007).

The origins of this prescriptive belief and the ideology that underpins much development praxis are perhaps most accurately located in 17th Century colonialism wherein the periphery was brought into an expanding network of largely-exploitative exchanges centred around a western core (Power, 2003:28). Research was a central tool in planning and policy development for European colonial administrators (Humble & Smith, 2007:21) and, as development theory and practice ran in parallel with decolonisation (Sylvester, 2011:187), so 'the colonies' became 'the Tropics', followed by the 'developing', Third' and 'post-colonial' worlds (McEwan, 2009:131). Contemporary development research is then marked by such origins (Humble, 2011:1) which in turn shape the ways in which it is devised and performed.

However, as the everyday currency of academia, research has become so fundamental to scholarly life that it has attained 'the invisibility of the obvious' and often 'resists conscious scrutiny' (Appadurai, 2001:10, in Kenway & Fahey, 2009:7). In this sense, the historical assumptions and

generalisations about the peoples and cultures development research seeks to examine and explore have become further secreted as the relationship between the researcher and the 'subjects' of that work are ever more infused with the imperial representations that preceded it (Doty, 1996:161 in McEwan, 2009:131).

Yet within academia, development studies holds a comparatively-extensive record of foregrounding ethics and problematising relations within research (McEwan, 2009: 263. See for example, Sidaway, 1992; Potter, 1993; Porter, 1995; Mohan, 1999; Dreze, 2002; Corbridge & Mawdsley, 2003; Hickey & Mohan, 2004 and Donnelly, 2007). Such work has had tangible effects. Indeed, following half a century of development research and practise, 'not only have notions of what constitutes appropriate and 'good' development research changed radically, but also the significance of ethical research has also moved from what was formerly, in effect, a background assumption, to an overt planning strand in the very forefront of research projects and practices' (Brydon, 2006:26). From individual academic departments[1] to national and international guidelines[2], formal codes of ethics now articulate and regulate the responsibility of the researcher towards the 'subjects' of their research. They have not, however, erased the innumerable personal, ethical and political dilemmas that research in, on or for development presents.

How can I identify with these people?! I've spent the morning soberly nodding my head at respondents like some tawdry talk-show host as they tell me about the lack of drinking water in their village, their minute salaries or the debts in their families that caused them to turn to black-market money lenders. And I'm supposed to understand and ~~present~~ (re)present them as the complex individuals and diverse groups that they are. I'm white, male, university-educated and comparatively rich. Sometimes I'd be hard-pressed to offer a more contrasting figure.

Friday 10th July. 2009

Figure 3.2 Fieldnotes, 10/07/09

As the above extract (from a field diary that was kept intermittently during the overseas periods of the project) bears out, concerns over development research frequently stem from the simple issue of a relatively advantaged individual from the Minority World travelling to a 'less developed' country in order to conduct research 'on' people living in poverty (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003:2).

A major catalyst of the disquiet surrounding this issue is articulated in the growing body of work that questions the 'jetting-in and jetting-out' mode of development research (XXXX). This literature highlights the prevailing model of academic enquiry in contemporary development studies in which Northern researchers spend small amounts of time at the actual site of the phenomenon being studied before returning home to analyse, write-up, distribute and, ultimately, benefit from the information gained.

For many this is deeply problematical. Some equate the practice to little more than 'academic tourism' (Chambers, 1983; Clifford, 1997:67; Mowforth & Munt, 1998: 101; Parnwell, 2006:74-75) while others, highlighting the unidirectional and 'exploitative' character of this system, have gone as far as to christen it 'rape research' (Lather, 1988:570, in Scheyvens & Storey, 2003:3). Consequently, a number of observers warn that some level of exploitation and betrayal is perhaps inevitable in social research that is carried out by westerners in the Global South (England, 1994:85). As a result, many admit to or exhibit a level of discomfort during this phase of a project (Madge, 1993: 294; Katz, 1994:70; Wolf, 1996:32) – these anxieties are exacerbated in situations where the research site is a former colony of the investigator's home country, as is the case here.

Alongside almost twelve months of extensive secondary analysis of project records, periodic literature evaluation, bibliographic searches as well as multiple follow-up interviews via email and *Skype* with key and otherwise unavailable informants, the 'knowledge-gathering process'[3] (Gobo, 2008:4) for this thesis consists of approximately five months of ethnographic work across three research trips to Tamil Nadu[4] between July 2009 and September 2010. In sum, this is very much a site-based project and was designed as such in order to explore the site-specific issues that are central to the thesis. However, in designing a project in this way, a number of problems emerge.

While it is possible that the doubts cited in Figure 3.2 were exacerbated by the location and pressures of delivering a high calibre research project, they do reveal a level of unease. This is a growing trend in development research (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003:3; Baaz, 2005:85), and one which

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[3] In this case, the relationship between the investigator and the research 'subjects' extends far beyond the period of investigation and involves a sustained working and personal relationship dating back to 2007. This is discussed in further detail in subsequent sub-sections.
[4] The specific location is detailed in chapter four.

challenges the relatively-undemanding notion of field-based development research as little more than a combination of techniques that are applied to a field site by foregrounding the effects of a researcher's multiple positionalities (such as nationality, sexuality , gender and, in the case of this project, social and economic status, skin colour and age) upon the research relationship, the information that is collected and its source (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003:3).

'This has created somewhat of a crisis of legitimacy affecting both male and female researchers from Western countries who have been forced to reconsider their role in the research process in Third World contexts in recent years'.

Scheyvens & Storey, 2003:3

A review of the development research literature illustrates that these concerns coalesce around two key points: the unequal power relations between the northern researcher and the southern respondent (Eade & Rowlands, 2003; Tembo, 2003; Baaz, 2005; Brydon, 2006), and the ability of the former to accurately and ethically access and convey the voices of the later (Cooke & Kothari, 2001; Mizen & Ofosu-Kusi, 2007, Simpson, 2007).

Research is largely unable to deliver anything more than partial truths (Clifford, 1986, in Brydon, 2006:25), and development research – with its colonial histories, representational discourses and inborn power gradients (McEwan, 2009:121) – is, perhaps, well situated to take delivery of criticism on this front. As such, the practice of 'fieldwork' has faced heavy scrutiny.

A large proportion of these challenges have been prompted by the rise of post-development critiques alongside the gradual infusion of postcolonial theory into the study of development. As postcolonial approaches and their implications for development are covered in depth in chapter one, the breadth of these topics will not be revisited here. However, there are specific convergences – despite not providing a singular reactionary position (Power, 2003:83; Simon, 2006:11) – with the more 'progressive' or 'radical' (McEwan, 2009:262) trends that inspire the post-development school around issues such as knowledge and representation and, therefore, research that merit further discussion.

Development research is underpinned by discourse which in turn relies upon the power to (re)present other places through describing, claiming, constructing knowledge and publishing (McEwan, 2009:131). Through this relationship, differentiation between rich and poor is perpetually

reinscribed and a sense of difference is translated into a notion of authority, then superiority and, ultimately, a justification for intervention (McEwan, 2009:131).

'Interactions with and representations of people in the South are inevitably loaded. They are determined by a researcher's favourable historical and geographical position, their material and cultural advantages that are intertwined with processes driving global economic inequalities. These interactions and representations are also determined by the fact that most researchers are relatively privileged...'

McEwan, 2012:23

Power is central to this system; the elements in play during colonial times remain active in contemporary development practice and, many argue, rely upon the same assumptions and generalisations (Power, 2003:84; McEwan, 2009:131). As such, in post-development and postcolonial critiques, 'subjectivity' – that is, the ways in which humans as agents perceive and understand their place in the world – is centralised and positioned as being produced by power and discourse (Power, 2003:84). In this sense, the traditional reliance of development discourse upon notions of Southern homogeneity is challenged in favour of an outlook that prioritises individual subjectivity and contexts while positioning the countless knowledges that make up development's various discourses as both situated and partial (Yapa, 1996:2002, in Power, 2003:85). However, the situated and partial knowledges of the North play a disproportionately-large role in representing those of the South.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work (1988) highlights two discontinuous but often conflated meanings of 'representation' that development writing rests upon: ''speaking for', in the sense of political representation; and 'speaking about' or 're-presenting', in the sense of making a portrait' (Kapoor, 2004:628). Spivak (in Kapoor, 2004:631. See also, McEwan, 2012) argues that when the researcher disavows their complicity in the power inequalities at the centre of these actions – or denies their existence altogether – they render themselves liable to speak for the 'subjects' of that work. As a result, inequality is justified and the superior position of the investigator is reinscribed.

Like the distinctions that were constructed around colonial expertise[5], the cultural practices of development fieldwork embody 'whiteness' in ways that recurrently disregard or overlook racism (McEwan, 2012:24. See also, Abbott, 2006; Raghuram & Madge, 2006). In this situation, the 'other'

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[5] See chapter two.

become subject to a 'white gaze' in which they are situated within a landscape that is created by the observer and subsequently represented as different (Kabayashi & Peake, 2000: 394) and, in the case of development studies, categorised as poor or 'developing'.

In this role, the subject of development research becomes a colonised subject who is 'artificially produced as different from the coloniser and whose fate is often linked not to the histories of the production of inequalities but to its own lack of capacity. The intellectual authority of the colonial project therefore sits heavily on the shoulders of the northern development professional working in the South'. (Raghuram & Madge, 2006: 272).

In all, the danger remains that, despite attempts to improve the circumstances of the 'subjects' and (often) intended beneficiaries of a project, the discourse that runs throughout and conveys development research can scarcely avoid reinforcing hierarchical, imperialist and racist conceptions whilst further silencing the voice of the subaltern (Alcoff, 1991:26 in McEwan, 2012:23). This risk has perceptible results:

'Although issues of power, privilege, location and authorship pervade all research practices, "the crisis of representation"—that is, the doubts surrounding the "possibility of truthful portrayals of others" and "the capacity of the subaltern to be heard" (Ortner 1995, 190)—has been particularly paralyzing for those engaged in fieldwork.'

Nagar & Geiger, 2007:267

This 'disabling angst' (Simon, 2006:15) has amplified the question of power, privilege, location and authorship to a point where positionality and reflexivity are argued to have reached an impasse and complete disengagement becomes a preferable solution (Nagar & Geiger, 2007:268; McEwan, 2009:262). Simply put, a substantial number of scholars would rather abandon 'fieldwork' than risk research 'that might place them in territory to which they have no social claim, or that might put in question their credentials for social representation' (Kobayashi, 1994:74, cited in Scheyvens & Storey, 2003:4).

However, the blanket abandonment of research on, in and for development does not erase the multiple, interrelated difficulties that it presents (McEwan, 2009:262) if for no other reason than it removes the opportunity of the researcher to experience and observe the everyday lives, material realities and lived experience of others (even if only in a transitory and somewhat superficial way). In

this light, the need to 'decolonise' (Sidaway, 1993; Radcliffe, 2005; Power et al., 2006) and 'provincialise' (Chakrabarty, 2000; Robinson, 2003) development research becomes clear.

3.3 Towards a postcolonial method

At a methodological level, this project is concerned with the realisation of a theoretical *and* practical projection of postcolonial thought. As chapter one makes clear, a defining aim of postcolonial theory is to reveal the mutual constitution of the colonised and the coloniser within the colonial moment (Power et al., 2006:232). Accordingly, a postcolonial approach to the study of development requires that the processes by which particular concepts assume pre-eminence are re-examined and that the 'blind spots' within development knowledges are interrogated (McEwan, 2009:187). However, the translation of these principles into a practicable research method is not without problems:

'...developing this postcolonial method involves complex and potentially contested processes that require recognition of the specificities of historical and spatial production of inequalities in particular places, thoroughgoing dialogue with those who inhabit these places and willingness to challenge existing hierarchies. A commitment to take up issues raised by those who are researched, a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue that takes into account the conceptual landscape of those with whom we engage, as well as a desire to participate in emancipator politics...'

Raghuram & Madge (2006:270)

It is perhaps for these reasons that postcolonial epistemologies have avoided widespread adoption within development studies (Sylvester, 1999:703). Or, rather, it may be that postcolonial epistemologies reside in quarters that development studies and the increasingly dislocated realities of the academy (Dreze, 2002) don't usually enter (Sylvester, 1999:704).

Following Raghuram & Madge (2006), a postcolonial method can be argued to be one in which the northern researcher that carries out the research is geographically, linguistically and culturally decentred (McEwan, 2012:24). In their attempt to identify what such a postcolonial method might look like, the issues that should considered while deploying it, the potential problems of the process and how these might be overcome, this central tenet is broken down into a number of core issues that stem from a postcolonial approach to development studies. These issues are covered in chapter one but can be summarised as the need to recognise and understand the ways in which the knowledge of those who were colonized are a central part in constructing imperial knowledges and

how this knowledge has become localized, provincialized and sometimes erased (McEwan 2002, in Maghuram & Madge, 2006: 271-272); that these processes of knowledge construction are central to the way in which wider geopolitical and economic power is secured by some groups for their own benefit; that a diversity of perspectives and priorities are expunged both within the colonial project and the postcolonial present; that recognizing the voice of the subaltern is thus a crucial methodological priority for postcolonial writers who seek to decentre the north as the privileged position from which people speak and finally, that the postcolonial present is constituted through the simultaneous presence of a range of subject positions, differentially located along different axes of power across different locations.

In effect, Raghuram & Madge (2006: 274) do not call for a radical or particularly new type of method[6] for development studies, but one that is *expanded* to incorporate the scrutiny and problematisation of the questions one asks and the ways in which they are theorised. In doing so, they highlight the realities of academic research and the geopolitical circumstances of northern academia as central considerations of a postcolonial method. This, it is argued, goes some way towards taking account of the 'multiple realities that position academics... in the 'fields' that they go to and the 'others' they come across...' as well as the validation and exclusion of certain knowledges.

At the outset, it is necessary for a postcolonial method to be based upon a consideration of why the research is being carried out (in the South or at all) as well as who will gain from it. In order to forefront these issues, it is necessary for the researcher to be aware of the power relations at play and both the 'inequalities and injustices that enable and allow their research to occur' (Raghuram & Madge, 2006:275). From here an inventory of considerations emerges that, when taken into account, provide the potential to generate and unlock new, mutually-informing and mutually-beneficial discourses. Drawn from Raghuram & Madge (2006), these considerations are that theorisation is a constituent part of method; that research questions are not produced in a geo-political vacuum; that, likewise, the ways in which findings are analysed and subsequently (re)presented is not apolitical and finally that researchers have multiple investments (personal, institutional and geopolitical) that have tangible effects upon their work.

In many ways, a simple commitment to mutual dialogue and collaborative research brings development and, in particular, development fieldwork closest to meeting the ethical concerns of

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[6] The authors readily acknowledge that numerous 'exemplary' examples of development research have been published in recent years.

postcolonial theory (McEwan, 2009:265) and evading the development impasse (Briggs & Sharp, 2004). As such, a popular response to development's crisis of legitimacy and the increasing number of calls for postcolonial practices is the adoption of a relativist perspective that privileges the perceptions, understandings and knowledges of subaltern or otherwise marginalised individuals from the Majority World (Scheyvens & Storey, 2003:4).

3.4 Postcolonial participation and the mechanics of development research

Participatory research is that which is most frequently associated with postcolonial epistemology due to its associations with co-produced knowledge, and recognition of cultural hybritidy and power disparities (Mohan, 2001; McEwan, 2009:281). And, more generally, the growth of participatory techniques has grown alongside the importance assigned to 'local' involvement in development research and practice (Mohan, 2008:46-47). As such, it is now increasingly difficult to disconnect the notion of 'participation' from the popular theory and practice of 'development'.

The communion of these spheres was, of course, borne out of opposition. The publication of Robert Chambers' *Rural Development: Putting People First* (1983) and Michael Cernea's *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development* (1985) are frequently cited as momentous in introducing participation to mainstream academic and practitioner development circles. Likewise, a similar approach was developed in India by Rajesh Tandon (Kindon et al., 2007b:10 See, Brown & Tandon, 1983). Although they do not present an entirely cohesive message, these texts all draw upon Paolo Freire's (1970) endorsement of community involvement in research and offer an almost Gandhian[7] 'epistemology of practice grounded in people's struggles and local knowledges' (Kindon et al., 2007b:10). Through this, the texts address the technocratic and ethnocentric presumptions which often characterise externally-applied rural development programmes. Upon their release they found welcoming audiences in academia where a growing disenchantment with the wider development project had stimulated a renewed dialogue on human agency (McGee, 2002:92-95). Likewise, as critics began questioning the very legitimacy of the global institutions at the helm of development's latest phase, representatives of the organizations conceded that the top-down model was too narrow and 'banker driven', requiring development itself to be recast as responsive, empowering and, above all, inclusionary (Craig & Porter, 2006:4).

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[7] Gandhi's methods of passive non-cooperation were argued to enable what he called 'soul power' wherein local knowledge was drawn upon to voice concerns and resist colonial rule (Kindon et al., 2007b10).

Whilst these can be seen as the unifying first ripples in the wave that was the participatory development movement, participation in a development context still can't be said to enjoy an agreed definition or application. Some view it as solely functional, citing its efficiency and thoroughness in producing results in research and planning (Cornwall, 2002; XXXX). Others adhere to its transformative potential in enabling truly equitable social change (Hickey & Mohan, 2005; XXXX). Nonetheless, every conception relies upon an underlying sensitivity to power and inequality (Mohan, 2008:46) and as such it has been adopted by many as a response to the challenge of realising a postcolonial method in a post-development era. For Cernea, Tandon and countless others since, Freire's notion of *conscientisation,* in which educators and learners (or, in this case, researchers and in-country respondents) are brought into a mutual and equal dialogue, allows those usually subjugated by traditional power structures to observe the world and their position within it through a critical lens. Participatory research for development 'constitutes a challenge to the culture of silence' because only through acknowledging and understanding a state of dependency can one overcome it (Närman, 2006:99).

For early proponents of participation, the ways in which knowledge is traditionally created and harvested and the accompanying assumptions that habitually underpin it (often based on a dangerous blend of misunderstanding and preconception, and informed by 'stereotypical views of subaltern communities' circumstances and capabilities') require a substantial overhaul if subaltern agency is ever to be realised and dependency be repealed (Parnwell, 2006, 74-75). By tapping 'a wealth of knowledge, and a validity of insight, which the outsider lacks' (Chambers, 2008:71) many consider the learning process at the centre of participatory interactions as a much-needed challenge to the, externally-defined western-centric valuation of knowledge. Likewise, 'indigenous' societies are often seen to have amassed a broad and site-specific understanding of natural resource management stemming from generations of practical experience and, as is often argued, offer a positive counterbalance to the often-abstract prototypal knowledge base of outside 'experts' (Mahiri, 1998:528). The persistence of this line of thought ensures that applications of participatory principles in the Majority World remain prominent within environmentally-centred development initiatives and secure their place as a mainstays of rural developmental enquiry.

Following a period of obscurity, participatory research took the occasion to 'come in from the cold' (Hall, 2005) provided by a changing intellectual climate and has since multiplied into a plethora of approaches designed to harness the knowledge of subaltern communities and readdress the hierarchical relationships customarily found in traditional forms of 'extractive' research (Kindon et

al., 2007a:1). Action research was an early successor. Designed to be 'developed and tested by practical interventions and action', it lacked the full inclusion (and therefore empowerment) of participants within the research process itself (Kindon et al., 2007b:9-11). Focussing more on 'local knowledges' and utilising diagramming, dialogue, mapping, ranking and collective action to allow those involved to communicate their knowledge using their own cultural terms and signifiers, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) proved popular alternatives to large-scale development surveys (Kindon et al., 2007b). Once adopted by minority world institutions and combined with features of action research, these approaches became mainstays of the social sciences (Kindon et al., 2007b).

Change has also been dramatic within global development institutions. The World Bank for instance has altered its focus from a stress upon the alterations needed in its internal systems to better allow stakeholder involvement, to allowing those traditionally seen as 'beneficiaries' to take part in the planning and implementation of projects affecting their own lives (McGee, 2002:97). This included offering the first distinction between 'low-intensity participation' (consultation etc.) and 'higher-intensity', 'empowering' participation (management and control over projects); the division of 'primary' and 'secondary' stakeholders (direct beneficiaries and more marginal stakeholders or supporters respectively), and perhaps the first notion of a power-relations perspective on development itself at this scale outside of academia (McGee, 2002:97; see also: Bhatnagar & Williams, 1992; World Bank, 1994 and World Bank, 1995).

The participatory turn in development thinking, or 'New Orthodoxy', involved the mainstream acceptance of a series of ideals that originally represented a radical call to arms (Mohan, 2008:46). Today, however, these methods are equally employed to serve the interests international policy-makers (World Bank, 1995). Undoubtedly one of the major drivers in participation's acceptance is a simple matter of efficiency. Present-day focuses upon 'greater productivity at lower cost' are repeatedly cited as greasing the wheels of its induction into the wider development arena (Mosse, 2001: 17). Likewise, some argue that participation's rapid espousal signified its compatibility with the neoliberal agenda and consequent depoliticisation (Craig & Porter, 2006: 4; Williams, 2004:92; Rahnema, 1997:167). It is also instructive to highlight an emerging mass of southern-based NGOs during these years that were keen to highlight their proximity to subaltern communities as a means of emphasising their unique organizational attributes and therefore championed the use of participatory techniques (Edwards, 2008:39). All of this, combined with an instrumental tide of

Freirean theory in academia, contributed to a widespread take-up and warm reception within wider development circles.

The overseas element of the research was split into three separate trips. Each trip was divided by a period of around six months in the UK with the first trip to India – concluded by August 2009 – serving as a pilot study. The two subsequent trips were considered 'full' research visits with the data collection of each one directed by the preceding trip's findings.

This project was at first designed to centre upon a bespoke PRA with the staff of several NGOs and it was during the pilot study that participatory methods were trialled. However, this plan encountered early difficulties:

I don't exactly feel like I'm facilitating the stunningly emancipatory process that I envisioned in the proposal. If nothing else, it's really annoying. I think they're just saying what they think I want them to say – or what they want Mohan to hear them saying. Either way it's all very 'safe' and suspiciously PC.

Fieldnotes, Friday 29th July, 2009.

'Many have remarked that the word 'participation'...generates a warm feeling, a laudable ideal with which few would disagree' (McGee, 2002:104)

3.5 Ethnographies and postcolonial theory

3.6 Acronym soup: a call for case-based research

I'm not short of options. Between those Syed has suggested or introduced me to and the organisations I already have relationships with, I have a potential pool of willing NGOs reaching well into double figures. The problem is they're all so bloody different! Even now that I've got the list down to four. Even though the majority operate in roughly the same place and all, to some extent, share a common focus, They may as well be from different planets. I'm going to have to lump them all together at some level. Is it possible to do this? Is it <u>right</u> to do this?

Tuesday 21st July, 2009.

3.7 Conclusions

The principal function of this chapter is to complete the setting for those that follow. It is now necessary to populate it.

Building upon the two key considerations highlighted above, such criticism follows three main lines of enquiry: why is the research being done in the South, how has the investigator arrived at and produced the research questions, and how are the research findings analysed and represented based on subject positioning? (Raghuram & Madge, 2006:270; McEwan, 2009:264).

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CHAPTER FOUR

CIRHEP: 'A Small Organisation with Big Solutions'

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a profile of the case NGO that informs the research. It foregrounds the unique geographical, political, ideological and institutional settings in which The Centre for Improved Rural Health and Environmental Protection (CIRHEP) operate. In doing so it addresses the previously-identified shortfall in organisational specificity within NGO studies. The chapter links the methodological considerations discussed in the preceding chapter to the empirical analysis of chapters four to seven, while substantively contributing to both. It begins by situating CIRHEP (pronounced: 'syrup') within the wider political and developmental context of their constituency. It then maps the origins and evolution of the organisation, highlighting the backgrounds and influences of its founders and current directors. This is followed by a clarification of CIRHEP's activities and administrative arrangements, before closing with a consideration of the organisation's position in the *longue durée* of community-based development activism and on the non-governmental professionalisation continuum.
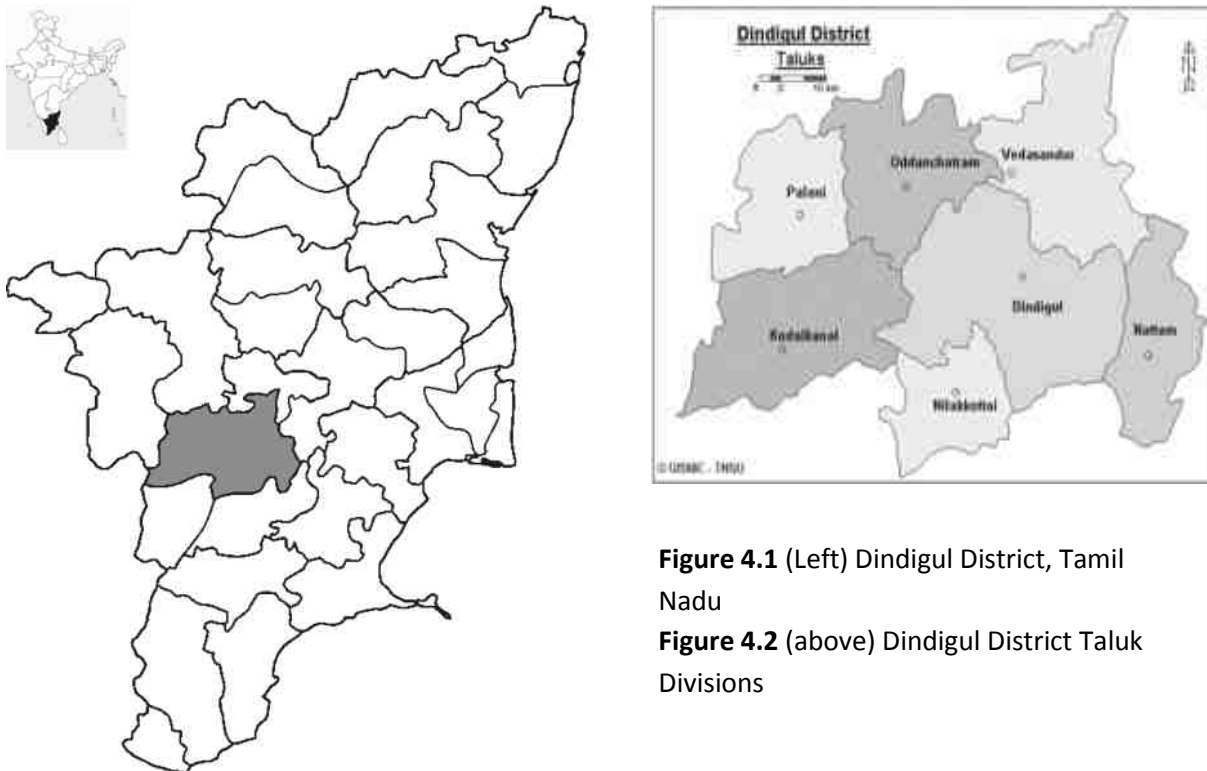

Figure 4.1 (Left) Dindigul District, Tamil Nadu
Figure 4.2 (above) Dindigul District Taluk Divisions

4.2 Context

CIRHEP work in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, in three *taluk*[1] divisions of Dindigul District. Agriculture has been a foundation of the Tamil economy since independence and, today, more than 60 per cent of the population remain reliant upon the natural environment as a main source of income (Government of Tamil Nadu, 2003:5). Almost a quarter of the state's population live below the poverty line – a sum that increases by nearly ten per cent when focussing upon Dindigul District alone (Ibid: 8).

According to the 2011 census (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2011), Dindigul District is home to 2,161,367 people – just over three per cent of the Tamil population – and has a population density of 357 people per square meter, which is more than 100 lower than the national average. The population growth rate for the district has declined (table 4.1) since 1971 from 11.90 per cent to 9.22 (State Planning Commission, 2009:33). This decline has been attributed to migration and the worsening environmental conditions that face the 65 per cent of the district's population that reside in its rural areas (Ramanujal et al., 2006:12).

	Population			Growth Rate
	Total	Male	Female	
Urban	673252	339064	334188	78.57
Rural	1249762	629073	620689	-9.67

Table 4.1 Dindigul District: population and Growth Rate. Adapted from State Planning Commission (2009:19)

Consequently, and notwithstanding the state government's pledge to eradicate poverty by 2012, a failure in poverty reduction has been attributed to poor agricultural growth and performance, as production 'barely kept pace with population growth' (State Planning Commission, 2009:124). However, since 1994, when the district's poverty levels were greater than that of the state average, poverty has declined in Dindigul. Nonetheless, the area maintains a literacy rate 10 per cent below the state average

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[1] India is separated into multiple administrative divisions. *Taluks* are subdivisions of a district and typically encompass a central town which serves as the centre of operations as well as several additional towns and surrounding villages. See Figure 4.2 and Appendix 4.1. CIRHEP originally operetaed within Nilikottai taluk alone, but have recently extended their activities to Vedasandur and Oddanchatram.

of 73 per cent; 80 percent of houses have no running water and 43 percent have no toilet (State Planning Commission, 2009:70).

Out of a total of 347,786 families, nearly 8 per cent receive less than 499 rupees as average monthly income (State Planning Commission, 2009:126). At the time of writing that equates to approximately 27,000 households living on less than £6.10 per month. In all, only 2.81 per cent of rural families in Dindigul District earn more than 2500 rupees in average monthly income (State Planning Commission, 2009:126).

The district's main economic drivers are agriculture, animal husbandry, horticulture, floriculture and the tanning industry. With regard to sectoral shares of net district profit (NDP), the primary sector contribution towards district income declined from 32.22 per cent in 1994 to 20.52 per cent in 2003 (State Planning Commission, 2009:126). This indicates a fall in the share of agriculture[2] - the District's major contributor to the primary sector (State Planning Commission, 2009:126). What's more, this reduction has occurred without an equivalent decrease in the rural population[3]. This illustrates the large-scale underemployment in this sector. The direct shift in the district economy from agriculture to the service sector highlights the low levels of industrial development in the region. As such, strategies to reform agriculture as a viable livelihood option are frequently devised (State Planning Commission, 2009:128).

Geographically, the district is a semi-arid, drought-prone area with wide-ranging hilly areas and undulating plains. Groundwater pollution is prevalent in places due to the discharge of untreated effluents from the 80 functional tanneries in the area (Katsifas, 2004; State Planning Commission, 2009:199). Environmental concerns also stem from widespread and, relatively recent, changes in farming practices. Throughout the late-1960s and 1970s, Tamil Nadu was at the forefront of agricultural innovations in Indian agriculture. However, the changes endorsed during this period[4] have since been argued to have been unsuited to Tamil Nadu's climate and soils whilst not exhibiting the neutrality of scale that the state's innumerable small-holdings required (Mencher, 1974; Farmer, 1977; Chapman, 2002).

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[2] Today, 404,000 labourers work on the 40 per cent of Dindigul District's geographical area (626,664ha.) that is cropped.
[3] 65 per cent of Dindigul's population is classed as rural, of which 61 per cent of total workers are cultivators and agricultural labourers (State Planning Commission, 2009:128).
[4] This has become known as the Green Revolution. The revolution entailed the international dissemination of an agricultural package of synthetic nitrogen-based fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides combined with the introduction of machinery and 'miracle seeds', across the Global South. The seeds were developed through hybridization and back-crossing with the view to creating a plant that shed the traditional problems of staple food crops but which dramatically increased yields (Johnson, 2009).

In sum, scores of farmers in the region turned to the new crops and accompanying methods promoted during these years in the hopes of increasing their yields. However, success was often only achievable when many prerequisites were met. Soils were argued to become 'addicted' to expensive synthetic fertilisers, requiring higher and increasingly recurrent doses as well as vast increases in irrigation. Similarly, the new varieties were best suited to being cultivated as monocultures. The subsequent loss of indigenous varieties to vast crops of rice and wheat provoked much censure from proponents of biodiversity. In addition to the environmental effects, social ramifications soon materialised:

'... the new agricultural methods and practices were argued to be well-matched to the capacities of larger, more established...farms, whereas many small-holders suffered from the reduction in prices caused by the considerable increases in large farm production. Likewise, as word spread and prospective profits increased, sharecroppers...and others of limited tenancy were often dispossessed.' (Johnson, 2010:444)

As a result, small, poorer agricultural families were disproportionately affected and suffered (Chapman, 2002:157). Accordingly, across the state, and indeed the world, mounting concern for both the rural landscape and its inhabitants was translated into a capacity to act (Bryant, 2005:9).

4.3 Reactionary Beginnings

The Palni Hills Conservation Council (PHCC) exemplifies this position, and can be seen to have served as the non-governmental petri dish for CIRHEP's formation and development. In 1985, the year Dindigul District was created, a group of environmentalists, businesspeople, and others living in the eastern branch of Tamil Nadu's Western Ghats[5] formed an informal assembly of concerned residents. The group, which soon matured into a registered NGO, sought to address the deteriorating environmental condition of the Kodaikanal[6] and Palni *taluks* of Dindigul district (PHCC, 2011a). While the size and scope of the PHCC now encompasses over one hundred paid staff working on projects as diverse as wildlife surveys, drinking water provision and the development of 'Elephant corridors', the organisation's work

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[5] A hill range and central catchment area running approximately 1,000 miles from North India through the western edge of Tamil Nadu.
[6] Kodaikanal was established in 1845 by American Christian missionaries and wealthy colonialists, and is primarily known as a hill station frequented by Indian and foreign nationals as a retreat and tourist destination. Its popularity rests in large part due to its positioning of almost 7,000 feet above sea level – allowing residents to evade the heat of the surrounding plains – and its 'natural' attractions which include grasslands and a manmade lake. However, covering the southern escarpment of the Palni Hills (which form the eastern spur of the Western Ghats), Kodaikanal as a *taluk* division incorporates hundreds of villages as well as waterfalls and acres of cyprus, eucalyptus and shoal forests which are home to a diverse range of flora and fauna.

originally focussed almost exclusively upon the environmental degradation of their project area through small and informal education programmes and conservation measures. In the ten years following its inauguration, the PHCC's activities included wetland preservation, biodynamic agriculture and indigenous Shola tree planting as well as regularly confronting the inactivity, as they saw it, of the local, district and state governments (PHCC, 2011b; Riley, 2002:138).

At this time a young P. M. Mohan, the co-founder and current Secretary of CIRHEP, was a Masters graduate with a newly-awakened passion for rural development. Mohan's family lived in a small village named Veelinayakanpatti. The natural environment was the sole source of income for the vast majority of the village's seven hundred-strong population, and Mohan's father and grandfather were no different. As such his interest in agriculture was keen from an early age and stemmed from inimitable experience.

When it came time to select academic pursuits, Mohan opted to read for a BA and, later, an MA in Commerce at The Madurai Kamaraj University. This was followed by an MA in Rural Economics at Gandhigram Rural University in nearby Dindigul, where he specialised in watershed[7] management, rural industries and organic farming techniques. Having moved away to study, Mohan returned home upon the completion of his MA in 1986. However,

Figure 3.3 P. M. Mohan (2010), CIRHEP Secretary and co-founder

the village that welcomed his arrival was not that which lived in his thoughts throughout his time away:

'There was heavy chemical input which caused the soil to die. There was no humus – very little organic content. Water sources were contaminated. Many good insects had died because of chemical application. It poisoned the food and affected the health of the people... the pesticides affect the people. It affected their breathing. They mixed it with their hands... there were cases of suicide through drinking the pesticides. Debt was there'.

Mohan, Interview 10-04-10

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[7] Watershed management has become a central component in environmentally-focussed rural development due to the fact that water is a universal solvent, affected by all that it comes in contact with including land soils. As such, actions above ground have direct ramifications for the whole watershed and those living within it.

The environmental effects he noticed were not particularly new – the district government had championed chemically-intensive and industrial agriculture as much as any since the mid-1960s – yet, upon Mohan's return, the human impact was ever more apparent to him. Veelinayakanpatti was situated approximately 25 miles from the PHCC's nearest projects, but a sustained friendship with a Mr C Jeyakaran – the NGO's then-Secretary and now long-time Treasurer – opened Mohan's eyes to the practical application of the economic and social theory he had studied in his home state, by residents like him. In the subsequent months Mohan accompanied Jeyakaran to various local and PHCC projects and saw how activism could be undertaken at a local scale, often by an ad hoc group of likeminded individuals and with palpable results. He spent much of the next 12 months volunteering for local environmental causes and organisations.

Mohan's interest and attributes did not go unnoticed and by 1987 he was employed as Project Manager for one of the PHCC's fledgling ventures. During his time with the PHCC Mohan progressed from manager to Project Coordinator and gained experience in devising and delivering an array of services and programmes to low-income communities in Dindigul and neighbouring *taluks*. It was one particular initiative, however, that had more bearing on his future than most.

Figure 3.4 K. A. Chandra (left, 2007) CIRHEP President and co-founder

Several months in to his first year with the PHCC, Mohan and colleagues decided to approach a matriculation school in nearby Nillikottai for assistance with a project promoting tree plantation and soil conservation. Government schools in rural Tamil Nadu own and operate out of their their own land, which is often protected by chain-link fencing. A school would thus provide readymade protection and an enthusiastic team of young caretakers for the PHCC's fragile and expensive saplings. The headmaster suggested Mohan contact their English teacher, K. A. Chandra, as the proposal seemed best suited to her interests.

Although an MA graduate in Tamil Literature, Chandra, also a resident of Veelinayakanpatti, had completed a BA in Geography at the Sri Meenakshi Arts College and was a keen environmentalist. The PHCC project provided a welcome outlet for her interests and, although it was a voluntary position that her family could scarcely afford for her to take, she agreed to oversee the school's involvement. Within a year Chandra had supervised the development of a seed nursery in the campus that was maintained

by the school's children. Soon after this the PHCC opened a community centre in Nillikottai. Chandra taught evening classes there and, gradually, her involvement with the conservation council overtook her regular teaching. In 1997 she was invited to attend a conference in Stockholm by a Swedish teacher that had visited the PHCC activities Chandra administered. While there, Chandra was asked to speak about the PHCC's grassroots initiatives and also took the opportunity to visit a local *mulleskolan[8]*. Upon return to India she proposed an Indian 'Mulle School' to the PHCC executives. Her proposal was accepted and she set to work adapting the European model to the contours of the subcontinent.

By 1999, for Chandra, Mohan and others, the scope of the PHCC's projects and priorities had become worryingly tapered:

'...some members only wanted to work in the plains and some wanted to work in the foothills only. Some people would say: 'This is the Palni Hills Conservation Council, why are you working in the plains?' We explained that the plains were also very important because the plains people go to the hills and cut down the trees in the forest. That is why we want[ed] to give awareness to the plains people... For some people we were diverting from the mission and vision.'

Chandra, Interview 11-09-10

This somewhat small disagreement grew into an organisation-wide, policy-level dispute. On one side were the PHCC's top-level managers and executives who were relatively wealthy, middle-class, men with a background in business. On the other were approximately thirty low- and mid-level project staff. The former believed the remit of the PHCC should not extend beyond the immediate environs of the mountain range from which they took their name, and that activities should be restricted to forestry-based conservation. The latter felt that the PHCC's focus upon the natural environment – to the exclusion of almost all social work – was a mistake and betrayed a misunderstanding of the interconnectedness of ecological systems. Mohan, Chandra and several others believed that it would be ineffectual to concentrate on the environment while doing nothing about the unemployed chopping down local trees to sell as firewood, for example, or local farmers polluting the region's ground water. Their concerns came to no avail and, in June 1999, they decided to leave the organisation and start an NGO of their own.

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[8] A Swedish model of nature school in which teachers promote environmental awareness and conservation using play, song and dance. 'Classes' are often conducted outdoors rather than the confines of a schoolroom.

4.4 The Centre for Improved Rural Health and Environmental Protection

This mass departure can be seen to be the origin of CIRHEP as it is today. As a non-governmental body however, CIRHEP was not a new endeavour. The Centre for Improved Rural Health and Environmental Protection started life nearly five years earlier in Mohan and Chandra's home *taluk*. It was founded by a local academic from Gandhigram Rural University, and originally focussed upon sanitation ('rural health') [9] and ecological awareness ('environmental protection'). By all accounts the organisation at that time was desperately lacking in both direction and funds. Soon after their departure from the PHCC, Mohan and Chandra, alongside M. Karupphia and K. V. Ramraj – the most senior members of the break-away group – approached the then-director with an offer to take over the organisation. An agreement was made and a transfer of ownership began. During the subsequent 1 ½ year transition period, the organisation's environmental protection work broadened in scope while its emphasis upon 'rural health' took on new and directed meaning.

Following the changeover, CIRHEP retained little more than its name and area of operation. This area constituted the foothill populations of the Kadavakurichi Reserved Forest area (including Veelinayakanpatti, Kombaipatti and Lakshmipuram, the home villages of CIRHEP's new owners and other staff. In all this included a cluster of 32 villages and approximately 30,000 intended beneficiaries.

Figure 4.5 CIRHEP's 'Mission' and Vision' statements. 2011.

Over time the transition was completed and CIRHEP was, for all intents and purposes, rebranded. Emphasis was placed upon the organisation's new mantle as an instrument of the local community. It was not to be seen as a collection of good-willed locals working underneath an executive body of 'service management people' from the surrounding urban centres as the PHCC had been, but as an

[9] Evident in the 'Rod of Aesculapius' motif that remains part of the organisation's logo.

active, locally-run and locally-staffed endeavour. Importantly, the founders of the CIRHEP's newest manifestation saw to it that the organisation's management were both representative of the constituency and democratically elected[10]. Mohan was elected as Secretary[11]; Chandra as President; M. Karupphia[12] as treasurer.

As is customary for Indian NGOs, CIRHEP's new members then decided upon the organisation's 'mission' and 'vision'. Essentially, these are foundational declarations that direct endeavours and serve the dual purpose of target statement and project synopsis. Naturally, and by necessity, these short statements cannot encapsulate the full sphere of activities that CIRHEP staff undertake now or planned to at that time, and were derived from the perceived and communicated needs of the local area and its communities (see figure 4.5). The ex-PHCC members were in a position to adapt the PHCC projects and programmes that they saw as being most needed and expand upon them. First, however, it was necessary to assess the specific wants of the local population:

'Actually, we wanted to start empowering the people first. Empower the children; empower the farmers; empower the women. In 2000 we conducted a meeting... we asked what they wanted and they said: 'we want the water'. We said: 'we cannot give you water' and they said: 'well how can we live?' We said: 'we must conserve the water'. We conducted a PRA and ranked the priorities of the local people...[the environment was] the last priority'.

Chandra, Interview 11-09-10

It was around this time that India's National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) advertised for organisations to facilitate and implement watershed development projects. CIRHEP approached NABARD and were awarded one contract.

4.5 Current activities

4.5.1 Watershed Management

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[10] As observers and practitioners alike have highlighted, despite intended aims or written and verbal assurances, countless NGOs are not democratic, either in their internal decision making structures or their relationships with their wider community (Joseph: 2002:51; Sangtin Writers & Nagar, 2006 114-115). As such, CIRHEP's status as democratic will not be taken for granted and is discussed further in chapter five.
[11] In CIRHEP the title 'Secretary' leans decidedly towards the use of the title in a company or club inasmuch as it referrers to a board-level person that heads the organisation's day-to-day administration. However, in this particular case Mohan's role extend far beyond this. He is widely known (if not openly acknowledged) as the hands-on founder and driving-force of the organisation and, it could be argued, would be better suited to the title of Director or President.
[12] M. Karupphia worked for the PHCC from 1989 and by 1999 was employed as a fieldwork supervisor. He has recently completed an MA in Economics at the American College, Madurai.

To date CIRHEP have successfully facilitated five NABARD-funded micro watershed projects. Three more are presently active. These projects are typically advertised by the funding agency or proposed by the facilitator. Due to past successes it is now occasionally the case that NABARD approaches CIRHEP directly. Projects begin with net planning activities. That is, at the request of NABARD, CIRHEP staff conduct participatory appraisals of the project area and its inhabitants. This includes Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA) and the mapping of land, water and bio-physical resources and structures such as (non)arable land and irrigation capacity. Project proposals are then prepared, sanctioned by the local community, and sent to the funding agency for approval.

Once approved, a Village Watershed Committee (VWC) is formed. This committee is made up of local volunteers and is chaired by a member of CIRHEP staff. CIRHEP ensure that the committee is demographically representative of the population it will administer. For example, each VWC must contain women (usually a third of the members), farmers and those that do not own land as well as members of all relevant castes (this is the only inclusion that is not encouraged by donors).

The project itself typically requires the physical treatment of the area to improve or conserve the supply, quality and drainage of the watershed. This may involve the construction of field bunds and check dams, the digging of percolation ponds or the promotion of agro-horticulture, amongst other measures. To date, CIRHEP has administered watershed projects covering nearly 6,000 hectares of land (CIRHEP, 2010:4). These projects are jointly sponsored by NABARD and the Tamil Nadu Watershed Development Agency (TAWDEVA).

4.5.2 Women's Empowerment

Under NABARD watershed contracts, five per cent of the project costs are reserved for women's empowerment initiatives. With this and funds from international donors (see 4.5.4), CIRHEP facilitate women's self-help groups (WSHG). The enterprises are based on the now-ubiquitous Grameen Bank model from Bangladesh that famously pioneered microcredit as a strategy for poverty alleviation. The groups function with the view to strengthening the decision-making power and economic status of their (exclusively female) members, and echo the feminised character of the current neoliberal orthodoxy (Rankin, 2001). WHSGs centre on the concept of microcredit in the form of loans for the purposes of promoting small-scale enterprise. Under the supervision and, sometimes, suggestion of CIRHEP staff, informal savings collectives of local women are formed and a savings account is opened in the group's name. Following six months of saving, a low-interest loan is sought.

Once a collective secures a loan from a local bank – with CIRHEP acting as a sponsor of sorts – the capital is invested in to small money-making programmes such as honey processing and *sambar*[13] powder production. Over 100 CIRHEP WSHGs currently operate in the project area and total some 1500 women (CIRHEP, 2010:16). Groups typically consist of around 10 members and, in turn, form larger women's federations of up to 20 groups. Each group consists of an elected president and is administrated by a CIRHEP project worker. Once the enterprises begin to return a profit, the loan is gradually repaid.

4.5.3 Agroforestry and Tree planting

Another project that is carried out by CIRHEP's WSHGs is tree planting. In order to increase the productivity, sustainability and profitability of the organic farms, CIRHEP projects promote the planting of trees and other woody perennials on the same land as horticultural and floricultural crops. This practice – known as agroforestry or farm forestry – is proven to increase biodiversity; enrich the asset base of poor households; enhance local water tables; improve soil health and aid carbon sequestration (Schroth et al., 2004; Montagnini & Nair, 2004; Rice, 2011). Alongside project staff, WSHG members run nurseries within the CIRHEP training complex and raise the seedlings that are eventually sold or given to local farmers. Likewise, tree planting initiatives on non-farm land are promoted in order to reduce soil erosion and water loss from in the watershed basin. As this practice takes place on public/state-owned land, local children are engaged in the events as part of CIRHEP's youth initiatives.

These activities play a significant role in both organic farming and watershed management. At present, CIRHEP, financially supported by The Cottonwood Foundation and The United Bank of Carbon (UboC) – two British-based, environmental organisations, have facilitated the planting of upwards of 20,000 saplings within the project area.

4.5.4 Nature Schools and Eco Clubs

The children's tree planting activities were represented in CIRHEP's first major funding relationship. Upon leaving the PHCC many staff had good working relationships with representatives of their previous employers' funding agencies. In the case of Mohan and Chandra, they had developed close ties to individuals from the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). These individuals were also linked with an environmentally-focussed development organisation named *Framtidsjorden,* or 'Future

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[13] Sambar Powder is the base of a spiced vegetable stew of the same name which is served at almost every meal in this District. It usually contains asafoetida, mustard seeds, black gram, curry leaves, fenugreek seeds and coriander seeds, all of which can be sourced locally.

Earth'. In 2002 it was suggested that a team of Swedish students should travel to Tamil Nadu to experience CIRHEP's work. Upon their return to Sweden, the students formed a 'friends group' for CIRHEP – a prerequisite for Future Earth support. Based on their three guiding principles of 'ecology, cooperation and self reliance', the CIRHEP friends group and Future Earth funded projects devised by the NGO and its local community.

Future Earth provided 500,000 rupees for the formation and running of fifty WSHGs and several village-based Eco Clubs. The clubs were originally informal meetings similar to the *mulleskolan* format, but with a greater emphasis on environmental preservation and the implementation of ideas. The Clubs have since developed into a form of young activist network, where conservation ideas are developed and carried out. They are typically attended by older children and include activities such as litter picking and tree planting. To the Eco clubs, CIRHEP have added weekly 'Mulle Schools' based upon Chandra's PHCC adaptation of the Swedish model. The schools provide environmental education to children up to the age of ten through a collection of games, dramas and songs that Chandra devised. It is not uncommon for classes to have more than forty attendees – many of which go on to attend village eco clubs. In total, approximately 1,500 children attend regularly.

4.5.5 Organic and Biodynamic Agriculture

In addition to children's and women's activities, FE initially agreed to sponsor some limited organic farming initiatives[14]. This has become central to CIRHEP's work. In order to restore soil fertility, reduce the cost of cultivation, rejuvenate degraded lands and revive microbial activity, organic farming methods are now practiced on 250 small and marginal farms.

At first, farms located within active CIRHEP watershed project areas were targeted. Farmers were approached or selected from existing committees and asked to attend meetings. There, project staff explained the unsuitability and dangers of chemically-intensive methods, as well as the benefits of traditional organic production for both the farmers and the watershed. From there a change in agricultural practices was proposed. This exercise continues today and enthusiasm is typically low amongst attendees at first. These initial meetings are now built-upon with visits to successful, local organic farms and to CIRHEP's training centre for demonstrations. In addition, CIRHEP now runs a model

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[14] Of course, farming is far from the sole preserve of males (Odame et al., 2002; Momsen, 2010:141) and, as such is not excluded from 'women's initiatives'. Twice as many women as men work in agriculture in the Global South. Nonetheless, the management and decision-making of of farms is more-often-than-not a male occupation.

organic smallholding within the training centre grounds that acts as a space for learning and trailing new methods.

At this scale the transition to organic farming takes place in two main ways: first, modified seed varieties for modern, monoculture-favouring cash-crops are replaced with a small variety of traditional seeds for crops well-suited to the area. In the case of Dindigul district, ragi (finger millet), cow-peas and sorghum are selected due to their resilience, low water requirements and agricultural by-products.[15] In addition, 'garden crops' such as tomatoes and flowers are promoted. Second, synthetic, usually nitrogen-based fertilisers and pesticides are replaced with naturally-sourced and locally-produced manures and treatments. This can include cow horn manure and vermi-compost. These changes are, of course, augmented by other activities and measures, but, together, form the basis of the ecologically-sensitive farming that CIRHEP promote.

At the same time, farmer's groups were developed in order to share experiences and advice. Likewise, a seed bank and exchange programme was established to enable local cultivators to develop networks and increase biodiversity. These activities were recently extended with the, perhaps questionable, introduction of biodynamic farming methods and training[16]. Biodynamic farming differs from organics in that it promotes the use of homeopathic preparations that contain specific herbs and minerals that are treated or fermented with water, soil and, often, animal organs (Heimler et al., 2009:764). The 'BD' preparations are intended to increase soil and crop quality, and are prepared at CIRHEP's training centre.

4.5.6 Organic Shop

Once farmers convert to organic methods, it is sometimes the case that their produce has had to change in the process. For example, where one smallholder once solely produced monoculture rice cash-crops, the shift to organics may require him/her to cultivate the abovementioned millets, grains and pulses. In some cases, farmers trial the organic methods on only one part of their land. Consequently, an additional crop that is not included or suited to their usual marketing routes is produced. In light of this,

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[15] In order to maximise productivity and minimise 'waste', the modified rice and wheat seeds popularised and distributed during the Green Revolution were designed to produce uniformly-short crops with larger yields. However, the by-products of crops that were often bred out of the hybridised varieties (stems, leaves etc.) often play a large role in rural life as livestock feed, building materials and so forth (Shiva, 1993).
[16] Biodynamic farming is commonly regarded as a holistic method of soil and crop improvement which stems from a world-view known as anthroposophy. While some studies have found positive results (Heimler et al., 2009:764; Reeve et al., 2005), biodynamic management is frequently criticised for lacking a scientific basis. Nonetheless these methods are widespread and increasingly popular in India.

a small retail unit was rented in Nilikottai below an existing CIRHEP office and, in 2006, became the Sangamam[17] Organic Shop.

The shop provides an outlet for various products that result from the organisation's work. Ready-mixed organic manures, fungicides and pesticides as well as BD preparations that require less common products such as lime powder and rock phosphate are sold. Many of these products are prepared by the NGO and sold to ease the transition to organic methods. Farmers sell fruit, vegetables and legumes, and WSHG members – who also staff the shop – sell products from their income-generation activities such as organic honey, eggs and neem soap[18]. The shop's location – on a busy road in the main shopping district – is important as it provides an outlet and clientele that would otherwise be unattainable to the communities that supply it.

4.5.7 Giriraja Breeding Farm

The Giriraja Breeding Farm is another CIRHEP initiative that is designed to underpin the WSHG programmes. In the early 2000s, representatives from each of CIRHEP's five women's federations formed an apex federation known as the SHG Federation Giriraja Project. The NABARD-funded scheme hatches, rears and sells chicks to WSHGs for a nominal fee. Girirajas are a large, hardy breed of chicken that require minimal food and water, yet supply a large quantity of eggs and, eventually, meat. As such they provide income and food, while avoiding many of the common shortcomings of traditional breeds.

The farm consists of several small structures – an incubation building, hatchery and feed unit – which are situated in the same complex as the CIRHEP training centre and office. In Dindigul District poultry farming is traditionally seen as 'woman's work', so the potential for the income generated benefitting the group members themselves is increased. CIRHEP's goal is that the revenue generated from the scheme will eventually be used as a revolving fund in the federation, thus reducing the reliance upon bank loans.

4.5.8 Training Centre – The SAM Complex

The breeding farm's location is essential to its success, as it provides a central and neutral point of access for the many groups that use it. Indeed, the complex it resides in now provides a focal point and

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[17] Meaning confluence or 'to come together'.

[18] Neem soap is derived from the oil of the neem tree seed. The neem tree is a well-known and widespread tree in South Asia with documented medicinal and prophylactic properties, making it an effective and abundant ingredient for both organic cosmetic products and pesticides (Akhtar, 2000; Krishnayyaand & Grewal, 2002).

platform for the organisation's varied activities, and is widely cited by staff as a core factor of CIRHEP's successes. In 2004, in light of the increasing amount of training sessions being requested, CIRHEP's management decided to increase the organisation's capacity to fulfil this role:

'We discussed the idea with our team and with our farmers; we thought that this would help not only this community but others.'

Mohan, Interview, 02/04/10

It was decided that the site would be chosen for its centrality and familiarity to CIRHEP's intended beneficiaries. Where this point would be was, in many ways, predefined; an enormous and very old banyan tree sits 4km from Nilikottai at the intersection of three local villages, and has been used as a meeting place and community hub for centuries. As such it seemed a rational place to base the organisation.

The majority of the construction was completed voluntarily by local labourers. Money was also borrowed from the local community. Nearby businesses donated or loaned materials and tools, and that which was not donated was purchased using an advance paid by NABARD for future training sessions.

The complex now comprises: the CIRHEP office; a large training/dining room; dormitories that sleep up to fifty people; a honey processing unit; kitchens; two toilet/shower blocks; the Giriraja Breeding Farm; 40,000 square feet of orchards and farm land, as well as a generator and water purifying system. Arguably the most important of these is the training room, as it is the place where CIRHEP host their awareness raising, skills building and knowledge giving activities.

4.5.9 Training and study visits

CIRHEP currently conduct training with a wide variety of groups. In 2010, following the successful completion of a number of micro watershed projects, NABARD approached CIRHEP and asked that they apply to become a 'resource supporting agency'. CIRHEP applied and were appointed the NABARD resource supporting agency for Tamil Nadu. In this position CIRHEP provide exposure visits for NGOs and farmers from across the state that are embarking upon natural resource management-centred activities. Now, NABARD-funded farmers groups from other parts of India regularly attend two and three day residential visits. In this role, CIRHEP staff also travel to other NGOs' field sites in order to offer guidance on the reporting, maintenance and preparation of projects.

Due to their increasing profile in the region and Mohan's links with nearby colleges and universities, CHIRHEP often host groups of students studying topics such as social work and biodiversity. Visiting participants (i.e. non-constituents) are charged for accommodation, transport to field sites and food. These visits also provide an opportunity to gain revenue through the sale of CIRHEP's products. Similarly, due to staff ties with Future Earth, CIRHEP began receiving Swedish students who wished to learn more about their international development and the work of a community-based environmental NGO. International guests are now regular: in 2009/10 this included study visits by university students from Japan, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States, and totalled over six months of activities (CIRHEP, 2010:22). This has prompted the development of a new endeavour as CIRHEP are, at time of writing, developing an ecotourism programme for foreign and Indian holiday-makers.

Despite this increased engagement, the main stream of activity comes from CIRHEP's own community. Training sessions and guest lectures form the backbone of CIRHEP's programmes, and all meetings are free of charge. Topics range from human rights to organic mushroom cultivation for WSHGs, and cow pat pit preparation and irrigation techniques for farmers. CIRCEP team members also receive regular training. This may be in the form of guest lectures, support sessions led by core or temporary staff with particular expertise or away days and field visits.

4.6 Locating CIRHEP on the non-governmental spectrum

Two roles are presented by Lewis and Kanji (2009:17) as being assumed by modern day, local development NGOs: advocacy/campaign work, and 'the delivery of basic services to people in need'. CIRHEP certainly embody the latter; their work revolves around facilitating cost-effective welfare services. Of course, these roles are not mutually-exclusive and a large proportion of CIRHEP's work is geared towards promoting environmental awareness and conservation, and could, therefore, be labelled 'campaigning'. Nonetheless, service delivery remains the daily employment of the organisation. However, this function is viewed by the team in terms of demand rather than supply. That is to say, CIRHEP view their activities in terms of providing the requirements of the community as more than facilitating the projects of outside agencies. In fact, this role is further dissected by the organisation itself. In sum, staff view the needs of the people they serve – and therefore, their mission – in 'stages'. This is best illustrated by P. M. Mohan's description of the 'first stage' of CIRHEP's work (acknowledged

as being the first ten years) as a time of basic needs provision – food, water and alike – as well as consciousness raising. The current, 'second stage', he suggests, remains needs provision, but with a more economically-conscious approach:

M: 'Earlier [the people living in the project area] were struggling for water. Now they are in the second stage, they want to construct a house now, or they want to expend their agriculture, so they need a bank loan. Like that. Financial needs. They are in the process of upgrading them so they need some income generation activities, like... the marketing of their products...'

Mohan, Interview, 24-09-10

Indeed, of the many activities CIRHEP oversees, very few can be said not to be market orientated. This is because its work, like its intended beneficiaries, is in a later period of 'evolution' and is grounded in the development orthodoxy in which the organisation was founded. Where the local area and its inhabitants once lacked water and education, they now require the tools and means with which to build upon this position and increase their capacity. Through their specialisation and increasing proficiency in watershed management and organic agricultural practices, CIRHEP enjoy a certain amount of market shelter in the district. Likewise, rising levels of numerised evaluation, staff training and technicalisation in their everyday activities cement this position. Consequently, their success rate in securing contracts is comparatively high amongst similar NGOs in the region. With this relative success has come new professional relationships, and with them detailed work plans, increasing scrutiny and externally imposed work plans and deadlines. As such, the organisation can be considered to be in the later stages of a traditional indigenous, non-governmental service or intermediary organisation and, therefore, inhabiting the third stage of professionalisation as summarised in chapter two.

In this sense, CIRHEP can be viewed as a product of the neoliberal 'participatory' era of development. As explained in chapter three, the concept of participation within development theory and practice rose to distinction during the late 1970s and dominated development discourse and practice throughout the subsequent decade (Ebrahim, 2005:38-39). Likewise, by the mid-1980s the neoliberal mantra of the Washington Consensus that 'human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual economic and entrepreneurial freedoms' (Harvey, 2009:2) had cemented itself as the new orthodoxy of development, along with its policy agenda combining 'economic liberalisation with elements of 'good

governance' and democratisation' (Ebrahim, 2005:47). This period coincided with the point in which CIRHEP's founders entered the non-governmental arena. Presented with these widely popular ideals, and, in the wake of the macro-level industrial growth era and India's green revolution, Mohan, Chandra and others invested in the commercially-focussed, participatory cultures of development.

In terms of recognition, CIRHEP have much to cite: in 2006 the NGO was one of only two that were mentioned by name in the Tamil State Planning Commission's (2009) Human Development Report for the district. More recently, CIRHEP spent three years on the Central Steering Committee for the NABARD Watershed Development Fund – a revolving, national body of three advanced stakeholders and experts who assist in the direction of NABARD objectives, budgetary control, resource allocation, and policy. Despite this, CIRHEP remain a comparatively small NGO. In 2011, the organisation had a gross income of 4,927,303 rupees (approximately £64,000 at time of writing). They currently employ twenty-five staff (only fifteen more than worked for the organisation when they received their first substantive funding contracts in 2000), twenty of which are salaried employees. Fifteen of these live within the project area and the rest live within five kilometres of the training centre. All are more comfortable speaking Tamil than English[19]. Amongst and sometimes in addition to these, CIRHEP employ a small number of 'external professionals' (engineers, accountants etc.) where the expertise of core staff falls short. As such, it can be argued that they represent an undeniably local endeavour and a valuable conduit to the 'voices of the poor' that modern funders so often seek.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter has traced CIRHEP's organisational character and highlighted some of its principal and defining features. In all, it can be seen that CIRHEP largely fits the broad-brush picture of a 'typical' southern- and community-based development NGO: it is small, secular, 'local', externally funded, and has 'at least several full-time staff, some sort of hierarchy, a budget and an office' (Potter & Taylor, 1996:1) – it is a collection of development practitioners. And, as John Maynard Keynes once said, practitioners are bound to interpret and judge the reality around them through the concepts and ideas they learned while in training (Hintjens, 1999:383). This is no less true for CIRHEP. Equally, its experience

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[19] As explained in chapter two and also by Roy (2011: 600), 'the Indian middle classes are a broad expansive category; more internally divided and heterogeneous today in an era of globalization' and, social status and class identity can be determined through crucial cultural markers such as access to English education or language in addition to occupation, income or wealth.

of the 'report culture' that now defines many elements of the South's increasingly professionalised non-governmental sector, and is evident in the levels of documentation; mounting technical requirements; increasing focus on performance indicators and a concern with 'good governance' (Mawdsley et al., 2002:16) increases with each new funding agreement.

Indeed, CIRHEP's immersion in the competitive, donor driven and donor led system described in chapters one and two is clear. Its projects, office and day-to-day activities are dependent upon short-term contracts with external sources. Most notable amongst these are the state-run agricultural bank, NABARD, and the international 'network supporting initiative', Future Earth. All of their associations, however, require some level of documentation, correspondence, reporting and auditing in return for project funds. As such, it can be said that CIRHEP are as much part of the 'emergent transnational community' (Mawdsley et al., 2002:4) as any, and are no less embroiled in the professionalisation process.

Subsequent chapters focus on a detailed analysis of the activism-professionalisation dialectic in this particular context and examine the specific ways in which CIRHEP have come to inhabit their contextually-unique organisational space as well as how they navigate the pervasive dilemmas of contemporary community-based development activism: economic growth and private enterprise; governance; resistance and reform; globalisation; sustainability and bridging civil society (Tandon, 2001).

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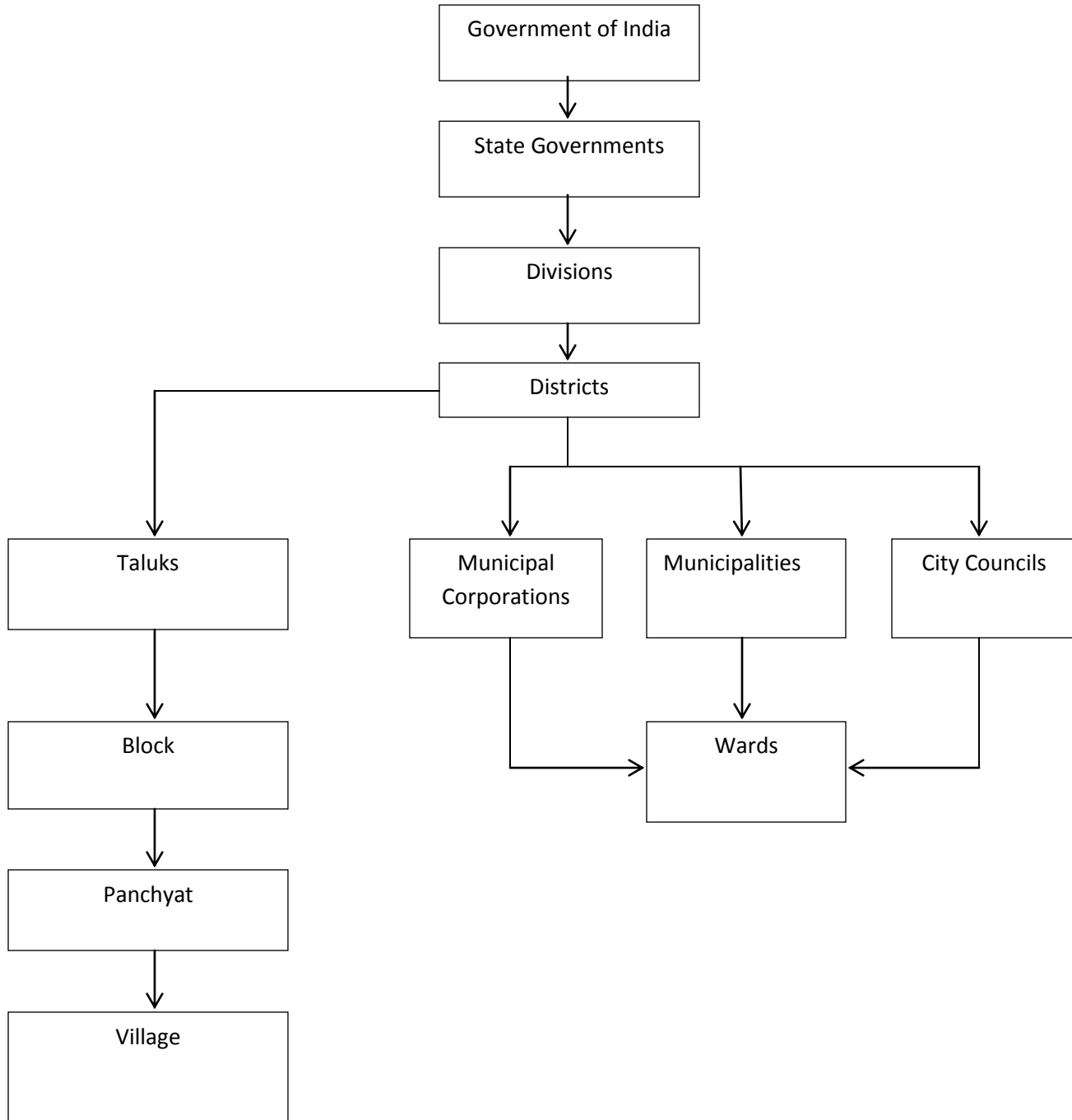**Shiva, V.** (1993) *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology.* London: Zed.

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Administrative Structure of India   **APPENDIX 4.1**

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Source: Adapted from Du Plessis (2011).

CHAPTER FIVE

Jigsaw Funding and Patchwork Professionalisation

5.1 Introduction

First, the chapter explores the implications of yielding to donor requirements of professionalisation.

5.2 The problem of professionalisation

As the first section of the thesis has explained, the dominance of bilateral agency support in current NGO funding models regularly results in an unbalanced dependency on the part of community-based southern NGOs. This dependency often requires southern NGOs to balance passion with a logic of efficiency and frequently necessitates adopting a prescribed mode of professionalism (Dunpath, 2003:1109). What the preceeding chapters only touched upon however, is that the processes of professionalisation prescribed from 'above' is sometimes in conflict with the processes and practices adopted by the NGO.

DUNPATH MORE

Despite the short-term nature of the projects, cirheps mission and vision are anything but....
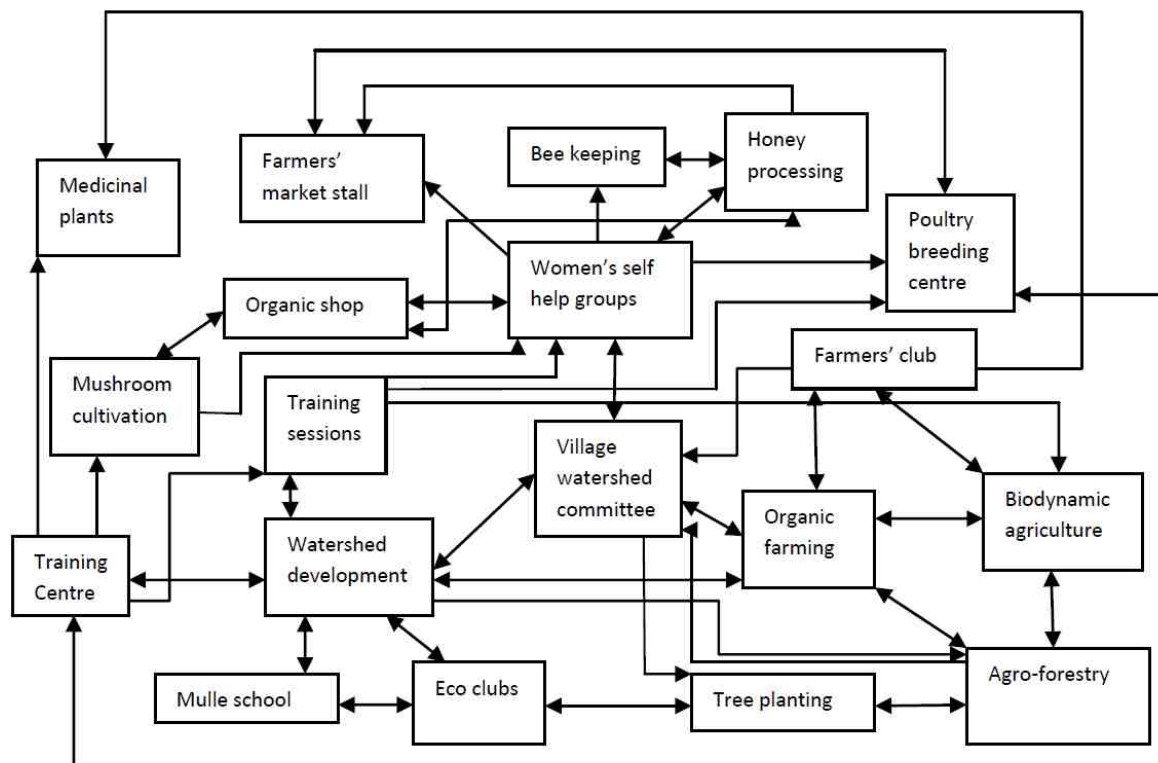
5.3 Project interconnectivity

Figure 5.1 the interconnectedness of CIRHEP's activities

Because CIRHEP's work is focussed upon the ecology of the project area, their initiatives strive to be as interlinked and multifaceted as nature itself. That is to say, CIRHEP understand that every aspect of a particular natural ecosystem is interconnected, and believe that human action within this ecosystem is equally linked. For that reason CIRHEP feel that it would be somewhat futile to focus upon, say, organic pesticide production without considering watershed management or agroforestry and so on. As such their work attempts to encapsulate all possible facets of the rural, human-environment relationship and requires that their projects address as many interrelated issues.

For example, while the WSHGs may initially appear distinct from the other, more environmentally-focussed activities that CIRHEP facilitate, their integration is fundamental to their operation. For instance, women's groups take part in bee-keeping and honey-producing activities as part of CIRHEP's microcredit initiatives. The organic produce is sold in the organic shop – staffed by WSHG members – and, due to the resulting increase in bees in the vicinity, local pollination is increased.

As expanded upon in chapter one, CIRHEP lean decidedly towards the 'means to a human end' division of ecologism (Dobson, 2000:18). As such, human gain is central to their mission, and all activities must work towards improving rural livelihoods. An example of this in practice is the vital partnership between organic farming and watershed management. This association - loosely labelled soil and water conservation by CIRHEP staff - encompasses almost every activity CIRHEP facilitates yet centres on farming. The watershed cannot be conserved using industrial agriculture's bore wells and water quality cannot be maintained with its chemicals. Likewise, organic agriculture cannot

function optimally with lowered or polluted water tables. Equally, the trees that maintain the watershed's run off – planted by farmers, project staff and eco club members alike - are the same that have been shown to increase organic yields (Lal, 2006). In all, CIRHEP's activities are unavoidably and almost automatically interlinked (figure 5.1).

This process is not recorded as being more than a dual-level process however. That is to say, professionalisation extracts community-based development actors from the 'local' sphere, but does not position them any higher than their intermediary level. Consequently, the gap between beneficiary and facilitator widens while the distance between donor and facilitator shrinks.

Here I adapt the phrase '**Diachronically cumulative**' from Political Scientist, April Biccum (2010), who coined it to describe the way the Haya people of north-east Tanzania inhabit and experience their environment. My usage will stress the importance of our bodily sensations of material life, and of the tacit meanings with which we invest it.

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Until relatively recently academic attention directed towards development NGOs has followed rather predictable and now well-trodden paths. The effectiveness, impact and abilities of NGOs as well as their heavily contested role in the political economy of development has, quite rightly, received disproportionate consideration in the post-Cold War era. However, more often than not this anglophone literature bases itself in discourse derived from the western historical experience and employs terms such as 'civil society' 'good governance' and 'social capital' as if their meanings enjoy universal understanding (Mercer, 2002:5).

Observers make plain that they see no real development alternatives left for NGOs to promote (Bebbington, 1997) as their only form of existence is now the involuntary legitimation, dissemination and maintenance of neoliberal discourses from within their 'donor-created and donor-led system' (Townsend et al., 2003). The ways in which NGOs obtain, use, manage and lose funding is, of course, central to this issue and raises the vital questions of from whom NGOs receive their funding, to whom are they subsequently accountable, and whose interests this process serves?

Recent critical re-evaluation of NGOs has identified the unpredictable results of increased financial support by states and neoliberal funding bodies. This has been followed-up, admittedly only sporadically, by studies that seek to explore the too-often neglected or unnoticed spaces of divergence and resistance within the everyday workings of the neoliberal-funded non-governmental sector (Laurie & Bondi, 2005). My latest research trip to the Kadavakurichi reserved forest area in Tamil Nadu, South India interviewing the staff and professional associates of a small community-based environmental NGO has presented several areas of interest that similarly diverge from the presumed norm that NGOs have become 'forced to adjust their agendas in order to compete' (Gideon, 1998: 311) and indicate that the pursuit of 'alternative'[1] forms of development is quite possible within neoliberal development structures albeit with its own pitfalls. This paper will 'flesh-out' some of these themes and situate them within the wider literature in order to inform further research.

Jigsaw funding and patchwork professionalisation

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[1] Like Townsend et al. (2004:885) I do not use the term 'alternative' to imply a form of Manichean or dualistic binary but, like them, evoke the label 'in terms of plural responses to plural contexts, or how our respondents are using, inhabiting and enacting certain global cultural economic flows in diverse ways'.

Like many NGOs CIRHEP have a 'mission' and a 'vision'. Essentially, these are the organisation's foundational statements that direct their endeavours and serve as a goal while providing a 'sound byte' of their work. The mission and vision are derived from the needs of the local area and its communities and are as follows:

> *'Vision: Building the capacities of the rural communities in conserving the*
> *Vaigai – Kaveri watershed in Dindigul, Theni and Maduria districts and making*
> *the area sustainable for better livelihoods.'*

> *'Mission: To create a stable human-ecology relationship and improve the quality*
> *of life by striving to alleviate poverty, provide education and conserve the*
> *environment with active participation of the rural community.'*

Naturally, and by necessity, these short statements cannot encapsulate the full remit and sphere of activities that CIRHEP undertakes. Because CIRHEP's work is focussed upon the human-ecology relationship of their project area, their initiatives strive to be as interlinked and multifaceted as nature itself. That is to say, CIRHEP understand that every aspect of a particular natural ecosystem is connected and believe that therefore human action within this ecosystem is also inherently interconnected. For that reason CIRHEP feel that it would be somewhat futile for an organisation such as themselves to focus upon, say, organic pesticide production without considering agroforestry or watershed management and so on. As such CIRHEP's work attempts to encapsulate all possible segments of the human-agriculture ecological relationship and requires their projects to address as many interrelated issues.

However, this presents a problem. To realise a wide-ranging and all-inclusive strategy would require wide-ranging and all-inclusive funding and in the current contractual non-governmental sector comprehensive funding is increasingly difficult to secure in place of short-term project-orientated contracts. For example, one funding agency may be quite willing to financially support CIRHEP's organic farming initiatives (encompassing farmer training, organic manure and pesticide production, maintenance of a local seed exchange centre and so on) but would be unlikely to offer support for their watershed management or women's income generation programmes too.[2]

To realise their complex and interrelated vision, CIRHEP have been forced to approach and secure contracts from several different agencies – all with different goals and areas of interest – in order to work towards completing their work in full (Fig. A). I use the word forced in this respect because,

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[2] The reasons for this are perhaps beyond the scope of the PhD but may be an interesting point to follow up.

when asked if they would prefer one funding body to support all of their activities, respondents invariably answered that they would (albeit in an almost cynical tone that suggested that, realistically, this would be too much to hope for). The reason often cited for this was that it would be to reduce the heavy documentation requirements that inevitably come with many contractual agreements, which I will come to later.

Watershed management: use of field bunds and check dams.	Watershed management: Education on dangers of bore well use.	Women's income generation schemes and self-help groups	Seed exchange centre.
Agroforestry.	Organic shop to sell local organic farmer and women's self-help groups' produce	Dissemination activities: farmers club	organic agriculture: farmer training in non-synthetic manure and fertilisers.
Organic agriculture: cropping pattern training.	'Mulle School' Environmental education and awareness classes.	organic agriculture: farmer training introduction to sustainable organic methods.	organic agriculture: farmer training in non-synthetic pesticide and herbicide.

Figure A. A visual representation of CIRHEP's funding structure whereby each block represents one of their initiatives, each colour represents a funding source and the image as a whole symbolises CIRHEP's work as an organisation.

As illustrated in *Figure A*, CIRHEP must apply to and work with several agencies for relatively small contracts in order to ensure that their full vision is realised. In a sense they can be seen to employ a 'jigsaw' funding configuration in which financial support is sourced from several different bodies to complete the picture or 'vision'. This is best explained by P. M. Mohan, CHIRHEP's secretary and co-founder when questioned on why he recommends comparable NGOs not to look for only one source of funding:

> *'You see, some [funding] agencies, they like to support certain areas. With several funders on separate activities then [an NGO] can integrate their activities. ... So in order to get success you have to fill the gaps. With one funder you can complete only part of the job. You cannot fulfil the people's needs like that. ... We cannot transfer funds from one activity to another activity. ... If you propose a project with five recommendations to a funding agency, maybe you will get one or two as per the funding agency's target. ... So the remaining two [sic] activities could come from other agencies.'*

Indeed, CIRHEP itself can be seen to have been born out of the need to 'fill a gap'. During the mid-1990s CIRHEP's founding members were all employed by another NGO known as the Conservation Council - a larger organisation than CIRHEP today - which focussed upon preserving the environment

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in the local hills of the Western Ghats. This NGO's sole focus was upon the environment. P.M. Mohan, CIRHEP's present Secretary, along with K. A. Chandra, CIRHEP's current President, and others felt as if the Conservation Council were only seeing half of the picture. They felt that the Council's focus upon the environment to the exclusion of all social work was a mistake and betrayed a misunderstanding of the interconnectedness of ecological systems. Basically, Mohan and others believed that it was futile to concentrate on the environment while doing nothing about housewives chopping down local trees to sell as firewood or local farmers polluting the region's ground water. They took these concerns to the leaders of the NGO with no avail and consequently decided to leave and form CIRHEP.

In its current form this gap filling can be seen to have both positive and negative effects, and is further compounded when taking into account that it is unusual for a contract to last more than five years for large projects and two-to-three for smaller initiatives, thus creating a funding situation – or jigsaw - that must be continually renewed and 'completed'. Likewise it is common for smaller funded projects to cover activity costs only meaning that staff salary and office maintenance (which is often one and the same) must be funded by other means. The methods by which CIRHEP address this shortfall will be covered later. One benefit of the 'jigsaw funding' model however is that staff feel that they have a large amount of autonomy in their work. This comes from the fact that no one funder has a contractual monopoly over CHIREP's activities. In this sense CIRHEP retain direction over the organisation as a whole and are able to maintain their vision and mission while realising the goals of other 'development' bodies.

Even within different component projects – the pieces of the puzzle that make up CIRHEP's work as a whole – staff feel that they have a large amount of independence and self-rule. It is common for activities and their administration to be divided between staff so that the CIRHEP team is split into smaller teams, each of which concentrates on one activity. This is taken further in some cases wherein one or two members of staff can be made responsible for smaller or fledgling projects such as organic honey-processing with individual self-help groups and with this come added responsibilities. As one junior member of staff noted:

> CIRHEP tells its staff to make their own decisions in every aspect of their work. If I am working on the organic processing I take control from decision making to implementation. CIRHEP gives full freedom to all staff. ... I take care of the accounts of the projects I work on. I must keep accounts; also, in the poultry farm I must keep notes such as how many eggs have been laid...I must maintain my log book and my allowance.

Much of this autonomy can be seen to come from the combination of CIRHEP's staff's local 'credentials' and the fact that most of their activities are derived from participatory planning exercises with beneficiaries. CIRHEP's staff, because of their background, are afforded a similar level of trust by the funding agencies to carry out appropriate work that is needed by the local communities.

Of course, working with several different funders involves several potential sources of professionalisation – that is, five funders require five sets of monitoring, accountability, regulation, documentation, specific outputs, the development and maintenance of information systems and so on. I've label this process, which develops as a result of the jigsaw funding structure, *'Patchwork Professionalisation'* in that the assorted professionalising practices required by CIRHEP's multiple funders converge in influencing the organisation and it's staff. However, despite its simultaneous effects, patchwork professionalisation does not appear to represent a diachronically cumulative[3] process, and some of the positive and negative issues that stem from or relate to the patchwork professionalisation CIRHEP experiences will be discussed in separate sections below.

In observing CIRHEP work I witnessed an NGO that has adapted the 'contractor' role of modern intermediary NGOs in a way that allows them to uphold and pursue their own agenda – be that 'alternative' or not. Through deciding, alongside the local communities, what needs to be done, facilitating several initiatives to cover each aspect and then sourcing the funding accordingly. CIRHEP provide an up until now unrecognised example of 'working the spaces of neoliberalism'. Yet, I'm inclined to argue that they are unaware, at least for the most part, that they are 'working' anything, more like *making the spaces work.* It may be more of a creative use of funding than an attempt to style an alternative form of development. Nonetheless, this serves as a promising example of civil society organisations evading co-option into neoliberal frameworks and a new context within which to observe the tensions between funders and NGOs and the processes through which external donors shape NGO behaviour while adding to the diminutive bank of literature that analyses the specific mechanisms through which this external influence can be both exerted and resisted (Ebrahim, 2005:77).

The benefits of face-to-face interaction

Within this jigsaw configuration CIRHEP have shown that it is beneficial to set new projects in motion before funding is secured. By beginning a project on a very small scale either independently or as a

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[3] A term used by April Biccum (2010:83) and originally applied to the process by which the promotion of development discourses secure authority and control in which the different components of the process 'resonate, refer to one another and overlap, rendering their hegemony more and more difficult to dislodge'..

small component of a successful funding bid there is an increased possibility that this project will be taken up and developed by the agency that has allowed the pilot scheme or by another funding body. This is often the case when funding representatives visit the project areas. CIRHEP ensure that, alongside the projects that the representatives are there to see, they experience other aspects of the organisation's work. This is but one of the many benefits CIRHEP feel they gain from regular face-to-face contact with funding representatives and serves as a useful way to 'manage' the many relationships and requirements that Jigsaw funding necessitates.

Official visits by funding agency representatives are seen by all staff as a positive thing. For some evaluative visits can mean the opportunity for 'fresh eyes', as one respondent envisioned it, to appraise a project. For others, interaction with funding representatives offer good opportunities for agency spokespersons to experience CIRHEP's work first-hand and, as mentioned above, see what else CIRHEP is working on. This is confirmed in my experience at CIRHEP to be a successful route to securing further or additional funding. For example, recent visits to project areas by government officials prompted additional funding of organic farming sites. Not only was this unprompted, but this change represented a departure from the funder from their usual 'territory' of watershed management. [4]

Likewise, many staff feel that personal interaction works well in tandem with documentation. During interviews there were no signs of discontent with the administrative characteristics of 21st Century non-governmental managerialism such as quantifiable indicators, records and targets. On the contrary, the detailed documenting and scrutiny of CIRHEP's projects and balance sheets to measure performance were cited as necessary processes which helped both the funders and the NGO charged with up-keeping them to manage their work. In fact, every senior member of staff that I asked told me that they would continue to produce these documents if there was no requirement from the funders to do so:

> *PHJ: How much of your time is spent in the office on paperwork?*
>
> *K: Most of my time is in the field. But it depends on the office work. Maybe one hour per day. We keep daily records.*
>
> *PHJ: You've been in the non-govenmental sector for a long time, how have you seen the levels of paperwork change?*

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[4] Most interestingly, this represents the first time that two funders are contributing to one area of CIRHEP's work. This overlap will likely bring some interesting repercussions for the professionalisation of both the organisation and staff in that area and will be explored further during my next visit.

> *K: Yes. There are too many records [now]. The MIS, the Management Information System, is too much. There are twenty five parts. But it is necessary for our impact analysis. It is useful for this.*
>
> *PHJ: Do you feel impact analyses like the MIS are important?*
>
> *K: Yes, yes, yes. This is necessary for our work, to count the impact and success stories; the area under cultivation. It is useful for measuring migration and education too.*
>
> *PHJ: Would CIRHEP continue to them if your funders did not require it?*
>
> *K: Yes. We would continue to follow this.*

This, from CIRHEPS treasurer and co-founder indicates that there is no perceived threat of a 'culture of suspicion' (O'Neill, 2002) within the organisation, and any management regime which has emerged out of the requirement to keep such documentation cannot be said to have been imposed upon CIRHEP as such. Thus, while there appears to be evidence of NGOs functioning as *active* subjects of the neoliberal development process. Yet despite these benefits, a familiar difficulty was highlighted.

Certainly, the number of reports required by an organisation with several funding contracts will be more than that of an NGO with one funder or one that takes up projects one at a time. It is at this intersection that CIRHEP's particular case opens up the possibility for original and inventive research. CIRHEP present an opportunity to study how these social actors accept and utilise professionalisation on several different fronts through varied documentation, training and credential requirements while being asked to 'tap into social, political and cultural skills that may advance their agendas but at the same time grease the wheels of ascendant neoliberalism' (Catz, 2005:229).

Interestingly, one issue that arose in discussions which has yet to be fully investigated was the use of language that is required within the documentation. In short, the vast majority of funding proposals, reports and accounts are required to be written in English. This makes a certain amount of sense as English remains the international tongue and, due to the fact that there are 22 national languages that have been recognised by the Constitution of India besides over 840 different dialects practiced throughout the country, English is the sub continent's second official language after Hindi (Government of India, 2010). This particular aspect of professionalisation presents two problems: first, because they come from the local area which is a marginalised rural district, many of CIRHEP's staff are unable to read or write in English. This both limits the number of people able to contribute to documentation and, to an extent, excludes a significant proportion of the staff from a central

aspect of 'professionalisation'. During observations I witnessed an element of unofficial internal hierarchy because of this and believe it warrants further exploration. Second, the involvement of the local communities in the management and maintenance of CIRHEP's many projects at the end of funding periods is a central aspect of jigsaw funding and in many ways can be seen to be the polestar of the structure's success. However, amongst rural farmers, land labourers and housewives in the Kadavakurichi reserved forest area, a competent, let alone fluent, English speaker is very hard to come by. As such, CIRHEP are required to translate documents into Tamil for locals in the Village Watershed Community, for example, to work from. This raises three additional questions in addition to the internal issues of the NGO: How much does time does this translation take up, how are documents selected for translation and what does it mean for local, supposedly 'empowered' communities to only receive a selection of documents that are deemed important enough to interpret by the NGO?

The issue of language aside, current or potential face-to-face interaction with funding agencies was identified in interviews as a prospective means by which NGOs and their funders could ease the reliance upon documentation, targets and most significantly funding proposals. Increased visits with beneficiaries would go some way in reducing the dependence of farming communities upon (English) written communication during funded periods (although, I admit this would not totally eliminate the problems of language barriers etc.). Likewise, the removal of even a small amount of administrative duties to 'the field' in the form of meetings with beneficiaries etc. would, based on answers in interview, boost the morale and job satisfaction of NGO staff while simultaneously sensitise funding agency executives and representatives to the all-important local and regional specificities in the project area while championing 'downward' accountability (something post-Washington neoliberal institutions would surely jump at the chance to do?) (Mawdsley et al., 2005:79). I noted that personal face-to-face interaction is a favoured method used by CIRHEP to manage their various contractual relationships.

Indeed, India is a country where, despite a burgeoning IT sector, personal interaction remains paramount. For instance, during participant observation I noted that approximately 80+% of professional communication was completed face-to-face or via mobile phone rather than email, faxes or letters. Interestingly, this point was noted by one Future Earth representative from Sweden while explaining why he saw communication as an invaluable tool of NGOs:

> *PHJ: In your opinion, how can an NGO give itself the best chance of securing funding?*

> *N: Through communication I think. I mean, they have to be able to communicate both what they want to do and what they are able to do...and then to keep up that communication during projects...before projects, during projects, and after projects. It comes back to what we talked about, where should we [Future Earth] have people like me? Where should they be? In Sweden, or here...? Even here I am still fascinated that India is known for its IT but internet and email are still not really the main way of communicating. The cell phone is everything. Everything is done through cell phone. It is only if you have to use email that you use it. As far as I understand, this is not at all the same situation in South America [the other major region that Future Earth works in] for example. They use email much more. As the culture in Sweden is to do all communication through email it can become a problem.'*

Issues such as this are surely indication that in this case increasing the level of personal interaction within the professionalisation process would not only be well suited to CIRHEP's jigsaw funding methods, but also play to the strengths and best working practice of those involved.

These findings would echo and expand Mawdsley et al's (2005) call to increase the number and quality of face-to-face visits between Southern NGOs and their Northern counterparts. It appears to be the case that in the specific contexts of both CIRHEP's jigsaw funding and patchwork professionalisation as well as the framework of communication within India itself, the 'devaluation of professional working practices and relations' through an 'over-reliance on documentation, targets and indicators' (Ibid:81) which are both outside the means of many local beneficiaries and stretching the time and resources of staff attempting to manage a revolving door of agencies and associated requirements, may be detrimental to more effective change.

Likewise, drawing on Lister's (1999:15) observation that 'the dominance of personal relations within the organisational relationships calls into question much of the theory currently being developed for NGOs in terms of capacity building, institutional strengthening, scaling up and diffusion of innovation, which all rely on organisational processes as the basis for change', it must be asked how CIRHEP's unique brand of professionalisation balances with their role as a authorised training body. Indeed, face-to-face interaction with other NGOs is seen as inherently positive by CIRHEP's staff and is regularly made possible through CIRHEP's role as a NABARD-sanctioned training centre. In my conversations and upon observing some CIRHEP training sessions it became apparent that staff utilised this interaction time as a two-way learning opportunity in which outside NGOs were able to come and learn from CIRHEP, while CIRHEP's staff were able to reap valuable tips, methods and information from them during discussion (including some examples of how to reduce office workloads). These interactions frequently develop into long-running beneficial personal and

professional relationships but perhaps raise questions for the CIRHEP's role in the 'good governance' agenda.

<u>Working together, training together</u>

CIRHEP's working relationships with funders are full of arbitration, contradiction, conciliation and collaboration, and have had some unforeseen results. In 2005, following four successful years working on NABARD-funded watershed development projects, CIRHEP were asked to train other NGOs from neighbouring states and districts in watershed management. They accepted and before long were conducting several training sessions per year. CIRHEP's management saw the need for infrastructure to support this work and they proposed the building of a training centre in the project area in order to accommodate visiting NGOs (for a nominal fee) and house the training itself. The centre would act as a headquarters for the NGO and provide enough additional space for an office and a small amount of farm land to create model organic farms. They approached NABARD with the ideas and requested funding to build the centre. This appeal was rejected, but an offer was made to pay for several NABARD-sponsored training sessions in advance in order to pay for some of the work. CIRHEP accepted and took the ideas to the local communities. After securing the remaining money and labour through bank loans and donations the centre was built.

With this infrastructure CIRHEP's role as a training centre has grown to the point where they now conduct approximately 15 sessions per year with visiting organisations and also travel to other NGOs' project areas in order to provide site-specific advice. They are now recognised as a 'resource supporting agency' by NABARD and the Tamil government and these duties take up a large proportion of their time. This role has affected the organisation's work in several ways:

First, through training, NGO-NGO interaction is greatly increased and has the ability to spread the word of CIRHEP's work (sometimes internationally) and has been known to secure more work. This interaction between NGOs also serves the role of a continually shifting forum to discuss ideas and funding possibilities while explaining problems and successes. When asked if the content of the training sessions were controlled by the funding agency that was supporting them, respondents were quick to respond that the reason they were the best people to train others is because of their personal experiences and successes and, as such, the funding agencies gave minimal instructions on what is to be taught. It can be seen that although potentially managerial neoliberal spaces are opened by CIRHEP's donors, CIRHEP avoid the hazards associated with taking on this type of role.

Through the increasing number of training sessions CIRHEP has created a sustainable fund to maintain the organisation's office, thus circumventing the problems of 'jigsaw funding' and

improving their standing in the eyes of their funders and their peers. One particularly startling finding during my interviews was how feasible it was for an NGO who has taken on this training role to scale-up its influence and 'work the spaces' on a much grander scale. The reasoning, as one senior member of staff told me, for CIRHEP's selection as a major NGO training centre is due to NABARD viewing them as a 'model agency' with the resource base and staff strength (meaning attributes not numbers) to roll-out their methods to others. However, because funders pay little attention to CIRHEP's other funding relationships and have a fairly narrow view of the work that CIRHEP does (namely, only the projects they pay them to do) they would seem to presume that when CIRHEP rain other organisations they are towing their line so to speak. In reality, the funder has effectively opened up a space for CIRHEP to disseminate their own 'alternative' development messages and get paid for it! In CIRHEP's case this was scaled up in the sense that in 2006 NABARD asked CIRHEP's secretary and founder, Mr Mohan, as a representative of CIRHEP to sit on the state-level steering committee. This lasted for two years, and in 2008 Mohan was asked, on behalf of CIRHEP, to take a seat on the central steering committee for all of India. In effect CIRHEP, alongside only two other NGOs, represented every NGO in India and were given a forum, or a 'space', to work.

By all accounts this opportunity was not wasted and CIRHEP set about lobbying for policy-level changes. Because CIRHEP's work is so intertwined with the environment there are often problems matching the deadlines of nature to the deadlines of the economy. For example, in India it was policy for local and national funding agencies to have 10% of the project cost for a particular initiative come directly to the NGO as a grant. The remaining 90% had to be channelled through the state government. This process was very slow and required much paperwork. In CIRHEP's case, their work is very much directed by the seasons. For example, if the check dams and field bunds of a watershed development programme are not in place before the monsoon rains arrive and the infrastructure is set up late it can mean waiting months before the project sees results . As a member of the central steering committee CIRHEP pushed for direct funding to be increased to 50%. Eventually this change was accepted and policy-level change was achieved. This, I believe, can be seen to be an example of an authorised critical voice that is able to stir governments to enact positive changes (Tandon, 2003).

Recipient and source

The vast majority of CIRHEP's staff were born and still reside in three or four small villages situated within five miles of the organisation's training centre and therefore live in the heart of CIRHEP's project area. When a position arises CIRHEP actively seek out applicants from the surrounding villages. I found that this was due to a blend of practical and ideological reasons, but comes with

difficult decisions to make and can leave staff feeling unsure of their attributes and standing. This proximity can be seen to impact CIRHEP's work in several ways:

Local people often possess valuable knowledge of the organisation's project area. For example, empathy was often cited as a useful tool with witch to mobilise the local people. What's more, rural India remains cripplingly hierarchical and, for want of a better label, 'tribal'. As such a local working for an NGO who wishes to sit with and consult a community will invariably fare better than an 'outsider' (which may constitute someone from as little as 45 minutes drive away[5]). Examples were given during interviews when beneficiaries who did not understand the changes or technical processes that CIRHEP introduced would berate staff members for 'wasting their land' or wasting their time. During these situations several staff said that the fact that they were local helped avoid or diffuse confrontation. This can be seen as a further reason for 'localising' the whole endeavour. From staff selection to participatory planning, through grounding the projects and their progress in the hearts and minds of the local communities ('envisioned by us, maintained by us and facilitated by members of our own community') CIRHEP open out the accountability and also build trust with those they are working with. This comes into play when, at the end of project funding - when the work is done but the maintenance must begin – CIRHEP hands over the projects to small committees made up of CIRHEP staff (voluntarily) and non-CIRHEP local representatives. This unity between staff and beneficiary shows itself to be a major support of the ever-changing jigsaw configuration.

When interviewed many members of staff spoke from the perspective of both the provider and beneficiary of CIRHEP's work. This perspective came repeatedly and without prompt and, as best I could tell, was an unconscious act. For example, when asked what reputation the organisation holds in the local community, one of the organisation's accountants subconsciously flipped between the use of terms 'us' and 'them' throughout his answer when referring to the local population. He was seemingly unaware that he was simultaneously adopting the standpoint of both recipient and source.

Similarly, staff frequently indicated that, because they and their families and friends live in the project area, they have a vested interest in the organisation's success. Qualities that originate from this sense of belonging, allegiance and commitment are believed to be that CIRHEP's staff are therefore uniquely placed to listen to and understand the local people and their context-specific needs and are consequently best placed to carry out the projects of national and international development agencies.

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[5] I shudder to think what that makes me.

In this vein CIRHEP appear to view themselves as 'middle-men' and also local representatives who broker the needs of the local population with funding bodies. However, this is where a another potential line of enquiry for my research emerges. This explanation on its own may be a little one-dimensional. In later interviews, and throughout participant observation exercises, CIRHEP's staff were seen to maintain their 'we are members of this community like you' stance while at the same time adopting the mantel of an 'expert' and/or 'professional' with particular abilities and knowledge that made them uniquely able to do the work that they do. They therefore elevated themselves above – or, at least, distancing themselves from – the marginalised communities they work with while presenting themselves as the same as those they were seeking to help. Again, I do not believe that this is a conscious act, but staff can certainly be argued to wear two types of hat and to use them – sometimes interchangeably, and occasionally at the same time – in order to grant themselves two types of credibility amongst CIRHEP's beneficiaries which in some ways leaves their role contradicting itself.

This can be seen to resonate with the existing literature that highlights the institutionalisation of development and the managerialisation of the non-governmental sector. CIRHEP as a case study holds to develop research that explores the ways in which expertise is personally constructed - both internally and externally – and why and in what circumstances actors consider themselves professional. Most importantly, following Jenkins' (2008:140) CIRHEP and their distinctive jigsaw funding structure appear to offer a unique example of how ongoing activism can be shaped by the increasing formalisation of civil society and the ways in which their atypical exposure to professionalisation allows them to challenge or comply with the dominant neoliberal development paradigm.

This self-presentation takes on further complexity if one takes into account the relationship and positionality of CIRHEP as a professional entity with funding agencies. CIRHEP present themselves as uniquely placed to understand and empathise with the marginalised communities, while also portraying the organisation as sufficiently experienced and well trained to carry out the work and produce the results that funders require. During interviews and participant observation I witnessed an uneasy balancing act within CIRHEP between these 'expert professional' and 'local with indigenous knowledge' roles.

Conversely, when applying for funding it is increasingly the case that agencies (via the pay scales they set) require 'technical' staff with qualifications for most projects, and they are to be paid more than other staff with different qualities. However, suitably qualified applicants are invariably found out of town. I found that this created a situation where NGO staff had widely different

understandings of what attributes a NGO worker should possess and what characteristics and traits they possessed that allowed them to do their job successfully. This parts somewhat from the usual discussion within professionalisation literature which focuses on acquiring (I'm reluctant to say 'achieving') and upholding professional status, and shifts focus towards the process of gaining professional status while maintaining 'local' standing, thus adding new avenues of enquiry to the study of formalised and managerial manifestations of professionalisation. For example, knowledge of the 'tensions generated within the contested process of professionalisation that are beginning to manifest themselves at the grassroots level' (Jenkins, 2008:144) can be expanded upon by adding extra dimensions to the reconceptualisation of the 'development expert'. In CIRHEP's case, the seemingly inherent tensions felt by staff in constructing their professional persona are potentially different depending upon which project they happen to work on. Different funders may cause staff to simultaneously situate themselves within their community whilst accessing and managing a range of specialist knowledge (Ibid: 146) in very different ways. This case is unique in that it is played out within a fractured and collated contractual framework in which policy is implemented on several different fronts.

Experience, local knowledge and qualifications

CIRHEP have a reasonable level of independence when hiring staff. However, due to the agricultural and environmental focus of their work, CIRHEP's initiatives and the projects they take on agencies require increasing levels of technical work. For that reason their funding bodies – such as the state-sponsored National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) - has it written into contracts that CIRHEP must employ, for example, a qualified agronomist, engineer and sociologist. The salary for these 'technical' staff and others that are needed for the project are set by the relevant funding agency. In doing so, they assign value to different capabilities. For example, NABARD would pay candidate with a degree in sociology more than an NGO worker that has twenty or thirty years experience in the field and/or has excellent local knowledge, thus indicating their predilection towards qualifications. Of course in reality it is not always this 'black and white'. A recent project saw this very situation arise. However, in this instance CIRHEP pushed to hire a local candidate with experience for the high salaried position and explained the case to NABARD. The local candidate was hired, but not without a laborious struggle with NABARD executives. What we see emerging here is a picture of what Nagar and Raju (2003) identify as the 'widespread co-option, professionalisation and internal hierarchies' that are increasingly present within NGOs. Here though may be an example of this professionalisation as a multi-scalar causal factor of the internal hierarchy.

Junior staff or staff already possessing academic qualifications were more likely to say that qualifications were the single most important prerequisite. However, throughout interviews, CIRHEP's management maintained that if they had to choose they would always opt for a combination of local knowledge and experience over qualifications while maintaining, despite some past experience, that funding agencies hold local knowledge in as high esteem as qualifications. This position was validated when speaking to the South Asian network coordinator for Future Earth - an international funding agency based in Sweden that supports several CIRHEP projects - who stated that,

> *'I think I would say local knowledge [is the most desirable quality]. But then you have to be able, or at least willing, to learn how to teach about whatever you want to develop or find the people who can do that for you, because if you don't have any content or anything to give then even if you understand the situation then it won't help. Without understanding the social situation in the area I think it can be very difficult to useful work'.*

Again, current staff, when given a choice of what would be most desirable for a prospective NGO worker out of qualifications, local knowledge and experience, frequently answered that a combination of qualifications and local knowledge is most desirable although the best balance between them seemed uncertain. It also came across during participant observation exercises and informal conversations that the idea of lots of experience is not consummate with either in their minds and certainly could not come before either of the other two. It can be seen from these perspectives that a number of staff in the non-governmental sector believe that academic or professional qualifications are key while, in reality, some funders would prefer the more traditional home-grown 'activist' who is open to training – that is, prepared to be professionalised. There appear to be some interesting divergences in what is supposed to be most desirable and because NGO staff are perhaps presuming that some funders would prefer qualifications they are actually perpetuating this assumption through their practices.

The questions that present themselves are: when left to their own devices how much influence has the diverse hiring preferences of their various funders affected the ways in which CIRHEP appoint staff, and what qualifications, attributes, traits and characteristics do existing and potential staff feel they need or possess in order to do the job?

Fascinatingly it is an abundance of all three that was cited as the route to success for an NGO as an organisation. For example, past successes teamed with good working relationships with both funders and beneficiaries were frequently cited as crucial elements in securing future contracts.

Perhaps then another question to ask is not which is better – if for no other reason than they are evidently not mutually-exclusive – but in what ways do professionalisation take place in this atypical context? I think other than the traditional 'funding contracts require NGOs to lose their activist edge because of red tape and bureaucracy' comments it would be productive to explore other routes of professionalisation that are appearing here, such as self-imposed or presumed professionalisation as well as professionalisation accrued through organisational (as opposed to individual) practices.

Some final thoughts

Although the purpose of this short paper is simply to highlight some potential avenues of further inquiry, I think it is possible (although perhaps not advisable) to forecast a number of emerging issues.

Rather than fitting the mould of NGO institutionalisation, CIRHEP at present perhaps better represent an 'independent thinking' NGO that, like the majority, must prioritise organisational financial survival. The distinction comes when we observe that they too use this incessant hunt for funds as an end rather than a means, but their 'end' is the increased organisational autonomy that their 'jigsaw' configuration allows them. It is worth noting that environmental and developmental concerns are relatively recent bedfellows and, as such, the funding scene is on the whole neither holistic nor well established. Several areas where debates are beginning to merge such as issues of rights and the environment have yet to be explored further in this project and therefore did not feature in this discussion. However, environmentally-centred NGO work does bring additional considerations to the professionalisation debate due to the high number of 'technical' activities and expertise required which are perhaps absent in other areas of civil society and therefore, in its infancy, presents as many potential benefits as it does drawbacks.

The 'ambivalence' towards constructing themselves as professionalised that is identified in other comparable spheres of civil society (Jenkins, 2008) is missing in CIRHEP's case and the tensions between positioning themselves as truly part of the community whilst acquiring practical experience and accumulated expertise are manifest throughout my interviews. That ''expertise' is widely assumed to exist outside of the communities targeted for development interventions' (Jenkins, 2008)is complicated by CIRHEPs unusual funding relationships and warrants further inquiry. This avenue has the potential to advance debates concerning organisational change, agency and

structure by way of Foucault and Bourdieu's notions of discourse and dialectical relationships which potentially upturn presuppositions of 'donor-created and donor-led' funding relationships.

Fascinatingly, the jigsaw funding structure implemented by CIRHEP can be seen to restrict the functionality of the office as funds are not always available from the short-term specific projects that they take up to maintain it. Coupled with the fact that many respondents valued the ability to complete documentation, monitoring and accountability via information management systems (providing it was in manageable quantities), it seems ironic that the primary location identified as the site of neoliberal domestification is somewhere that is in this situation fought for by the NGO and held back by the neoliberal funder.

CIRHEP offer an insightful and context-specific example of what Townsend et al. (2004:872) call 'a fluid, contradictory web of relations, simultaneously approved by the Word Bank for their supporting role in strengthening a neoliberal civil society, and ... making possible an "insurrection of subjugated knowledges" against neoliberal globalisation'.   However, in highlighting CIRHEP's use of 'jigsaw funding' and their susceptibility to 'patchwork professionalisation', they appear to fit less with Tvedt's (1998) 'donor created and donor driven' idea of the non-governmental sector and lean decidedly more towards multiple-donor driven and internally directed. In this sense they move beyond the commonplace picture of subcontractors delivering welfare on behalf of neoliberal development institutions and offer a attractive site-specific example of an until-now unrecognised collection of strategies that are employed – knowingly or not – to evade acquiescence and carefully balance resistance against survival (Townsend et al., 2004: 877). What CIRHEP exhibit is a new (although I do not believe that they originated the idea) 'buffering strategy' (Ebrahim, 2002) in which the collation of funding bodies serves to reduce their transparency albeit without any deception or dishonesty. In fact, far from wishing to 'deter probes into their work' this buffering strategy would appear to benefit from increased involvement – providing it is in person in order to make visible the activities that take place beyond the office.

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From Dependence to Empowerment and Back Again: Adopting the 'Magical Negro' in Participatory Development.

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Abstract

Popular participation is now a central component of worldwide social transformations. But the discursive meanings embedded in and drawn from this practice is rarely, if ever, subjected to analysis that questions its performativity. This paper takes participatory approaches to rural development as its focus to illustrate, by way of postcolonial theory, how the subaltern actors that take part in such activities and their relationships with the environment are discursively framed. It draws parallels with the cultural phenomenon of the 'magical negro' and outlines the ways in which portrayals of subaltern participation carry a resonance with the receiver that evokes the same sense of sentimentalism, (fabricated) authenticity and (magical) realism. In the case of participatory development this cultural essentialism serves to deplete agency and place indigenous knowledge in socially subservient positions, thereby counteracting the Freirean philosophy of transforming structures of subordination and the Marxist vision of self emancipation thus furthering the hegemonic stigmatization of low-income groups.

Introduction

> *'Perseus wore a magic cap so that the monsters he hunted down might not see him. We draw the magic cap down over our own eyes so as to deny that there are any monsters.*
>
> *Karl Marx,* Capital, Volume 1 *([1867] 1976:91)*

With its own political economy of extraction, processing and distribution, knowledge as produce – that is, the result of work or efforts – is routinely fashioned by power relations (Rademacher & Patel, 2002:169). When the 'raw materials' that constitute the knowledge in question are located within those at the periphery of almost every conceivable spectrum of global society, the implications are tenfold. The consequent susceptibility to mediation and representation requires that the institutional spaces created to 'hear' and 'give voice' to subaltern actors are afforded extra scrutiny. This paper employs a constructivist post-colonial approach to the politics of representation and examines the cultural depictions of

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marginalised 'developing' communities engaged in rural participatory development (PD) programmes within academic and mainstream development discourse.

PD is lauded by many as a transformative, democratizing and empowering operation that decentralizes authority whilst allowing effectual and efficient progress (   ). Equally some see it as little more than development's 'new clothes' (Hintjens, 1999), an 'act of faith'; something to be believed in but seldom challenged (Cleaver, 1999; 597). Others have critiqued the very theory of participation for its capacity to systematically entrench inequality under the guise of subaltern agency (Mosse, 2001; Kothari, 2001). It is not my intention to question the theoretical or technical attributes of participation and power, or to add to the already bloated catalogue of work that explores participation from a purely operational perspective. Rather, this paper interrogates the performativity of the discourse surrounding it.

I begin by outlining the widespread adoption of participation and the ways in which it has made an almost seamless migration from the periphery of development to the heart of both northern academic enquiry and the neoliberal agenda in the majority world[2]. This is shift that has cemented the theory, rhetoric and legitimacy of participation within the wider vernacular of development as presented to the publics of the global North. Next, I brave my own 'descent into discourse' (Crush, 1995:6) to draw attention to the power, limits and scope of the dialogue surrounding development, highlighting its propensity to reproduce western hegemonic power structures through the formation of an 'us and them' dichotomy with significant material ramifications for the wider development schema. I then draw attention to historical representations of Africans and those of African descent within the western film industry and highlight the ways in which the creation and promotion of racial stereotypes enables and in many cases encourages comparable dichotomies to those found within development. Subsequently I introduce the stereotype of the 'magical negro', one almost entirely neglected in media studies circles and, until now, wholly absent from the study of development but one that provides a useful lens through which to consider wider 'development encounters'. By way of conclusion, using examples from international development policy and promotional literature as well as contemporary academic research papers, I propose that the dominant narrative surrounding PD schemes creates its own 'magical negroes' that fulfil the same role as the original 'magical negro'; it presents a classic colonial discourse in serving to deplete subaltern agency and place indigenous knowledge in socially subservient positions.

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[2] Throughout this paper I use the terms 'global South' (as a loose geographical distinction) and 'majority world' (to acknowledge the fact that the countries considered 'underdeveloped' are home to some 80 per cent of the world's population) (Rigg, 2007:3). Although neither is usefully uniform or permanent in its implied meanings, to an extent, these terms circumvent the customary difficulties of binaries such as 'developed/developing', 'core/periphery' and the now-obsolete 'First world/Third world'.

Challenging the culture of silence: adopting participation

The last two decades have seen it become increasingly difficult to disconnect the notion of 'participation' from the popular theory and practice of 'development'. The communion of these spheres was, however, borne out of opposition. For early proponents of participation traditional conceptions of development offered little more than an patriarchal 'project'-based benevolence in which development is viewed in terms of an ever-changing socio-economic modernity and, therefore, requires the 'developed' to continually 'develop' the 'developing'. This system was seen as western-centric and cripplingly disempowering. It prompted observers such as Paolo Freire amongst others to endorse community involvement in research and the development process itself.

PD enjoyed a rapid ascent to prominence. The publication of Robert Chambers' *Rural Development: Putting People First* (1983) and Michael Cernea's *Putting People First: Sociological Variables in Rural Development* (1985) are frequently cited as momentous in introducing participation to mainstream academic and practitioner development circles. The texts readdressed the technocratic and ethnocentric presumptions which characterised externally-applied rural development programmes and found willing audiences in academia where a growing disenchantment with the wider development project had stimulated a renewed dialogue on human agency (McGee, 2002:95). Likewise, as critics began questioning the very legitimacy of the global institutions at the helm of development's latest phase, representatives of the organizations conceded that the top-down model was too narrow and 'banker driven', requiring development itself to be recast as responsive, empowering and, above all, inclusionary (Craig & Porter, 2006:4).

Whilst this can be seen as the unifying first ripple in the wave that was the PD movement, participation in a development context still can't be said to enjoy an agreed definition. Some view it as solely functional citing its efficiency and thoroughness in producing results in research and planning (   ). Others adhere to its revolutionary potential in enabling truly equitable social change (   ). Nonetheless, every conception relies upon an underlying sensitivity to power and inequality. For Freire, Chambers and countless others since the process of *conscientisation,* in which educators and learners (or, in the case of development, benefactors/researchers and in-country stakeholders) are brought into a mutual and equal dialogue, allows those usually subjugated by traditional power structures to observe the world and their position within it through a critical lens. PD 'constitutes a challenge to the culture of silence' because only through acknowledging and understanding a state of dependency can one overcome it (Närman, 2006:99).

For early proponents, the ways in which knowledge was traditionally created and harvested and the accompanying assumptions that habitually underpinned them (often based on a dangerous blend of misunderstanding and preconception, and informed by 'stereotypical views of subaltern communities' circumstances and capabilities') required a substantial overhaul if subaltern agency was ever to be realised and dependency be repealed (Parnwell, 2006, 74-75). By tapping 'a wealth of knowledge, and a validity of insight, which the

outsider lacks' (Chambers, 2008:71) many consider the learning process at the centre of participatory interactions as a much-needed challenge to the, externally-defined western-centric valuation of knowledge. Particular focus was given to participatory research with rural communities and, more specifically, those attached to agrarian ways of life where the most potential for increased community inclusion was seen. For one, it presented the largest deficit. Likewise, 'indigenous' societies are often seen to have amassed a broad and site-specific understanding of natural resource management stemming from generations of practical experience and, as is often argued, offer a positive counterbalance to the often-abstract prototypal knowledge base of outside 'experts' (Mahiri, 1998:528). The persistence of this line of thought ensures that applications of participatory principles in the majority world remain prominent within environmentally-centred development initiatives and secure participation's place as a mainstay in rural developmental enquiry.

Of course, participation has been taken up and implemented in different ways by different proponents over time. Following a long period of obscurity, participatory research took the occasion to 'come in from the cold' (Hall, 2005) provided by a changing intellectual climate and has since multiplied into a plethora of approaches designed toharness the knowledge of subaltern communities and readdress the hierarchical relationships customarily found in traditional forms of 'extractive' research (Kindon et al., 2007a:1). Action research was an early successor. Designed to be 'developed and tested by practical interventions and action', it lacked the full inclusion (and therefore empowerment) of participants within the research process itself (Kindon et al., 2007b:10-11). Focussing more on 'local knowledges' and utilising diagramming, dialogue, mapping, ranking and collective action to allow those involved to communicate their knowledge using their own cultural terms and signifiers, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) proved popular alternatives to large-scale development surveys. Once adopted by minority world institutions and combined with features of action research, these approaches became mainstays of the social sciences (Ibid: 17).

Change has also been dramatic within global development institutions. The World Bank for instance has altered its focus from a stress upon the alterations needed in its internal systems to better allow stakeholder involvement, to allowing those traditionally seen as 'beneficiaries' to take part in the planning and implementation of projects affecting their own lives. This included offering the first distinction between 'low-intensity participation' (consultation etc.) and 'higher-intensity', 'empowering' participation (management and control over projects); the division of 'primary' and 'secondary' stakeholders (direct beneficiaries and more marginal stakeholders or supporters respectively), and perhaps the first notion of a power-relations perspective on development itself outside of academia (McGee, 2002:97; see also: Bhatnagar & Williams, 1992; World Bank, 1994 and World Bank, 1995).

The participatory turn in development thinking, or 'New Orthodoxy', involved the mainstream acceptance of a series of ideals that originally represented a radical call to arms but must now serve international policy interests. Undoubtedly one of the major drivers in participation's acceptance was a simple matter of efficiency. Present-day focuses upon

'greater productivity at lower cost' are repeatedly cited as greasing the wheals of its induction into the wider development arena (Mosse, 2001: 17). Likewise, some argue that participation's rapid espousal signified its compatibility with the neoliberal agenda and consequent depoliticization (Craig & Porter, 2006: 4; Williams, 2004:92). It is also instructive to highlight an emerging mass of southern-based NGOs during these years that were keen to highlight their proximity to subaltern communities as a means of emphasising their unique organizational attributes and therefore championed the use of participatory techniques (Edwards, 2008:39). All of this, combined with an instrumental tide of Freirean theory in academia, contributed to a warm reception within wider development circles.

One of the defining features of the 'New Orthodoxy' is that its advocates recurrently define themselves in opposition to past strategies (Henkel & Stirrat, 2001:170). Therefore, the current institutional commitment to participation, and the shift from prioritising 'expert' western knowledge to a concern for the 'indigenous knowledges' of those being 'developed' or 'researched' calls for justification, and thus submerges the subaltern actors that take part in such activities and their 'knowledge', that is, who they are, what they know and why it's worth listening to them, into the murky pool of development discourse. While participation in one guise or another has an eighty-year legacy within development thinking (Hickey & Mohan, 2004:19), its adoption by the wider development project signifies a new era in which decentralized micro-governance and individualized indigenous knowledge-based solutions must now be justified, given value and administered by the world's development agencies and academics and entered into the lexicon of development discourse to be delivered to the minority world.

Development discourse, power and the production of the subaltern

To create or adopt policy 'is necessarily to *imagine* it, to *speak* and *write* about it, to *discuss* and *debate* it, and to *see* it implemented (or to be *seen* to be implementing it)' leaving that policy semiotically mediated by the insertion of particular images, languages and rhetorics (Kapoor, 2008: 19, original italics). In this context two chiefly northern systems are central in the semiotic mediation of PD: The first is development's 'public faces' (Smith and Yanacopulos, 2004). That is, the multifaceted channels by which development, and therefore 'the developing world', is communicated visualised and expressed to a range of non-specialized northern publics. These include, but are not limited to: 'international development NGOs, government departments, fair trade companies, development education centres, schools, volunteering agencies and media corporations' (Ibid:657). The second is the written and spoken research output of academics in the global North. This includes scholarly journals, books, university courses and conference presentations. These two interrelated channels - which will hereafter be referred to as the 'minority faces of development' –

comprise the *diachronically cumulative*[3] discursive practice of disseminating development and in doing so allow it to function as a discourse. It is through these channels that a large proportion of the academy and metropolitan public of the minority world are introduced to and engage with development, the 'developing' world and those within.

At its core, development revolves around ideology and the production and transmission of policy and discourses (Power, 2003:169). But even this relationship centres on another: one of knowledge and power. Despite their own evolution from European (specifically French) sociological theory (Paolini, 1997), postcolonial critiques supply a way of problematising the all-to-often unacknowledged and western-centred assumptions of power, culture and society at the heart of development and its discourse. By analysing the historical production of the majority world and those that inhabit it, instructive parallels are drawn with contemporary discourses of development which allow a more critical interaction with the power it exerts.

Discourse, or, the 'historically, socially and institutionally specific structure of representations or articulations through which meanings are constructed, and social practices are organized' (Baaz, 2005:11) is central to the processes that create weakened, dependent and voiceless majority world publics (Said, 1978). The ability to (re)present other peoples and places through studying, labelling and constructing accounts has long played a central role in both colonial and development discourse. It has fuelled a homogenising sense of difference and distance between the minority and majority worlds easily translated into a sense of superiority over those being represented and, simultaneously, a validation of intervention (McEwan, 2009:131). As practitioners and academics continue to map and manage life in the aggregate (Sylvester, forthcoming) the accounts constructed are often reduced to data or 'basic needs' creating overtly simplified characterisations.

Yet the way in which 'typing' functions within cultural production is as revealing as the stereotypes that are selected (Malik, 2010:446). For example, the culturally-reductionist accounts of an unknown 'other' – both abundant within and indispensable to colonial and development dialogue – are, in reality, reflections of the producer of those depictions (Said, 1978). That is to say, in order to present a binary image (the Other), one must offer a control image with which it contrasts. To break this down: contrast can only materialize by establishing that which is 'normal'. Within this coupling, the Other routinely represents the (undesirable) deviation. Consequently, the relational construction of difference is innately hierarchical. This leads to an 'ironic' aspiration on the part of the North to reform and make recognisable the deviant while retaining some level of distinction in order to sustain the need for colonial (read: developmental) intervention (Bhabha, 2004:122). However, 'mimicry' and the paradoxical dualities that such presentations create also illustrates the vulnerability of the discourse's hegemony. 'Coeval statements of belief' - the foundation for colonial (read: development) culture and, subsequently, colonial (ditto) power – which are both the same and contrary – link equal and yet opposite narratives in which the understanding of one is created

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[3] Meaning, they 'resonate, refer to one another and overlap, rendering their hegemony more and more difficult to dislodge, in part because it relies for its power on gaps and silences in knowledge and memory that it produces and reproduces'. See: Biccum, 2010:83.

by the perception of the other. For example, colonialism was justified as a civilising mission to making the colonized more like the colonizers. Yet its existence relied upon the contrary, that the Other remained different and requiring intervention. Equally, development requires that inequality endures for 'development' to take place, thus generating a perpetual *ambivalence* (Bhabha, 2004). The requisite interdependence, Bhabha (Ibid) argues, in which the two narratives are able overlap or 'touch in contingency', 'produces a moment of anxiety articulated in the discourse as the *uncanny:* a moment when the staging of the narratives as narrative becomes discernable' which is prevalent in development discourse (Biccum, 2010:42).

The minority faces of development, like their colonial forerunners, have a long history of utilizing 'metaphors, images, allusion, fantasy and rhetoric' to present a 'developing world' to their audiences. This world is quite unlike reality (McEwan, 2009:121; Crush, 1995) and serves to exacerbate misrepresentation, intensify binary distinction and fuel reforming interventions. This has direct relevance and, some would argue, greater implications for development as not only is its discourse, in the vein of colonial literature, concerned with depicting and delivering a 'world' of culturally-diverse people to the North, but its very being results from an evolutionary construction of such people and their lives as backward and inadequate (Baaz, 2005:42) thus doubling the inherent hierarchy. This modern day 'Manichean allegory' (JanMohamed, 1985:60) that both divides and orders is, therefore, development discourse's default position.

This silencing blow of 'epistemic violence' (Spivak, 1988:281), reminds us that we cannot encounter the subaltern (and the discourse that presents them) without viewing them through a lens cluttered with the preconceived notions that 'development' is built upon. Indeed, the possession of power affords the ability to fabricate reality and, in the case of development, power-centred and institutionalized relationships such as those between development 'professionals' or northern researchers and their corresponding 'developing' communities can determine how the subaltern[4] are portrayed with considerable material consequences (Escobar, 1995:162). Power (2003:170) argues for an increased understanding of the *spatiality of power and discourse in development.* That is to say, he recognises that crude formulaic images of Southern alterity repeatedly sited in the representational script of development 'obscure the structural forces which produce [the] very geographies of inequality and unevenness'. To this I would add that while one set of structural forces are obscured, another set is created. Within this the latter fortifies the former. Thus, the ways in which subaltern actors are presented within discourse should be central to any discussion of development.

The dissemination of development is, then, reliant upon power and representation and, by its very conception, cannot cope with complexity or specificity (McEwan, 2009:146).The perception of the global South as distinct, different and the 'other' continues to receive authorisation and permeate mainstream development dialogue precisely because a

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[4] The Gramscian label 'subaltern' – a derivative of alterity or 'difference' – can itself be read as an example of discursive rendering.

'developed' northern control image is, for most writers, the starting point of inquiry. This can be observed throughout development and its discursive history and serves the same operational purpose as in colonial literature: a 'legitimation of material relations of exploitation', which is equally fundamental and contradictory to its functioning (Biccum, 2010: 42-43).

'Race', power and the formation of meaning: the black face on the big screen

As we have seen, the identification of variation is a significant component in the formation of meaning, and binary oppositions are one way in which variation can be recognized and organized. The notion of binary opposition and Otherness is, of course, not exclusive to discourses of development or colonialism. Both concepts are central to the understanding of media representations of 'race'[5]. In this context the concept of the Other is promoted to a discursively-influential ideological signifier as it is employed to impress, rather than negotiate, meaning (Ferguson: 1998:68). Once this negotiation of meaning has been consigned, the media society that in many ways defines the minority world is able to supply templates of what it means to be female or male, powerful or powerless and, indeed, black or white. These templates shape thinking and behaviour while dictating identity and informing much of what is known about the Other (Vera & Gordon, 2003:8). Thus they produce and uphold social norms. In the media, like development and despite the fact that they are not equal partners, the Other's binary companion is habitually the white global North (Ferguson, 1998:67). As such images of blackness present the archetypical contrast and, therefore, the model Other. Again, like development, when invoked in relation to culture, this Othering necessitates the essentialising of the object and frequently attributes characteristics to externally-defined groups that are portrayed as innate and eternal (Ferguson, 1998:68-69).

Black people occupy a unique position in the history of 'race' and representation and, accordingly, the 'image hierarchy' (Ross, 1996: xviii) of the minority world's mass media. To take the western film industry as an example, from the advent of commercial motion pictures fabricated and simplistic 'racial' imagery has fuelled northern narratives. This imagery has a direct lineage to the 'narrow and derogatory repertoire' of 'racial' stereotypes that have been formed and reused over decades. They offer a 'seductive' shorthand for observers, speedily invoking a 'type' whose features and traits are in some way ''known' to the audience through their experience of a shared cultural code' (Ibid:4). Early films established such shorthand using the culturally-simplistic and socially-underdeveloped preconceptions of black societies already held in Northern consumer culture. For example, three of Thomas A. Edison's early peepshow films, *Pickaninnies* (1894)*, Negro Dancers* (1895) and *Dancing Darkies* (1897), attracted strong audiences through the use of exotic,

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[5] Like Ferguson (1998) I am cautious of complacency surrounding a largely intangible term such as 'race' and reluctant to contribute to its normalisation in discourse. As such I will use the word in inverted commas throughout this paper as a reminder of its wider implications.

vivacious, and mysterious depictions of blacks (Ross, 1996:4) built on little more than colonial storytelling.

The turn of the century brought the cinematic debut of America's first black film character: a long-standing typecast in the form of Uncle Tom. Like Edison's peepshows, Edwin S. Porter's twelve minute adaption of the Harriet Beecher Stowe novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) portrayed an unknown white actor in the role of the black lead (Bogle, 1994:3). Uncle Tom's arrival provided the first example of a socially acceptable black character while retaining the inferiority that made him palatable to northern audiences (Bogle, 1994:4).

While it would be several more years and many more appearances before the 'blacked-up' dancing fool became passé, stereotypical black images multiplied. Early twentieth century films, drawing on vaudeville and popular minstrel shows and compensating for a lack of sound, portrayed larger-than-life black characters devoid of humanity that offered simple - often childlike - comic, exotic, foolish, unreliable, clumsy-yet-rhythmic and intermittently criminal black typecasts to Northern audiences (Leab, 1975:13-14).

These misrepresentations included the 'coon', laconically summarised by the Ferris State University Museum of Racist memorabilia as 'a lazy, easily frightened, chronically idle, inarticulate buffoon' (Pilgrim, 2000) and the child-like 'sambo'. Soon after came the 'mammy', a 'blindingly constant surrogate mother neglectful of herself and her own family when it comes to 'missy' and the rest of massa's family' (Ibid: 15) and many more. 'Blacking up' was a widespread practice in the early twentieth century popular culture and allowed the subsequent production line of 'coons', 'mulattos', 'mammys' and 'bucks' to take on an extra degrading appearance. Sharing an inheritance that had developed with the slave trade, these depictions all portrayed some degree of lowliness and inadequacy.

The cannon of black typecasts welcomed a new addition following the premier of D. W. Griffith's path breaking *Birth of a Nation* (1915). *Birth of a Nation* was the first feature-length studio production and pioneered fundamental codes of narrative in film while producing a full line-up of black typecasts for international audiences (Smith, 1998:90). The film is attributed with cementing a future for false and negative black representations in the mass media (Ibid: 91) and gave viewers the first glimpse of the 'brutal black buck' – a 'subhuman and feral' character 'out to raise havoc' and whose aggression and fury white audiences could assume 'served as an outlet for a man who was sexually repressed' (Bogle, 1994:13). With this, every key black cinematic pigeonhole had been created and introduced to the minority world which, over the following decades, would be deployed under a variety of themes and guises. All of which recycled and veiled the same handful of grossly-essentialized characters (Ibid: 17).

More than thirty years would pass before any significant change would occur in the portrayal and function of the black image. Following attempts to encourage national unity during World War Two and demands for more 'positive' black characters during the civil rights

liberalism of the 1950s and 1960s, a turn can be identified beginning with subtle-yet-noteworthy changes such as showing black men in (predominantly white) crowd scenes and the – albeit asymmetrical – 'racial' companionship of black and white actors onscreen. The black characters that made the transition from the wretched freeman or comic Negro to more outwardly-constructive protagonists that have since earned the label 'ebony saints' or loyal sidekicks' are epitomised in depictions such as Dooley Wilson's 'Sam' in *Cassablanca* (1942) and Sidney Poitier's Noah Cullen in 1958's *The Defiant Ones* (Leab, 1975). Through their moderate education, conservative dress and proper use of English, the 'ebony saint' or 'Noble Negro', still devoid of mature characterisation, was a tame and non-threatening enough to 'meet the standards' of his or her white audience and offered comfortable continuations of the docile Uncle Tom typecast content in serving 'massa' (Bogle, 1994:175).

In reply to this thinly veiled repackaging of normative stereotypes and following the near-collapse of the film industry in the late 1960s as well as growing black nationalist impulses, a surge of 'blaxploitation' films – movies 'centred on black narratives [featuring] black casts playing out various action-adventures in the ghetto...shaped with the 'exploitation' strategies Hollywood routinely uses to make the majority of its films' – filled the big screen throughout the 1970s (Guerrero, 1993:69; Lawrence, 2008). Aimed at harnessing growing African American audiences, these films featured increasingly assertive and multidimensional black characters, 'with a frequency that could almost be called reasonable' and a consciousness of social and political reality (Bogle, 1994:234). Christened 'Superspades' and epitomised in Richard Rowntree's lead role in *Shaft* (1971), such characters were marked by aggressive confrontations with racism while retaining the untamed and almost sub-human demeanour of Edison's Pikaninnies (Ibid: 234). The portrayal of triumphant, 'hip' black leads in uncommonly authentic settings was a hit. Nonetheless, this period is noted for its resourceful methods of repackaging the devaluation of black characters as well as its rapid reversal to traditional narratives and typecasts once the financial uncertainty surrounding Hollywood had abated (Guerrero, 1993:70).

For the most part, the black cinema image was in recession by the mid-1980s. Despite Eddie Murphy becoming Hollywood's top draw (Ibid: 114), black actors and storylines were increasingly marginalised and reunited with the racial reductions of Hollywood's past while. Conversely, the 1990s, again prompted by financial uncertainty required Hollywood's black 'reserve audience' to take the strain (Guerrero, 1994: 164). This heralded a 'utopian reversal' (Entman & Rokecki, 2001) in the depiction of blacks in mainstream media. Race was no longer taboo and black characters were given roles equal or superior to their white counterparts and situated in a world of 'multicultural fantasy' (Willis, 1997:50) in which 'anything can happen, where difference is the rule and where difference always appears as novelty" (Ibid:51). In the true spirit of utopia however, this shift was, for many, too good to be true.

In this disavowal – to acknowledge while simultaneously denying – of difference we are confronted by Bhabha's (2004) perpetual ambivalence. Through mimicry black characters occupy an uncomfortable position which is 'the same, but not quite'. As Thomas Cripps atones, the black image produced for Northern audiences is an ambivalent one in which black audiences have 'absorbed American culture, but could not be expected to be absorbed by it' (cited in Modleski, 1999:322). The black cinema image of last twenty years has been dominated by narratives that produce interracial utopias while conveying new forms of subordination within the parameters of past racial stereotypes. One such example is that of the much-neglected 'magical negro'.

Introducing the 'magical negro'

Despite receiving negligible attention within academia and the popular press, a definition of the 'magical negro' is largely agreed to be a central (although secondary) black stock character within a predominantly white narrative that, regardless of a lack of education and lowly position in life, assists the uncultured, lost or broken white protagonist(s) to succeed, using spiritual wisdom, earthly mysticism and, sometimes literally, magical powers. Notable examples include 'John Coffey' in *The Green Mile* (1999); 'Calypso' in the second and third *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2006 & 2007) movies; 'Oda Mae Brown' in *Ghost* (1990) and almost every character played by the actor Morgan Freeman. A number of defining characteristics can be identified and several authors[6] have compiled lists of conventions and defining traits. They are synthesised below with examples from popular films before the perceived and actual functionalities of this trope are elaborated upon.

'Magical negros' regularly occupy primarily service roles and assume a lower socio-economic status (occasionally manifesting itself as a mental or physical disability) in relation to the white protagonists (Glenn & Cunningham, 2007:144; Hughey, 2009). In *Bruce Almighty* (2003) for instance, 'God' is played by Morgan Freeman. While, a black actor playing a god would appear to be a progressive and somewhat empowering decision (which in some limited ways, as I will explain later, it is), we are originally introduced to Freeman's character as a janitor in a large derelict office block and he soon after appears as both an electrician and homeless man. Freeman also played 'Hoke Colburn', an out of work chauffer, in 1989's *Driving Miss Daisy,* 'Eddie "Scrap Iron" Dupris' a washed-up former boxer and caretaker in Clint Eastwod's *Million Dollar Baby* (2005) and 'Carter Chambers', a blue-collar mechanic in *The Bucket List* (2007). Likewise, in *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), Vance is an unemployed golf caddie willing to work for five dollars and a pair of old shoes (unwanted by the white protagonist) while both 'Thommy Johnson' and 'Blind Seer' in *O Brother Where Art Thou* (2000) portray an unemployed hitch-hiker and blind push-car operator respectively (Hughey, 2009:556).

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[6] Primarily Hughey, 2009 and Glenn & Cunningham, 2007, supported by Colombe, 2002; Okorafor-Mbachu, 2004 and Kempley, 2003.

Once the 'magical negro' has been introduced the audience soon finds that these characters harbour a paradoxical capacity in the form of spiritual gifts, earthly mysticism or primordial magic. *Ghost's* 'Oda Mae Brown' for instance is a spiritual medium with the ability to hear the dead; *The Pirates of the Caribbean's* 'Calypso', played by Naomie Harris is a sea goddess with startling otherworldly power and 'Rufus' played by Chris Rock in *Dogma* (1999) is 'the thirteenth apostle' back from the spirit world with the celestial ability to read minds.

In this vein, 'magical negroes' repeatedly display wisdom - sometimes referred to as 'folk wisdom' and usually derived from a heightened spirituality, long-standing relationship with or closeness to the earth. These qualities are unavailable to the white protagonist. 'Magical negroes' frequently use this ability to provide counsel and guidance to their struggling white counterparts. For instance the viewer is led to believe that 'Neo' in *The Matrix* Trilogy (1999 & 2003) would never realise his destiny to become 'the one' was it not for receiving the regular wisdom of 'The Oracle' – a black, ageing housewife(?) – in her dilapidated high-rise apartment building. In the same way, Whoopi Goldberg's rendering of 'Guinian' in the Star Trek films *Generations* (1994) and *Nemesis* (2002) exists only to provide spiritual counsel and worldly guidance to a troubled 'Jean-Luc Picard'. It should be noted that within the 'magical negro' stereotype this advice and knowledge is regularly presented as sagacity, insight or discernment, that is, a deep almost practical understanding, as opposed to intellectual cognition (Entman & Rojeki, 2001; Glenn & Cunningham, 2007; Hughey, 2009) and serves to reinforce the characters mysticism.

Assistance is regularly offered to confer moral lessons or in some way 'enlighten' the white leading role, usually with the purpose of encouraging them to cast-off materialism. Throughout *Bruce Almighty* Freeman's divine omniscient and omnipotent character can be seen to have no greater purpose than to assist the white protagonist to be a better person. Through giving the central white character all of his heavenly powers, 'God' seemingly wants no more than for Bruce, a dead beat white television reporter played by Jim Carey, than to learn humility and unselfishness (Glenn & Cunningham, 2007:144). In *The Green Mile* (1999), the character 'John Coffey', a huge African-American death row inmate with learning difficulties, uses his paranormal powers to cure and assist the white characters around him. Coffey, heals the white protagonist's urine infection, and later in the film, is taken to cure the prison warden's wife of cancer. However, it should be noted that the white prison guards at no point consult him or consider Coffey when plotting to use his powers (Glenn & Cunningham, 2007:144). Coffey then goes on to deliver his moral message,

'...as the film reaches its end, Paul [Edgecomb] and the other prison guards are nearing the scheduled execution of ... John Coffey. While engineering the escape of Coffey would not be beyond the realm of possibility...they decide to follow through with the execution...[and] Coffey is transformed into the classic "white Man's Burden" in which Edgecomb's benevolent paternalism is able to free (murder) Coffey and then release (condemn) Coffey to the death penalty. Rather than inviting a collective distaste for Edgecomb, the audience is left

feeling that he has learned a valuable moral lesson, and that he has in fact repaid Coffey for the assistance that was given to him'. (Hughey, 2009: 564).

While folk wisdom is rarely omitted, occasionally 'magical negroes' do not actually have magical powers. Sometimes they simply appear to because they materialize from nowhere with an incomprehensible wish to right the world and vanish just as quickly, their screen time habitually increasing and decreasing with the needs of the white lead. (Hayden et al. 2007). The rapid integration of the 'magical negro' into the life of the white protagonist is perhaps best illustrated in the films *Dogma, O Brother Where Art Thou* and *Holy Man* (1998): Dogma's 'Rufus' literally plummets completely naked, from the sky; a lonesome 'Blind Seer' rolls in on a railway line from a hazy horizon and in *Holy Man* 'G', played by Eddie Murphy, is found wandering along a Miami expressway. Their origins remain bizarre and 'otherworldly' (Colombe, 2002).

This peculiarity is often accentuated by a complete lack of back-story or life history for the character. Again, to use the example of 'G', he is noted in the film as having 'no history, no social security number, no driver's licence, voter's registration [or] birth certificate' (cited in Hughey, 2009:560) while 'John Coffey's' obscurity is likened to 'dropping out of the sky' (Ibid: 146). We know nothing of the interior lives of 'Rufus', 'The Oracle', 'Oda Mae Brown', 'Bagger Vance' and numerous other 'magical negroes' aside from those details necessary for them to fulfil their one-dimensional role. Their sole purpose and only opportunity for character development is to make right the lives of white people and provide moral teachings based exclusively on their worldly wisdom and spiritual insight. Even then, the goal is to allow the white protagonist to unleash his or her own abilities with any other character traits developed along the way relegated to secondary. What's more, these relationships are frequently the 'magical negro's' only connections within the narrative and are, typically, one-way (Glenn & Cunningham, 2007: 145). As filmmaker Todd Boyd (quoted in Kempley, 2003) notes, '...Pawns ['magical negroes'] help white people figure out what's going wrong and fix it'.

Without these one-way relationships a further convention of the 'magical negro' as plot device could not materialize: The 'magical negro' is often the only black character (or one of very few) in a cinematic landscape dominated by whites. Yet despite the their social and economically subordinate state, and because the white protagonist's dilemma features as the focus of 'magical negro' films, characters in this role seldom use their attributes for any other reason than to assist others – although this is usually restricted to the white male lead – and not to emancipate themselves.

This is well demonstrated in Neil LaBute's *Nurse Betty* (2000). The film's 'magical negro' an ageing hit man named 'Charlie' – again, Morgan Freeman – is endowed with astute intuition and perception. Nonetheless, and despite using his wisdom to dispense guidance to the films white protagonist 'Betty', 'Charlie' and his son are killed because of his decision to travel to Los Angeles to support her (Glenn & Cunningham, 2007:146). Similarly, in Lawrence Fishbourne's appearance in *The Matrix* (1999), 'Morpheus', in the face of his own

superhuman abilities and wisdom – the character is named after the Greek god of dreams - is unable to save himself from the overtly white 'Agents' and becomes a disempowered victim needing to be saved from the Neo, the white protagonist played by Keanu Reeves 'Morpheus' himself trained. Indeed, *'...even though Reeves seems like an ungrateful, useless, vapid schlub, and he [Morpheus] has powers that no one else can match, [they] essentially only get used to help a white boy find himself"* (Hayden et al., 2007).

Wishful thinking: the role of the 'Magical Negro'

In an echo of Spivak's (1988: 297) 'white men saving brown women from brown men', Colombe (2002), highlighting the curious relationship at the heart of this growing trope, notes that the film industry of the minority world is continually devising 'new ways for brown folks to help less-brown ones...' and relies on 'the same old pile of guilty white hopes' to do so. Without doubt, the extension of the 'racially' subservient stereotypes of cinema's past are evident in 'magical negro' movies from the outset. Drawing on the, 'loyal servant', 'Mammy' and Uncle Tom characterisations, 'magical negroes' present a black man or woman with impressive strength of will that has come from nothing and is (sometimes naively) happy to forego their own comfort or wellbeing in order to secure the same for their white counterpart (Okorafor-Mbachu, 2004; Glenn & Cunningham, 2007:148). This invokes the customary stereotype of blacks as simple and unsophisticated and furthers it in suggesting a longing for a life of servitude while guaranteeing the white man/woman's position (Hughey, 2009: 556).

The 'magical negro' is bounded by a discourse of 'lack', failure, poverty, powerlessness and, above all, subordination. In depicting 'magical negroes' as uneducated and/or occupying the lower rungs of society, writers and directors place these unusually powerful black characters in a familiar context for white audiences, thus lending 'authenticity' to their position (Hughey, 2009:556) and sustaining traditional racially prejudiced paradigms while offering agreeable depictions of a troubled hierarchy (Colombe, 2002). The use of race relations as a focal point is both intentional and functional. 'Magical Negroes' are more than a caricature; they are also a plot device employed by writers and directors to navigate around this hierarchical 'elephant in the room'. The 'embattled status quo' between whites and blacks in the global North – particularly the United States – is built upon an image of backs as unsafe or dangerous. Black characters are thus recurrently portrayed as 'reassuringly disarmed' and black-white relations as healed or healing (Colombe, 2002).

Outwardly the 'magical negro' offers the viewer substantiation that unequal race relations are a thing of the past. After all, prominent black characters are written into exalted positions and act as powerful agents of change allowing the white protagonist(s) to fight or, indeed, to *see*, the good fight (Colombe, 2002). Perhaps 'magical negroes' draw on the convention of the superior virtue of the oppressed? If so their saintly status and higher merits only ever allow them to share *equal* standing with the otherwise middling white leads (Hicks, 2003). Cultural critic Ariel Dorfman (cited in Kempley, 2003) suggests that the 'magical negro' is a

contrivance used by writers and directors to avoid confrontation and proposes that through the black character helping the white character it can be shown that the former would like to uphold the existing societal relations. As Hughey (2009: 556-557) attests,

'The interracial cooperation between broken whites and ['magical negroes'] with exceptionally safe and happy attributes may appear progressive to some. If they are, then the concurrently represent a desire for audiences to solve interracial tensions via individual acts of black servitude, rather than through a rearrangement of racialized social structures or the contestation of dominant racial narratives'

There are some aspects of this typecasting that do signify a slow progression towards black acceptance and inclusion while indicating a willingness on the part of dominant white majorities to incorporate new perspectives into their lives in order to work together for a common goal (Glenn & Cunningham, 2007: 149). Many of the films referenced above go some way in circumventing traditional conceptions of white virtuousness and foreground race-relations in a positive light (Hughey, 2009: 553). Morgan Freeman's career has in itself fortified the visibility of black actors in mainstream film, and his recurring portrayals of wise and morally superior characters[7] – arguably climaxing in his casting as 'God' – have worked towards offering a counter-discourse to the traditional cinematic representations of people of African descent.

Still, 'magical negroes' provide conflicting images of blacks in the minds of whites. In limiting the assistance of the black characters to spiritual wisdom and earthly practicality and disregarding their cerebral abilities suggests a lack of full acceptance (Glenn & Cunningham, 2007:149) it is the limited and temporary nature of these interactions which reveals the true level to which white writers, directors and, ultimately, audiences perceive the value of this inclusion to be. What's more, the fact that 'magical negroes' are often devoid of purpose when not assisting the white characters shows black characters, despite their abilities, to rely on whites for direction. Here they exist to supply moral healing and redemption to their white counterparts. They advance the proposal that social ills can be remedied through individualistic solutions and rather than highlighting cultural or social answers to inequality advise 'bootstraps' resolutions that will likely appeal to (temporarily) broken and deposed whites (Hughey, 2009:562).

In line with traditional 'racial' categorization, the people of the global South are seen as more primal than those of the North (more so the darker the skin tone) and are, therefore, believed to be more in tune with the earth and all of the mystic and spiritual powers that this entails (Okorafor-Mbachu, 2004). The dispension of 'folk wisdom' by 'Magical negroes' is then an extension of these grossly generalized stereotypes to Africans or people of African descent.

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[7] Time and scope permitting, I would be interested in considering Freeman's repeated use as narrator in the films in which he appears and many in which he doesn't. The use of his dignified and steadfast southern brogue as an almost omniscient presence guiding the viewer through the narrative can be argued to act as the next generation of 'Magical Negro' one in which the partnership between white underachiever and black mystic is replaced (or perhaps embellished) with one between the viewer and narrator respectively. In doing so the manufactured race relations are given a new level of 'authenticity'.

Eighteenth Century colonial thought first delivered the 'noble savage' stereotype to describe the 'primitave' inhabitants of the global South as in harmony with nature, munificent, uncomplicated, detached from materialism and replete with moral courage (   ). 'magical negroes' are afforded the right to speak with authority on matters of spirualility, emotion and therefore morality because they are seen as offering an alternative to more material readings of life (Hughey, 2009:559) formed through a life of adversity and hardship (Gabbard, cited in Hughey, 2009: 559). These castings, presented within unproblematic relationships with whites, serve to displace the uncomfortable realities of history into something more agreeable, or at least familiar, and are always most effective when cultural, social and racial structures remain unspoken (Hughey, 2009:550).

The historical vacuum in which 'magical negros' are created and presented is also worth highlighting. A contextual abstraction allows 'magical negroes' to 'orbit above the history of white supremacy' because a de-contextualized black anger cannot rationally exist (Robinson, cited in Kempley, 2003). In line with this, the portrayal of 'magical negroes' as somehow culturally deficient, self-destructive or, at the very least, self-neglectful is a powerful tool in further obscuring the larger structural factors such as discrimination or a lack of healthcare that actually debar them from conformity with whiteness (Hughey, 2009: 557). In turn, authors identify a set of 'pathologies' (a child-like manner, a lack of mental capacity, laziness etc.) that become irreducibly paired to the black 'Other' (Ibid).

Correlated to this lack of history is the often abrupt fashion in which 'magical negroes' are introduced and then removed from a narrative with little or no explanation of their origins or destination. One effect that this peculiar lack of character development has is the emphasis it lays on the transitory and provisional nature of blacks within narratives dominated by white normativity (Hughey, 2009:559). Indeed, any character with a legitimate and genuine position would have little reason to be shown entering and leaving with such stark distinction while their partnership is framed as different and extraordinary. 'Magical negroes' are used as a counterweight to the white screen presence and their amalgamation of supernatural abilities and closeness to the earth endows the character with ability to guide the white protagonist back to primacy while completing their previously-deficient character. Incorporating a reading of Abdul JanMohamed's conceptualisation of the 'fetishization of the Other', Hughey (2009:561) likens this unilateral relationship to a 'use-value commodity' for white characters' salvation and attributes the magical attributes of the black character to an underlying fetishistic necessity on the part of white directors and writers to counteract the fact that they are stripping black characters of cultural, social and political capacities.

Colombe (2002) asks what allows so many white Hollywood writers to 'know' this typecast and why there is such a desire to produce a black character that is 'magical, in control (to a limited extent), and temporary'? Within this relationship the white protagonists all begin as failing or, at the very least, hopelessly average. Their past mistakes dictate their lowly position and, with the introduction of the 'magical negro', their 'former chattel' (Colombe, 2002) reinstates them to an admired position of cultural authority while concurrently shifting that person away from that which is coded as non-white (Hughey, 2009:566). In doing so,

having been rendered 'useful', the 'magical negro' is established as safe. Some observers suggest a form of syncretic motivation here, that is a 'historically conditioned longing for interracial harmony' (Shohat & Stam, 1994:236), and the selfless, desexualised, a-historical black character that the viewer can feel good about feeling good about (Colombe, 2002) is certainly able to provide it. However, perhaps a more plausible rationale can be found in Hughey's (2009:561) invocation of Marx and the metaphorical 'magical cap', seen in the epigraph of this paper, and JanMohamed's identification of a 'magical essence'. Together, they describe an extreme form of fetishization in which the colonial (read: cinematic/developmental) eye reduces all the specificity and differences of the Other down to the supernatural '...which blinds us from the uncomfortable realization that such films reproduce white supremacy'.

Utilizing Lewis' (2004) classification of 'hegemonic whiteness', - that is, a collective white cultural monopolisation of that which is considered 'normal' which subsequently forms the ideal – it can be seen how, no matter what context the film is situated in, the belief is entrenched that certain forms of whiteness are dominant and an answer is given to the highly questionable legitimacy of white primacy, thus fortifying it (Hughey, 2009:566). All told, the abilities and insights of 'magical negroes' are repeatedly absorbed by someone else's focus, stereotypes remain unquestioned, white authority is unaffected and the 'messy particulars' such as where the character came from, how she/he got that way and where they go next are left unrequited which, in all, secures of the white position (Colombe, 2002).

Through the 'magical negro' and the trope's apparent reversal of existing power relations it is possible that the film industry that serves the minority world has created a contemporary, entertaining and lucrative means of alleviating the white guilt that is held in the existing unequal society (Glenn & Cunningham, 2007: 150). The manufacture of a relationship in which the moral and spiritual superiority of blacks is unavailable to – yet concurrently indispensable to – whites may likewise construct the belief that blacks possess the ability to change the society and improve their status, but are unable to discern how to use their own abilities (Glenn & Cunningham, 2007, 150).

The crux of the 'magical negro' typecast is 'race' and difference. The films in which they appear demonstrate the subordination of a minority figure while apparently presenting the empowerment of one (Okorafor-Mbachu, 2004). They are at once overtly positive yet latently prejudiced and resound the expectations of those that consume it – expectations conceived within the logic of the 'new [non-racist] racism' (Bonilla-Silva, 2002:60; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Hughey, 2006; Hughey, 2009:544). Through this, and building upon the motif of redemption and salvation, a 'normative climate' of white supremacy is both fostered and reinforced 'whereby whiteness is always worthy of being saved, and strong depictions of blackness are acceptable so long as they serve white identities' (Hughey, 2009:548). Despite the fact that the two-dimensional 'magical negroes' are often the 'stars' of the films in which they appear (think: 'John Coffey', 'Bagger Vance', 'G', 'Hoke Colburn'), it is recurrently the white leading role, incorporating all of the complexities and subtleties of modern society, upon which the narrative centres (Hughey, 2009: 570).

Uncovering development's 'Magical Negro'

The position of subaltern communities involved in PD projects mirrors that of the 'magical negro'. This is evident in the following underlining themes of PD discourse:

- Since the advent of PD subaltern publics have been granted increasing 'screen time' in the international development arena by its minority faces. Like the black Other in film, these individuals and communities are now increasingly *portrayed* as capable and in command of the development agenda and are on their way (if they are not already viewed, as they are by some) as significant, influential and equal actors within the international development process.

- In countless agency reports and scholarly journal articles the subaltern participants 'fall from the sky'. That is, they experience a sudden and rapid integration into the 'narrative' (read: article, report etc.). Following their 'participation' they, like the many 'magical negroes' before them, disappear back into anonymity. They walk of into the sunset.

- This is augmented by positioning these actors in an a-historical vacuum. As in the case of 'Bagger Vance', 'John Coffey' and 'the Oracle', we are told nothing of their interior lives or history and we receive little, if any, sense of the larger structural forces that have led to their 'underdevelopment' and marginalisation. And, again, like the 'magical negro', the subaltern's relationship with PD's northern 'protagonists' is their only or main relationship and their visibility or 'screen time' increases or decreases with the needs of the northern partners. We know no other details other than those required to complete their one-dimensional role. The only opportunity to escape this is and attain some 'character development' is through interaction with the northern 'experts'.

- As such they cannot be seen as any more than a temporary or partial feature in the development process. Because their integration into development is as an 'event' – a remarkable or provisional feature in the wider mission – it is necessary for them to be 'introduced'.

- At this moment it is necessary for them to be narratively rendered 'okay'. In the case of the 'magical negro', before they can take their place as the wise aides to the white protagonist, these characters must be identified as accommodating, helpful and offering a solution to the white dilemma (Colombe, 2002).. Customarily, around this time the white lead is given the opportunity to be shown as open minded and just through their acknowledgement of the 'magical negroes'' merits. Likewise, the participating subaltern communities must be discursively 'Okayed'.

- This momentous inclusion is repeatedly positioned as the final piece of the puzzle or the redeeming factor of the international development project broadly writ. Indeed the chief catalyst of the structural reform that development undertook over the past three decades was the view that development was failing and that the 'voices of the poor' were indispensable to its true success. Through their exposure in this light,

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participants are identified as the solution to the North's dilemma. The scope of this assistance is however narrow and is usually restricted to natural knowledge.

- The understanding of subaltern contributors to PD schemes is frequently cited as valuable due to the 'closeness' to natural systems that they are perceived to possess and is linked to a alleged (and in many cases desired) material detachment. Their insights into natural resource management, farming systems or agroecosystem management are consistently framed in terms of a practical primordial understanding and rarely, if ever, as intellectual cognition. If the communities in question are presented as being in possession of both of these 'types' of knowledge it is the former that is harnessed while the latter, it is inferred, is inferior or merely equal to that of the Northern counterparts and is therefore disregarded.

- In contemporary accounts, where the power balances between Northern 'experts' and 'developing' communities are often emphasized, this positioning presents two sets of experts: the Northern partners as the authority on 'technical' or academic matters and the Southern subaltern partners as the authority on 'indigenous', practical and time-honoured knowledges and/or practices. In many cases the two sets of understanding are presented as exclusive to their respective groups – hence the need for partnership.

- This earthly understanding is time and again depicted as innate to these groups and is evident in a number of terms that have gained currency in the recent era of participation such as 'common knowledge'.

- This goes hand-in-hand with the allied belief and associated stereotyping of subaltern communities as simple, uncomplicated and leading unsophisticated and simple lives – 'stickmen'.

- Of course, as in the case of the 'magical negro's' predicament, despite these inimitable and valuable traits, the subaltern cannot help themselves out of poverty alone, only as part of a collaborative process with northern 'experts'.

- Subaltern contributors to PD projects are repeatedly publicized as happy to help and willingly involved in the collaborative process. In many cases this is taken a step further (more closely resembling 'John Coffey's' unidirectional relationship with his white prison guards) and the readiness to participate is presumed while never being explicitly discussed or openly requested.

- Like the 'magical negro', the gifts of the 'developing' communities are offset as they are discursively rendered 'disabled' (be that economically, socially, culturally or even physiologically). This provides a 'labour of representation' in which their placement lends an authenticity to their relatively recent placement in the development project: they retain their subordinate state despite their 'empowerment' and the marginalizing discourse of development is upheld.

- Paradoxically, this in turn fuelled many of the underlying principles behind their inclusion: having endured the hardships of poverty we should listen to them. This

'ambivalence' is also that which fuels the inclusion of the 'magical negro' in cinematic narratives.

- In such a position, the status of the subaltern is just as effortlessly' transmuted into an abstract moral signifier' for the North as the status of the 'magical negro' was for the white protagonists.

- Despite the fact that on the outside the subaltern participants are the 'stars' of PD, their northern counterparts remain what is understood to be 'normal'. By participating, the subaltern move away from traditional traits associated with them and in so doing, aspire to the normative ideals.

N.B. There are more.

Conclusion: Colour Blind 'Racism', Black and White Redemption

The discourse of PD has created a 'world' of 'magical negros'. To clarify, while black Africans are perhaps the first to come to mind when envisioning 'Third World' poverty, I understand the concept of the 'magical negro', when employed in relation to international development, to encompass people of all skin tones and 'races'. That is, to use the label in the context of development is to indicate anyone that inhabits the majority world (perhaps in this context the 'Other World' may be a more fitting moniker) depicted with the aforementioned defining traits that finds themselves economically disadvantaged, socially marginalised and culturally debarred.

In their production of PD, the minority faces of development have established and sanctioned the equality and dignity of the subaltern. However, this is done through the consumption of culturally-reductionist stereotypes which, as we have seen, present a route directly back to dependence. PD discourse marks the subject with the racist practices and dialogue of colonial culture and in doing so enacts the same subjectification (Bhabha, 2004:108). If colonial racism is a question of visibility then the visibility afforded to subaltern actors in the Majority World by PD offers a contemporary continuation of the asymmetrical colonial relationships of the past and results in a subaltern that cannot speak even when purportedly asked to do so (Spivak, 1988:272). They are thus dependant upon the North to represent them.

Entman and Rojecki (cited in Glenn & Cunningham, 2007:136) call the position that blacks inhabit in contemporary northern film – somewhere between acceptance (as they take on increasingly prominent and powerful roles) and rejection (due to a residual sense of superiority on the part of whites) – 'liminality'. This is defined as the 'unsettled status of blacks in the eyes of those that produce dominant culture and of those who consume it' (Ibid). Like black and white relations the depictions projected by the discourse and images that surround associations between subaltern communities and their minority world counterparts in PD are used to draw conclusions about the relationships in question.

Through employing the cinematic plot device of the 'magical negro' as a lens through which to study subaltern communities and the ways in which they are discursively rendered by the minority faces of development it can be seen that such communities also comprise a liminal status. As such, the relationships inherent in PD between marginalised southern communities and northern academics and practitioners is perceived as beneficial and concurrently reinforces the luminal status.

Like many white communities in Europe and North America, the general publics of the global North as a whole can be said to have nominal understanding of blacks or 'developing' communities respectively. Their understanding is drawn from the presentations they consume. Because both sets of relationships portray a harmonious affiliation, this can easily be taken to be reality.

In Morrison's (1992, cited in Colombe, 2002) catalogue of linguistic strategies regularly utilized in literature to essentialize black characters several can be applied to both the 'magical negro' and subaltern communities involved in rural PD programmes. These include the 'economy of stereotype' or the free and easy use of stereotypes; 'metonymic displacement' 'which works to suggest much about a given character, delivers little and counts on the readers [read: consumers] complicity in the displacement' (Colombe, 2002); 'metaphysical condensation' where characteristics and features (particularly physical) are presented as universal, and the use of a 'dehistoricizing allegory', a narrative approach that disregards uncomfortable or inconvenient historical truths from the story.

Following Gooding-Williams' (2006:18) reading of race representations in the films of Thomas Cripps, I wish to suggest that the discourse surrounding PD offers little more than a *recoding* of postcolonial Othering in a developmental context. Where PD advocates assert a shift in consciousness towards a language of transformative potential I, like Gooding-Williams (Ibid) and his classic films, interpret it as a revaluation of difference that reinscribes subordination and renders the subaltern dependant once again.

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