Transnational development networks:

bringing development and postcolonial approaches into dialogue

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Abstract

This paper explores some of the ways in which a dialogue between development and postcolonial scholarship might contribute to the theorising of transnational networks in contemporary development. It does so through consideration of three inter-related themes: epistemologies, spatialities and ethico-politics. The discussion of epistemologies points to the potential benefit in reworking the analysis of the relationship between structure and agency in networks, whereas the discussion of spatialities focuses attention on the interface between the global and the local. Dialogue between development and postcolonial approaches also creates space for considering the politics and ethics of transnational development networks. In particular, this discussion prompts challenges around how to ethically research subaltern knowledge in transnational development networks, including how to trace the translation and redeployment of subaltern knowledge through networks. Consideration of theses themes highlights not just overlaps and disjunctures between development and postcolonial approaches, but opportunities for further dialogue and future research on transnational development networks. To illustrate the points made in the paper, examples are drawn from Slum / Shack Dwellers International (SDI), a transnational network of civil society organisations working with urban poverty.

Keywords: development, postcolonialism, epistemologies, spatialities, ethico-politics, Slum / Shack Dwellers International.

Introduction

This paper will explore how dialogue between development and postcolonial scholarship might contribute to the theorising of transnational networks in contemporary development. It does so both in the context of the increasingly important role that transnational networks are playing in development, and in the context of an awareness among development geographers of the need to engage with the nature and role of these networks. The paper is organised around three themes through which dialogue might take place: epistemologies, spatialities, and ethico-politics. These three inter-related themes are not exhaustive of the possibilities for dialogue; the aim is that the conversation highlighted here will point to just some of the ways in which development and postcolonial geographers might more effectively theorise the role of transnational development networks.

I choose these three themes because of their centrality to the study of transnational development networks. Epistemology refers to the objects and methods of analysis deployed in development or postcolonial research on transnational networks. I will argue that at a general level development approaches could benefit from the more expansive notion of agency and power in postcolonial scholarship, and that postcolonial approaches could benefit from the greater alertness in development scholarship of the structuring role of resources and institutions in the creation and maintenance of networks. A concern with spatialities is important because it speaks to some of the central dilemmas in development geography today, and in particular to the relationship between the

'global' and the 'local'. Development geography's approach to transnational networks has generally been to deploy a scalar vocabulary of local through to global. There is often a concern with how people or organisations 'jump' scales in order to further their objectives. There is room here to develop new spatial vocabularies of transnational development networks, and one route for doing so involves dialogue with postcolonial approaches. In particular, the postcolonial focus on tracing the geographies of circulation and translation of practices, objects (such as documents), knowledges, and representations, could reveal more about how transnational development networks are made and structured.

Finally, the consideration of ethical and political issues is designed to show that neither transnational development networks nor the ways in which we research them are neutral; there are important political and ethical considerations at stake and consequences to engage with. Often, accounts of the politics of knowledge in development studies fail to adequately address how subaltern knowledge is translated and used in development strategies, and it is here that perhaps the most central contribution of postcolonial scholarship to the ethico-politics of transnational development networks is found. This dialogue, then, hopes to contribute to recent attempts to develop a critical approach to theorising transnational development networks, which are often conceived in mainstream development literature as technical and apolitical (Henry *et al*, 2004). Following an introduction to transnational development networks, the paper will be structured around treating these three themes in sequential order.

There is a growing body of work in geography and elsewhere highlighting the productive possibilities of dialogue between development and postcolonial scholarship (see, for example, Blunt and McEwan, 2002; McEwan, 2001; Sylvester, 1999). The impetus for this wide-ranging dialogue has been prompted by the growing recognition that these two sets of perspectives and approaches have something to offer one another. While there are certainly overlaps between development and postcolonial scholarship – perhaps particularly in the concern with the material influences of knowledge, discourses and ideas – many have referred to a divide characterised by postcolonialism's concern with the historical, textual and cultural, against development's concern with global inequalities and political economy. I hope to show in this paper that bringing into dialogue the particular epistemological, spatial and ethico-political inflections that circulate development and postcolonial scholarship on transnational networks, can contribute to the theorising of these networks in a variety of ways.

In order to illustrate the points made in the paper, I will draw on the case study of Slum / Shack Dwellers International (SDI). SDI is a network of civil society organisations working with urban poverty and spanning 12 countries throughout Asia and Africa. It is a learning network based around a structure of 'horizontal exchanges'. These exchanges involve small groups of the urban poor travelling from one urban settlement to another to share knowledge in what amounts to an informal learning process. SDI espouses a range of techniques that its leaders describe as indispensable to a development process driven by the urban poor. These include daily savings schemes, exhibitions of model house and toilet

blocks, the enumeration of poor people's settlements, training programmes of exchanges, and a variety of other tactics, some of which will be expanded on in the paper. I will use the experience of researching SDI as a basis to reflect on development and postcolonial approaches to transnational networks. Moreover, I would suggest that researching networks like SDI, and the transnational development networks that SDI members become involved in, demands that development and postcolonial perspectives be brought together. For example, if we are to understand the political impacts locally or internationally of SDI as a network organised around the exchange of knowledge, discourses and ideas, then there is a need to consider how subaltern knowledge circulates and is translated within and outwith the network. This requires an understanding of the terms through which subaltern knowledge is produced, and to not consider well established debates in postcolonial studies in this area would undermine such a task.

Transnational development networks

There is a long-standing and varied research agenda considering the role of the transnational in development, from work on colonialism or studies of multinational corporations and transnational media (for example, Blaikie, 1985), to calls for the ethnographic study of the networks of relationship through which place and development interventions are constituted (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). More recently there have been concerns with migration flows, alternative trade networks (Carr, *et al*, 2000), the circulation of knowledge and ideas (Perreault, 2001; Stone, 2003), and transnational development networks. This emerging

literature can also be distinguished by a concern not just with how actors are influenced by networks, but how they make use of networks to further their own objectives and strategies, whether in advocacy, livelihoods, or local negotiations (Patel and Mitlin, 2001). There is a growing recognition among development geographers that transnational networks play an increasingly important role in contemporary development (Bebbington, 2003; Kearney, 2000; Power, 2003; Simon, 2003), and are part of "the more general case of place reconstitution through various forms of transnational network" (Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001: 375). Following Bebbington (2003), transnational development networks are flows of ideas, resources and activities that play a role in development initiatives and projects. These are networks in which "people, ideas and resources circulate and in which material interventions in particular locations are conceptualised and executed" (Bebbington, 2003: 300). They are constituted by the relationship between institutions, practices, and knowledge; different forms and alignments of these create different kinds of networks and development interventions. Bebbington (2001), for instance, is concerned with how livelihood transitions in highland Ecuador and Bolivia are understood in terms of links between families, peasant organisations and transnational corporate, non-governmental and solidarity trade networks. The constitution of transnational development networks, then, can be wide-ranging, although the presence of certain kinds of organisations in these networks, such as NGOs, has become increasingly prominent. For instance, the number of funds channelled and rechannelled though NGOs in the 1980s and 1990s was enormous, and now exceeds the total annual disbursements through the International Monetary Fund and World Bank (Pieterse, 1998: 346).

There is a wide-ranging literature in the social sciences around networks, both as a metaphor used to describe political, economic and social formations, and as form of organisation (for overviews, see Barry, 2001; Thompson, 2003). Networks can be single-purpose, as in a particular development project or policy negotiation, or multipurpose, perhaps involving a wide collection of government agencies or campaigning objectives. Networks may be formed and maintained explicitly as networks, as in the World Bank's Global Development Network (Stone, 2003), or may be formed through new encounters and associations around particular actors, whether they are people, organisations, or documents (such as the policy statement of an international or state institution). In a recent paper on networks, Henry, Mohan and Yanacoplous point out that there is little theoretical work on networks in development literature despite their becoming something of a "hallmark of the development industry" (2004: 839)[i]. They explain the attraction of the network form for development actors:

Networks are a strategic response to the challenges and opportunities facilitated by the globalisation of capital and by technological changes, particularly the expansion of information and communication technologies (ICTs). In comparison to other relationships between organisations they have the potential to provide a more flexible, flat and non-hierarchical means of exchange and interaction which promises to be more innovative, responsive and dynamic, while overcoming spatial separation and providing scale economies.

However, they point out that there is little critical reflection on the notion of network among its proponents in development. In particular, they are concerned with the ability of networks to democratise development by 'empowering' the

marginalized. Examining networks as both structures and actors, they critically explore "how networks as developmental actors shape structures and the context of development" (2004: 841). Henry *et al* (2004: 246) go on to argue that there is a need for future research to "critically examine the effectiveness of networks as development actors and how effectiveness is defined in these networks and by whom". Their paper contests the notion that networks are non-hierarchical, and points to the need to take the role of power as it functions in networks seriously. This may include attention to, for instance, actor-network theory (Law and Hassard, 1999) or governmentality. Michael Merlingen (2002: 370), for example, argues that the conception of power emerging from debates around governmentality can reveal the often forgotten ways in which power operates in transnational networks. Governmentality is an approach that conceives power neither as "a property or capacity of IGOs [International Governmental Organisations] (material power) nor as a property of the social structures in which IGOs are embedded (normative power)". Rather, power is diffuse, microphysical, circulatory, and productive (of particular notions of how states, civil societies, and individuals should behave).

Henry *et al* (2004) also contest the notion that networks are based on shared values or straightforward consensus, drawing attention to the production of particular discursive agendas in networks (see, for instance, Hajer, 1995). We might, for example, point to the role of documents like the World Bank's World Development Reports as important actors in the production of influential discourses in networks. As a metaphor and as a technology, networks are never neutral. Assessing their utility involves examining what they do and do not

reveal, as well as what they do and do not do. Particular ideas, values, or solidarities – often inflected with particular patterns of funding (Bebbington, 2004) - can come to structure the nature of networks and any development intervention that results from them. This paper will seek to develop some of these issues by highlighting potential areas of dialogue between development and postcolonial approaches to transnational networks. It will build on Henry *et al's* 2004) critical approach to networks by exploring particular areas where dialogue might take place in ways that can lead to a stronger understanding of the nature and implications of networks. At stake here are the implications of the often uncritical ways in which network as a technology of intervention is deployed by mainstream development agents, including most notably the World Bank (Stone, 2003). In each section, the example of SDI is used to illustrate the claims made. In the next section – epistemologies – the paper considers the kinds of objects and methods of analysis that development and postcolonial approaches provoke in relation to transnational networks.

Epistemologies: reworking structure and agency

Research on transnational networks in development geography has focussed on the relationship between donors, states, NGOs, and communities, and is often concerned with the distribution of resources in these networks and the influences of these networks both in terms of policy and practice. This has involved attention to a variety of issues, including transnational funding agendas, such as those concerned with 'participation', 'gender', or 'social capital' (Harriss, 2002; Boas and McNeill, 2004), the disputes between different sectors and scales in the

conception and implementation of development initiatives and interventions, the strategies of different actors, and the forms of policy and practice that result. Much of this work has explored, for instance, state-led development programmes that have involved local organisations and international donors (Jenkins, 2002; Sanyal and Mukhija, 2001), the relationship between donors or states and NGOs (Bebbington *et al*, 2002; Mawdsley *et al*, 2002), the politics of transnational social movements and globalised resistance (Parnwell and Rigg, 2001; Routledge, 2001), global policy convergences and divergences (Desai and Imrie, 1998), the development implications of global commodity chains (Hughes, 2001; Gwynne, 2003), and networks produced through and for ICTs (Unwin, 2004; Mercer, 2004). Other work has explored local resistance and livelihood strategies (for example, see entries in Peet and Watts, 1996), including 'transnational livelihood' strategies that span areas in the 'North' and 'South' (Batterbury, 2001). The objects of analysis in these various research threads tend to be split between an analytic focus on agencies and institutions on the one hand, and smaller scale individual and collective development strategies on the other (Bebbington, 2003). The methods deployed often involve ethnographic research, and in particular interviews, as well as, for example, analysis of claims made by states or international agencies (Robson and Willis, 1997). More recently, methods have been extended to, for example, the use of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) (more later).

Transnational networks, then, are explored in relation to questions of structure (for instance, through the influence of state policy or donor resources) and agency (for instance, the abilities of local civil society organisations to influence

change). The emphasis is generally laid on structural influences, such as the role of state or donor agencies in creating and controlling networks around particular issues. In terms of SDI, this broad epistemological framing of the objects and methods of analysis encourages a focus on the relationship between donors, states, NGOs and communities in the network. It raises questions around, for example, the ability of local communities in SDI to influence state policy or practice around housing or sanitation (Mohapatra, 2003), or around whether donors – such as Homeless International, the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID), or the World Bank - are setting the agenda of the various SDI members.

By contrast, postcolonial work on transnational networks has tended to focus on, for instance, colonial policy and practices, slavery, diasporas, migration, or identity (see, for instance, Chatterjee, 1993; Bhabha, 1990). This reflects postcolonialism's epistemological focus on cultural and historical geographies, and on tracing the cultural legacies of colonialism in particular (Blunt and McEwan, 2002). In this broad-ranging work, the objects of analysis have included, for example, the circulation of documents and representations, or the production and circulation of ideas, knowledge and values, such as colonial metropolitan senses of moral responsibility (Lester, 2002). The objects of analysis have also extended to, for instance, attempts to uncover the lived experiences of actors within colonial or postcolonial networks (Kothari, forthcoming), and the different forms of consciousness and agency that are produced in part through networks and that can, in turn, refigure networks (Power, 2003). A variety of methods have been used in analysing networks,

from reading archives against the grain to uncover agency or resistance (McEwan, 2001), or exploring personal testimony (Kothari, forthcoming), to more general efforts to situate knowledge and remain alert to difference within networks without descent into an ostensibly 'neutral' cultural relativism or a disconnected or romanticised localism (McEwan, 2003; Briggs and Sharp, 2004). As I will go on to discuss below, this approach encourages a pluralisation of agency that is alert to the role of organisations of individuals but also to the complex relation of human and non-human actors. Bringing into dialogue the epistemological approaches of development and postcolonial scholarship to transnational networks, then, discloses new ways of considering how 'structure' and 'agency' are produced and interact in networks like SDI.

SDI and enumeration: disclosing agency

This broad epistemological foci of postcolonial approaches to transnational networks casts new light on the constitution and reproduction of SDI as a network, encouraging a consideration, of, for example, the role of representations, documents, values, agency, or lived experience. To take the example of agency and SDI, we might consider the role of enumeration strategies in the constitution of SDI networks. Enumeration is a strategy of knowledge creation in SDI, creating populations and creating territories. In enumerations, groups of the urban poor organise slum populations into clusters, map the clusters, and collect data about these clusters based on household information ranging from number of occupants and the presence of ration cards, to migration patterns and costs of transport to work. Documents are produced around

statistics, charts, tables and graphs that help create a basis for authority to certain claims, in particular through its status as quantitative knowledge that speaks the language of the state. The data is aimed at influencing negotiations with authorities, who often cite, for instance, a lack of data on the number of people in settlements, length of stay in settlements, health care and education provision, employment, and so on, as information difficult to get to through state censuses. These data gaps often inform prejudices about the poor - such as the notion that they do not work, or that they are highly transitory - that often help justify slum demolition or political inaction.

Enumeration documents, then, are particular representations of the poor that seek to tackle more dominant conceptions of slum dwellers in SDI member cities like Mumbai, India (McFarlane, 2004). This speaks to the interest in postcolonial work in disclosing the material and immaterial effects of representations (Blunt and McEwan, 2002). There has been a general impetus in this line of inquiry in destabilising epistemological assumptions, including processes of 'worlding' (Spivak, 1990: 114), which involves investigation of how representations and the power relations within which they are embedded are not esoteric, but rather enter into the constitution of the world. Enumerations are also attempts in SDI to reposition the urban poor as skilled and capable of taking part in their own development, reflecting a frustration in SDI with the role of the state in poverty reduction and a commitment to self-organising local co-operatives. As Bell (2002) has pointed out, drawing on the work of Said (1978, 1984, 1993) in this field, postcolonial work has revealed the role of power in transnational networks, for instance in the ways in which particular representations take precedence over

others.   One question, then, is around the extent to which representations produced through enumerations play both a constitutive role in SDI networks and influence local mainstream imaginative geographies and conceptions of the poor in the various cities in which SDI work (Gregory, 1995). Aside from the wide-ranging postcolonial work on the census as a feature of colonial governmentality (Appaduarai, 1996; Prakash, 1999; Joyce, 2003), a postcolonial approach would be alert to the agency of documents themselves in the constitution of SDI networks (see, for example, Blunt, 2000, on the diaries of British women in colonial India).

Through international exchanges in SDI, enumeration strategies have travelled, creating the potential for SDI groups to learn from one another's experiences in conducting enumerations.   Documents often travel with people in these exchanges, representing tangible evidence of what can be achieved and acting as a motivation to groups embarking on the strategy. In addition, SDI groups learn about conducting enumerations by joining in on an enumeration being implemented by the host group.   The example of enumeration reveals the constitutive role of agency in SDI networks, a notion of agency that is alert to the role not just of organisations or particular individuals, but to a complex relationship of people, documents, representations, lived experiences and values. What emerges is a conception of agency in postcolonial scholarship that is more nuanced than is often the case in the work of development geography's consideration of transnational networks.

From this discussion of the epistemological focus of development and postcolonial approaches to transnational networks, two central questions emerge for further research. First, emerging mainly from development scholarship, how does the distribution of resources structure networks? For example, how important is the relationship between the World Bank and SDI for structuring the network's activities? Second, emerging mainly from postcolonial scholarship, what is the role of material and human agency in network constitution? For example, what is the role of SDI's enumeration strategy in local, national, and global fora? Reconciling these two questions would be useful for broadening the epistemological range of the objects and methods of analysis used in research on transnational development networks. Development approaches could benefit from a more expansive notion of agency and power, and postcolonial approaches could benefit from a greater alertness to the structuring role of resources and institutions in the creation and maintenance of networks. A greater understanding of the creation, constitution, maintenance and consequences of transnational development networks, then, can result from a dialogue between development and postcolonial approaches around the relationship between structure and agency.

Spatialities: relational development networks

Writing the spatiality of transnational development networks has presented a number of dilemmas for development geographers. As Anthony Bebbington (2003) has argued, there has been a tendency in development geography, with some notable exceptions (for example, Mawdsley, *et al*, 2001; Mohan and

Stokke, 2000), to speak on the one hand of the abstract global processes of capitalism, and on the other hand of the local stories of development interventions, with generally little connection between the two. This raises a series of challenges. For instance, what is the relationship between transnational networks and development interventions or local livelihoods, and how can we account for that relationship (Bebbington, 2003)? Writing more about the possibilities of networking, Marcus Power has asked (2003: 135): to what extent can 'grounded' local interventions be informed by a global praxis? On a similar register, David Simon (2003: 16) has argued that one of the central dilemmas in development geography today is to account for the 'global-local dialectic', namely: "[H]ow to secure locally appropriate and participatory development at the same time as all countries and interest groups are being compelled to engage with the global agendas of trade liberalization, trade-related intellectual property rights (TRIPS), supposedly sustainable development and many others".

To take the example of livelihoods, recent work in development geography has sought to rethink livelihoods in light of transnational influences (see the special issue of *Ecumene*, 2001, 8:4). Livelihoods research in development has been concerned with how households make a living formally and informally, with households interaction with local resources, and with their social and economic networks (Murray, 2002; Bagchi *et al*, 1998). Arguing that livelihoods have "changed profoundly" in light of the increasing influence and manipulation of transnational processes (Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001: 369), the *Ecumene* collection explores, for example, the transnational circulation of ideas on indigeneity and related flows of resources in Amazonian Ecuador (Perreault,

2001), and the ways in which people 'jump' scales in livelihood strategies (Rocheleau, *et al*, 2001). Developing an earlier concern in livelihoods studies with the role of extra-local institutions and organisations in mediating resources in livelihoods, this collection argues that given that livelihoods are increasingly a part of transnational networks, there is an "analytical challenge to explain livelihoods in terms of their relationships with these and other transnational social spaces" (Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001: 374). In particular, Bebbington and Batterbury (2001) argue, there is a need to investigate the ways in which transnational networks extend or block access to material and ideological resources.

Development geography's approach to transnational networks has generally been to deploy a scalar vocabulary of local through to global. There is often a concern with how people or organisations 'jump' scales in order to further their objectives. There is room here to develop new spatial vocabularies of transnational development networks, and one route for doing so involves dialogue with postcolonial approaches. Development approaches often reinstate the distinction between scales and sectors (international agencies, states, civil societies, livelihoods), creating an image of different organisations operating in different spheres and trying to influence one another (Ferguson and Gupta, 2002). There is a challenge for development geographers in blurring these distinctions and developing new vocabularies for conceiving the spatialities of transnational networks.

A postcolonial reading, by contrast, tends to emphasise a more relational vocabulary of transnational networks. This is an approach that emphasises the co-constitution of space, for example, in relation to metropole and colony (King, 2004; Lester, 2002), homeland and diasporic spaces (Bhabha, 1990), and the transnational constitution of livelihoods (Gupta, 1998). Culture, identity and history are understood as translocal spatial formations, analysed through notions such as location, mobility, borderlands and exile (McEwan, 2003). Rather than reading transnational development space through a simple North-South trajectory, postcolonial approaches emphasise a spatial genealogy that highlights the multiple sites and heterogeneity of knowledge, space and politics (Bell, 2002). For Gupta (1998: 156), for instance, the livelihoods of Indian farmers are in part a product of "a condition in which disparate epistemologies and practices coexist and interpenetrate", resulting in an hybridity of 'indigenous' and 'scientific' that is central to the "mistranslation" of postcolonial modernity in rural India (1998: 232). He found that farmers often switched between advice and terminology used by development officials and more 'indigenous' understandings of soils, growth, plants, etc., and seemed to do so with ease. This led Gupta to question notions like 'indigenous knowledge'. Gupta's work has implications for development geographers working on translocal livelihoods, for example in the deployment of relational concepts such as 'mistranslation' in addition to scalar vocabularies. Here, the distinctions between scales are blurred. The spatialities that result emphasise the role of circulations in constituting networks and bringing some sites and forms of knowledge together while distancing others. This circulation is generally not one of seamless travel, but of contested travelling discourses and knowledges.

Lester (2002), for instance, traces the circulation of conflicting representations in British colonial discourses, mainly among middle-class men. He shows how discourses of race and class difference, at home and in the colonies, came to dominate over discourses of humanitarian liberalism among privileged and influential men across colonial networks. For example, in 1840s Britain, bourgeois anxieties of, for instance, the Chartist movement, were tied up with a broader fear of a proletariat revolution that would turn Britain into a socialist state. There was an emerging fear on the political right that further reform would serve to encourage the proletariat. Alliances around the propertied classes hardened in view of economic crisis, the Irish famine, and the revolutionary turmoil in Europe in 1848. These bourgeois reactions were intimately tied to struggles that settlers were waging against humanitarian liberalism in colonies such as, in Lester's case, the Cape. Lester's conception of discursive networks disrupts the division between metropole and colony, centre and periphery, or global and local. His work shows how the constitution of place, knowledge and politics is relational, and points to the broader point that local histories and cultures have always been mixed, a recognition that can be redeployed to think more creatively and progressively about the relation between place and politics (Massey, 1991, 2005; Clifford, 1997). His approach also points to a broader effort in postcolonialism to explore the vocabularies, imaginaries and practices through which different actors within networks conceive of networks and their roles within them, rather than solely relying on academic concepts for network analysis.

Knowledge, ideas, discourses, politics, and practices in transnational networks are constituted through conditions of equal power. For example, relations of power structure the kinds of knowledge that take precedence in networks. On a similar register, knowledge changes as it travels to different sites. There is now a broad-ranging postcolonial literature exploring how this process of translation occurs, inspired by, for instance, Said's (1983) notion of travelling theory. Said argues that theory must change as it deployed in a new context, and that this has been "part of a historical transfer of ideas and theories from one setting to another" (Said, 1983: 237). He argues that 'misreadings' are an essential part of learning and creativity. Similarly, tracing the practices of translation is an essential part of making sense of how transnational networks are co-constituted, revealing the geographies through which certain forms of discourses, knowledge, ideas, or practices become dominant. This focuses attention on practices over the interaction of scales and institutions *per se*. While development geographers have drawn attention to linkages between organisations such as donors, states and NGOs across space, there has been little attention to the geographies of practice that constitute or are constituted by these networks, as Bebbington (2003: 300) suggests: "Consideration, for instance, of where, how and why economic decisions are made and structured, by whom, and with what geographical consequences is too often absent or underdeveloped in these analyses".

Concepts such as 'misreading' focus attention on how knowledge and learning are translated in transnational networks, while retaining a central concern with relations of power and difference. There is a challenge here in tracing not just the increasing frequency with which people engage with various kinds of

transnational networks, but the unevenness of engagements as "new ideas, resources and desires get worked into the landscape and the ways in which people think about its future" (Bebbington and Batterbury, 2001: 376). These engagements have implications for how development, alternatives and resistance are thought about by people involved in development (*ibid*). The postcolonial focus on transnational spatialities as produced through the circulation and translation of practices, objects, knowledges, and representations, could contribute new approaches and vocabularies to development accounts of the spatialities of transnational networks. Tracing the geographies of circulation and translation would reveal more about how transnational development networks are made and structured.

Developing a relational topology of SDI

To elaborate on what a relational topology of SDI networks might involve, I will highlight the example of exhibitions. Exhibitions of model houses and sanitation blocks have become critical events in SDI's work. These are full-size model houses that are designed and built by organisations of the poor. Exhibitions are an attempt to illustrate the potential of the poor and to attract media and political attention. Often, they are associated with exchanges of poor people from across the city, country, or world, and they generally last three or four days. They often involve informal discussions ranging from concerns over land tenure to construction or local organising. Occasionally, exhibitions are combined with other events such as enumerations.

A development geography perspective encourages a focus on how exhibitions increase housing options and opportunities for the urban poor in SDI. It would explore the ways in which model house construction contributes to a sense of individual and collective empowerment, and how exhibitions help create opportunities for negotiation with local states. A postcolonial approach would place greater emphasis on the relationship between exhibitions, identity and culture. For example, exhibitions in SDI are inflected with a particular construction of the poor and of social change. In particular, exhibitions put the capacities and skills of the poor on demonstration. This is an image of social change with the poor at the centre, casting the poor as entrepreneurial and capable of managing their own development. While a development emphasis might focus on the way funds are spent, how the management of the construction project operates, and how this compares with more 'top down' housing and sanitation initiatives, a postcolonial emphasis might explore the involvement of the poor in these constructions as a kind of ambivalent modernity. On the one hand, this involvement is pulling the poor into discourses of urbanisation, improvement, and the march of progress that are associated with the ways in which the nationalist project constructed views of the city in, for instance, a modern India (Prakash, 2002); and on the other hand, the experience of urban life for the poor has often been marked by the denial of these very features of modernity – access to reliable infrastructure like sanitation or water, services like housing, and so on. Exploring the disjunctive relationship between discourse and experience is another instance of 'mistranslation', in this case of a particular mode of urban postcolonial modernity wherein the city inhabits a space of collapse and failure in the context of narratives of progress and development.

One set of questions for the analysis of SDI relates to the relationship between local exhibitions and the transnational circulation of exhibition as a strategy. Stories about how to conduct exhibitions, and how to construct model houses and sanitation blocks, circulate SDI through exchanges. In exchanges, visiting groups often join-in on constructions and exhibitions as they are going on. Strategies of measurement, or particular construction techniques, travel between sites during and after exchanges. For example, one strategy for people unfamiliar with tape measurers is to use clothes such as a sari as a measurement device. In addition, small-scale models, write the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, an SDI partner, are often deployed as "a three-dimensional imagining tool for people unfamiliar with the abstraction of scale drawings" (ACHR, 2001: 13). They go on to describe one exhibition in Thailand: "As the model went up, the people pulled out boards, nailed things up differently, changed this, argued about that. Measurements altered, ceiling heights were raised then lowered, window positions shifted, bathrooms and kitchens swelled then shrunk" (*ibid*). Models become the basis for negotiations around what kind of houses people want to live in, a process in which the collective will must be weighed against individual preferences, and which says as much about how people live and think as it does about their material well-being. In the process, codified technical knowledge about construction is often converted into more informal forms of technical knowledge. For instance, Amita Mbaye, part of a Senegalese Savings and Loan Network, said:

When I asked the technician (who works with us in Dakar) to show us how layout plans are designed, he used such sophisticated jargon that I barely understood a word he said. In Protea

South (Gauteng, South Africa) during our last evening, we asked a woman to draw us a plan. When she explained house modelling, I understood and felt that I too could do it (Patel and Mitlin, 2002: 132).

As a result of these travelling encounters between cities as different as Cape Town, Phnom Penh and Mumbai, knowledge, space and development in SDI's networks are co-constituted, relational products that combine the 'near' and 'far'. Disparate knowledges and forms of identification, from construction techniques to particular notions of the poor and social change, circulate exchanges and potentially bring into dialogue development's concern with urban poverty with postcolonialism's concern with identity and culture. This is a conception of network space, following Amin (2002: 389), as "folded together, produced through practices, situated, multiple and mobile", and as marked by:

[F]irst, the intensification of mixture and connectivity as more and more things become interdependent (in associative links and exclusions); second, the combination of multiple spatialities of organisation and praxis as action and belonging at a distance become possible; and third, the erosion of the ontological distinction between place and space as 'placement' in multiple geographies of belonging becomes possible. Therefore, places are more than what they contain, and what happens in them is more than the sum of localised practices and powers, and actions at other 'spatial scales' (2002: 395).

A dialogue between development and postcolonial approaches to transnational networks would be concerned with writing spatialities that connect local development interventions with transnational processes. This would involve tracing the geographies of circulation and translation in order to reveal more about how transnational development networks are made and structured. For

example, in terms of livelihoods, development geography could gain from postcolonialism's concern with livelihood as it relates to questions of indigeneity, modernity, culture and transnational flows. Postcolonial approaches, in turn, could benefit from development's concern with livelihood as a relationship between households, environment, and organisations and institutions locally and beyond, as well as its consideration of livelihoods in relation to poverty and inequality. Such an approach would build on emerging work in development around transnational livelihoods to consider livelihoods both as multi-faceted ways of making a living, and as produced in part through transnational development networks. In terms of SDI, this involves a focus both on how the travelling of knowledge (exhibitions) influences agency and identities, and on how that relates to how slum dwellers get by on a long-term and daily basis (through, for instance, increasing housing options). Developing this approach could usefully involve a topological reading of network space in order to capture the relationalities of knowledge, space and politics, developed in postcolonial scholarship and elsewhere. The postcolonial focus on transnational spatialities as produced through the circulation and translation of practices, objects, knowledges, and representations, could contribute to development accounts of the spatialities of transnational networks in ways that reveal more of the geographies of networks that connect scales of local, national and global. This approach would necessarily remain alert to how actors within networks construct their own spatial vocabularies of those networks, an issue that raises some of the ethical and political dimensions that the next section will explore.

Ethico-politics: policy, practice and subaltern knowledge

There is a wide-ranging engagement in development scholarship with the politics of transnational development networks. This has tended to focus on, for example, the influence of networks on policy and practice, the influences of global forms of capitalism and neoliberalism, or the ways in which the political economy of development in national states relates to global trade or donor agendas and local development policy and practice. Central concerns include, for instance, the role of aid in structuring the policies of states or the practices of civil society organisations, often as part of a more general concern with the structuring influence of the geopolitics of 'North' and 'South'. The relative influence of donors, states, and civil society organisations in transnational development networks is often framed around which sorts of politics come to dominate and which sorts of politics are marginalised. Often, there is a critical interrogation in this research of the intended objectives of donor or state agencies. Pieterse (2001: 166), for instance, has argued that development is a "large-scale spin-doctoring operation," and highlights Woost (1997: 229): "We are still riding in a top-down vehicle of development whose wheels are greased with a vocabulary of bottom-up discourse." Joshi and Moore (2000: 26) argue that mainstream discourses are little more than "fashionable jargon" used to gloss over political and institutional issues. Further, they argue that the proliferation of NGOs since the 1980s has co-opted alternative voices through the funding of and the 'pulling-in' of radical groups to 'accommodative' discourses with conservative agendas.

These rubrics have become important debates around the politics of transnational networks, often throwing into refrain the relationship between 'mainstream' and 'alternative' development. Pieterse (1998: 359), for instance, encourages attention to how the entire field of development is changing through shifting alignments between mainstream and alternative. In transnational development networks, states, civil society organisations, and international agencies engage with one another in ways that involve a variety of relationships, occasionally simultaneously (Bryant, 2002), from what may be tightly controlled conditions involving incorporation, to conditions that allow space for alternatives. The contention here is that transnational development networks are reworking the relationship between mainstream and alternative development. On a different register, development approaches to transnational networks have raised questions about accountability, including both the accountability of donors and NGOs to local communities (Edwards and Gaventa, 2001).

A related and no less controversial strand of development is concerned with how to locate and draw-upon local knowledge in local, national and global development policy and practice, with much deployment in recent years of Robert Chambers' (1997) influential work on Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). PRA uses oral and visual techniques to generate knowledge because it is thought that the written word marginalises those that are less accustomed to it. Mapping, ranking of preferences and oral histories are all noted parts of the PRA toolkit. Chambers (1997: 103, cited in Mohan, 2002: 52) has conceptualised PRA in the following way:

The essence of PRA is change and reversals – of role, behaviour, relationship and learning. Outsiders do not dominate and lecture; they facilitate, sit down, listen and learn. Outsiders do not transfer technology; they share methods which local people can use for their own appraisal, analysis, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation. Outsiders do not impose their reality; they encourage and enable local people to express it.

PRA has the strength of being locally oriented, but its impacts have been mixed in practice. Despite some real successes in democratising development, PRA is often rigidly tied to the agendas of donors, and can be implemented in a tokenistic fashion, routinised and 'parcelled-in' to development initiatives (Mohan, 2002). In addition, while more successful PRA has picked-up on, for instance, gender imbalances (Mosse, 1994), local elites have sometimes come to stand for 'the community'. Others have argued that the very focus on the 'local' has been a shortcoming of PRA, suggesting that it marginalises some of the causes of poverty by bypassing national and international concerns such as trade, or strengthening states in order to make them more accountable (Mohan, 2002; Mohan and Stokke, 2000). Often, accounts of the politics of knowledge in development studies fail to adequately address how subaltern knowledge is translated and used in development strategies, and it is here that perhaps the most central contribution of postcolonial scholarship to the ethico-politics of transnational development networks is found.

Postcolonial work on the politics of transnational networks has tended to manifest itself in a decolonising imperative of both past and present colonial discourses, including of the geographical knowledges in the academy (Robinson, 2003; Driver, 1992). This reflects postcolonialism's epistemological focus on

cultural and historical geographies, although there has been postcolonial work conducted by geographers around, for example, geopolitics (Gregory, 2004; Sidaway, 2000) and development (Corbridge, 1993; Bell, 2002). The concern here has been to trace the material effects of discourses and representations, but with far less examination of the relationship between postcolonialism, development and global capitalism than with cultural and textual representations. This gap, though, can be over-stated. As Blunt and McEwan (2002: 6) have argued, postcolonial scholarship has shown "how the production of Western knowledge is inseparable from the exercise of Western power", and there has been an attempt in this work to situate that knowledge, interrogate its power, and reassert the value of alternative experiences and ways of knowing. In addition, Spivak (1999), for example, has shown the connections between the marginalising of 'Other' women and their peripheral position within global economies (McEwan, 2003).

A postcolonial approach to transnational networks focuses attention on the terms through which subaltern knowledge is constructed, and this focus offers an important contribution to work on transnational networks by development scholars. An important issue of concern in this area of postcolonial work has related to the appropriation of subaltern knowledge. As Briggs and Sharp (2004: 664) have written in relation to indigenous knowledge: "A central tenet of postcolonial theory is its concern with the ontological and epistemological status of the voices of subaltern peoples in Western knowledge systems, and a postcolonial interrogation of the inclusion of indigenous knowledges in development suggests caution". Spivak (1988) argues that the subaltern cannot

speak, so imbued must s/he be with the words and phrases of 'Western thought' in order to be heard. This is to say that the subaltern cannot be heard as a consequence of the privileged position that, for example, academic researchers or development consultants occupy. This often leads to 'epistemic violence': ways of knowing the world outside of the language of Western science, philosophy and development are invalidated or trivialised. Thus, "the subaltern must always be caught in translation, never truly expressing herself, but always already interpreted" (Briggs and Sharp, 2004: 664).

Spivak's (1993) notions of unlearning and learning outline a formulation of ethics in this regard. 'Unlearning' involves "working hard to gain knowledge of others who occupy those spaces most closed to our privileged view and attempting to speak to those others in a way that they might take us seriously and be able to answer back" (McEwan, 2003: 384). For Spivak, learning from one another is an ethical imperative. For the academic researcher, learning in this sense is not about speaking for an individual or group, but developing new positions through interactions between researchers and people in disparate locations (Spivak, 2005). This is an imperative that points to transformation: to postcolonialism as, following McEwan (2003: 349), an ethico-politics of becoming, emphasising the processual and anticipatory - "recognising a condition that does not yet exist, but working nevertheless to bring that about". What emerges is an image of a postcolonial geography whose politics are "provisional and constantly under review" (*ibid*). Crucially, responding to these challenges means avoiding creating postcolonialisms in scholarship that become another colonising discourse, "yet another subjection to foreign formations and

epistemologies", and this requires a "greater sensitivity to the relationship between power, authority, positionality and knowledge" (McEwan, 2003: 351; Rose, 1997). One method for framing this ethico-politics lies in Briggs and Sharp's (2004) distinction between liberal and radical politics. They argue that there must be a radical attempt to engage indigenous people and indigenous knowledge, rather than a liberal attempt that integrates views into pre-given positions and stops short of the many different kinds of indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing.

In terms of SDI, attention to the terms through which subaltern knowledge is constructed would involve a critical reflection on, for example, how subaltern knowledge is used in housing construction. For instance, does technical knowledge around measurement and design come to displace more qualitative and experiential knowledges about what people want from a home? In addition, does the focus on collective agreement on housing forms amount to a consensus politics that displaces individual subaltern voice and knowledge? A postcolonial approach encourages an interrogation of the ways in which subaltern knowledge is translated as it travels through networks, whether through documentation and negotiations within and between civil society organisations, states, or international agencies, or within and between SDI groups themselves. In addition, Spivak's notions of learning and unlearning throw SDI's strategy of horizontal exchange into sharp relief. In SDI networks, learning in exchanges between subaltern groups in different cities is generative of new politics and practices, whether through travelling strategies such as enumeration, exhibition, or daily savings, through the disclosure and exploration of new tactics of

engagement and negotiation with authorities, or through modes of solidarity and support. The challenge for the researcher is to listen to these formations and to develop writing styles that allow subalterns to speak in ways that don't speak for them.

A dialogue between development and postcolonial approaches around the politics and ethics of transnational development networks would involve, for example, reconciling the role of transnational networks in local political economies of development, with attention to the ways in which subaltern knowledge is deployed in local political economies. In terms of SDI, for example, this involves asking how SDI's travelling subaltern knowledges, such as those drawn on through exhibitions, are deployed and translated in local political economies. At stake here are the ways in which subaltern knowledge is translated and used in development, and the postcolonial focus on these mediations could be a useful contribution to development scholarship on transnational development networks. Development geography would gain from attention to ethical considerations around learning, which involves an attempt to listen and to (un)learn, and to develop new positions through interactions with subalterns. This requires a critical approach to the ways in which subaltern knowledge is mediated as it travels and is reshaped, extending to how learning occurs between actors in transnational networks and what kinds of politics and practices emerge through the exchanges of people and information. Such an approach goes beyond a concern with whether NGOs or donors are accountable to subaltern groups to also consider the extent to which such agents can and do listen to subaltern individuals and groups, as well as what they do with what they are listening to.

There is scope in this dialogue for considering in a potentially new light how knowledge gained through strategies such as PRA is used by, for instance, agencies like the World Bank.

In addition, development's concern with the relationship between transnational networks and local political economies, with the policy influences of networks with local, national and global fora, or with debates around mainstream and alternative development and their relationship with transnational development networks, are instructive for postcolonial scholarship seeking to engage with the politics of the relationship between global capitalism, transnationalism and poverty. Such a dialogue might provide a basis for developing political alternatives beyond the concept of the 'hybrid' in postcolonial research, which often becomes the privileged space of political correction in work on diasporas or migration, as if highlighting the very existence of hybridity undoes the violence of various discourses of purity (McEwan, 2003; Loomba and Kaul, 1994). As McEwan (2003: 345) points out, celebrating 'hybrid' ethnic cultures may also serve to exclude the "harsh realities facing immigrants all over the world", and development's concern with inequality and political economy disclose other possibilities for political change that are too often marginalised in postcolonial accounts.

Towards a postcolonial geography of trasnational development networks

This paper has explored some of the ways in which a dialogue between development and postcolonial approaches to transnational networks might inform

the study of transnational development networks. It has done so through three inter-related themes: epistemologies, spatialities, and ethico-politics, and by illustrating some of the issues pertaining to each theme through examples from SDI. Each of these themes marks out ground for future research on transnational development networks. In terms of epistemologies - the objects and methods of analysis - dialogue between development and postcolonial approaches points to the potential benefits of reworking the analysis of the relationship between structure and agency in networks, and in particular for rethinking the ways in which agency is constituted. This might involve, for example, tracing the role of documents, representations or values, as well as aid, in the constitution of transnational development networks. This dialogue is useful for broadening the epistemological range of the objects and methods of analysis used in research on transnational development networks. Research on the spatialities of transnational development networks involves attention to the interface between the global and the local. I have argued that a relational conception of network space is useful for understanding this interface. This is a conception of networks as co-constituted through a variety of 'near' and 'far' actors and practices. The postcolonial focus on transnational spatialities as produced through the circulation and translation could contribute to development accounts of the spatialities of transnational networks in ways that reveal more of the geographies of networks that connect scales of local, national and global. Such a conception would trace the relative power of different forms of knowledge, discourse, and materialities in the production of network space.

Critically, this requires alertness to the different kinds of knowledge and spatialities produced by different actors, and the ways in which some of these become dominant while others are marginalised or abandoned. Concepts such as 'mistranslation' (Gupta, 1998) or 'misreading' (Said, 1983) are useful for tracing the production of these relational spaces. Dialogue between development and postcolonial approaches here might also, for instance, seek to trace the role of transnational networks in local livelihoods, contributing to an emerging research agenda in development geography. In addition, postcolonialism could benefit from development's consideration of livelihoods through the lens of material poverty and inequality. Finally, dialogue between development and postcolonial approaches opens space for considering the politics and ethics of transnational development networks. The possibilities of this dialogue stand in contrast to the often uncritical ways in which network as a technology of intervention is deployed, for example by mainstream development agents such as World Bank (Stone, 2003; Henry *et al*, 2004). In this particular dialogue between development and postcolonial scholarship, there is the possibility of a theorisation of transnational development networks that is more alert to a range of overlapping ethical and political considerations. Dialogue here presents challenges around how to ethically research subaltern knowledge in transnational networks, including how to trace the translation and redeployment of subaltern knowledge in networks like SDI. One challenge is to trace the terms through which subaltern knowledge is translated in transnational networks and through local political economies.

Researching networks like SDI, and the transnational development networks that SDI members become involved in, demands that development and postcolonial perspectives be brought together. This is the case when we consider the development impacts of subaltern knowledge: we are required to ask both what the political effects of subaltern knowledge are on the development of policy or new development interventions, *and* to ask how subaltern knowledge is translated and used. For example, if a postcolonial approach to SDI were to consider how states and development agents respond to or use subaltern knowledges, then it would be required to explore not just, for example, the relationship between travelling subaltern knowledges and individual identity, but also the development literature on these different development agents. On a different register, given that researching transnational development networks can involve constantly shifting positionalities, from speaking with the urban poor to speaking with development professionals, exploring the power relations and modes of representation that occur between 'researcher' and 'researched' in these different contexts requires a commitment to an (un)learning that seeks a more equitable dialogue. Again, these debates have been explored in postcolonial studies to the extent that it would surely be a mistake not to consider them.

Taken together, the three inter-related themes discussed in this paper mark out not just overlaps and disjunctures between development and postcolonial approaches, but space for further dialogue and research around transnational development networks. Further research may lead to new ways of conceptualising 'structure' and 'agency', and their interactions, in transnational development networks. It may also lead to new ways of describing and methods

for exploring the links between the 'global' and the 'local', in ways that problematise that distinction by tracing the actual geographies through which networks are made, maintained, manipulated, etc. This may involve a variety of ways of writing relational topologies not explored in this paper (see, for instance, Massey, 2005). These research approaches and methods – like the networks themselves – cannot be viewed as neutral, but must be understood as interventions that face political and ethical dimensions in their planning and execution, as well as in the outputs that result. Further dialogue could take place between development and postcolonial scholars working through these challenges as they research transnational development networks, and this too may develop new vocabularies and conceptions of, for example, the ways in which subaltern knowledge circulates and is translated. More generally, this dialogue contains the promise of a more postcolonial geography of transnational development networks that would improve understanding of these increasingly important forms of intervention.

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[i] Notable exceptions include Keck and Sikkink's (1998) study of transnational advocacy networks, an attempt to show how counter-hegemonic networks can be useful in bringing different groups together, and Bebbington and Batterbury's (2001) and Mawdsley's *et al's* (2001) work on transnational funding networks, to highlight just a few. Rather than exploring the different theoretical approaches to networks, such as transnational governmental networks (Risse-Kappen, 1995), epistemic communities (Haas, 1992), advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1998), discourse coalitions (Hajer, 1998), transnational advocacy networks (Keck and Sikkink, 1998), global civil society networks (Kaldor, 2003), actor-network theory (Law and Hassard, 1999), transnational governmentality (Ferguson and Gupta, 1998), etc., my focus here is to explore the possible dialogue between development and postcolonial approaches to transnational development networks.