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Ethical issues in community development: setting the scene

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Abstract This article introduces a special issue of the *Community Development Journal* designed to explore aspects of community development through an explicitly ethical lens. Arguing for a broad understanding of ethics as inextricably linked to practice and politics, it introduces the concept of 'ethics work' to capture the cognitive and emotional efforts community development workers expend to identify and handle matters of responsibilities, rights, harms, and benefits. Drawing inspiration and illustrations from contributions to the special issue, the article identifies ethical questions and concerns at three inter-related levels: micro (everyday relationships and interactions), meso (strategies for community development engagement and action), and macro (distribution of power and resources). After examining case examples of micro- and meso-ethical encounters, the article moves to consideration of macro-ethical questions linked to the political context of community development as a movement or project. The importance of interrogating the contradictory ideologies underpinning community development is stressed, ensuring the ethical lens is broad and versatile enough for practitioners to view their work reflexively with reference to postcolonial, postmodern, and posthuman perspectives. The article concludes with a call for a situated ethics of eco-social justice, seeing ethics as embedded in everyday practice while located in political and ecological contexts.

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Introduction: ethics and community development

Ethics as an explicit topic is underexplored in community development, although it is implicitly present in much literature and discussions about power, responsibility, and conflicting rights. The aim of this special issue of the *Community Development Journal* is to explore aspects of community development through an explicitly ethical lens. Our understanding of what is meant by ethics is deliberately broad. We understand ethics as a topic that covers matters relating to rights, responsibilities, harms, and benefits; what counts as human and ecological flourishing; and what kinds of people we should be and become (see Banks, 2019, p. 5).

Our understanding of community development is equally broad, as articles in this issue demonstrate, covering community development as a participatory *process* by which communities of place, identity or interest grow and change; as a *practice* of stimulating and supporting communities to participate in change; as an *occupation or profession* with a focus on participatory community change; as an *academic discipline* which studies and theorizes the field; and as a *social movement* advocating for participatory community development processes locally, nationally, and internationally. Workers may be called 'community development workers', or be other professionals (social workers, international development workers, or community-based researchers) who are taking a community development approach, as outlined by McConnell (2022, p. 22).

Community development is often described as 'value-based', indicating that the change or 'development' work should be underpinned and infused by values. This is illustrated in the definition of community development produced by the International Association for Community Development (2018, p. 8), which describes it as promoting 'participative democracy, sustainable development, rights, economic opportunity, equality and social justice through the organisation, education and empowerment of people within their communities, whether these be of locality, identity or interest, in urban and rural settings'. This is just one definition among many, and the configuration and meanings of the values of community development are contested (see Banks, 2019; Clarke and Crickley, 2022). Nevertheless, it offers a backdrop against which to place the articles in this issue.

In addition to articles focussing on ethical challenges facing community development practitioners and how they handle these (including Bollaert *et al.*, 2023; Ebubedike *et al.*, 2023; Khatoon and Kumar, 2023, in which the protagonists are community-based researchers), there is also an article on neighbourhood conflicts in Lithuania, a country where community development work is uncommon (Matairyte-Dirziene *et al.*, 2023) and a final

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article on ethics education for development work (Agisilaou and Harris, 2023). Each article offers different perspectives on the topic of ethics and its relevance to community development—manifesting varied understandings of what counts as ethics and ethical practice, and how ethical practice can be achieved in very different types of community development contexts (from armed conflict in the Lake Chad region, to food insecurity and COVID-19 conditions in India, to neighbourhood work on a housing estate in Australia). The articles highlight the process of community development as ethically contested (raising questions about whose vision of development dominates and who benefits) and the role of community development practitioners as active ethical agents (negotiating between conflicting visions, rights and interests; prioritizing benefits and harms; and challenging injustice).

Suspicion about ethics: association with professional distance, rules, and standards

Community development workers have traditionally been suspicious of ethics, which may explain the paucity of literature in this field. Ethics is often associated with following codes of ethics and working to prescriptive rules and standards, developed as part of a professionalizing project. This conflicts with the self-image of many community development workers who see themselves as allies of the people with whom they work, not as distant or superior professionals. Beck and Purcell (2023) in this issue offer a critique of codes of ethics as top-down, externally imposed and professionally dominated. However, those professional groups and associations in different parts of the world that have developed codes of ethics for community development may see them differently (e.g. Australian Community Workers' Association, 2017; Community Learning and Development Standards Council Scotland, 2017). Codes of ethics or statements of ethical practice can be regarded as ways of making explicit the standards of behaviour expected of professional community development workers, enabling people working with them and their employers to challenge them if they fall short, enhancing the status of the profession by outlining its role, purpose, values and ethical standards, and encouraging professional dialogue about ethics. Yet some of the reservations expressed by those who critique codes of ethics may be justified, as the language in which some are written reveals a traditional professionalized framing (see Banks, 2019, pp. 18–20). Beck and Purcell (2023) argue instead for the development of a community-based ethical contract between community members and community development workers about the terms of engagement.

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Situating ethics and broadening the lens: from codes to context

In proposing this special issue, we used the term 'ethics' as a singular noun, referring to a broad ranging subject area or topic (that is, not as the plural of 'ethic', which is often taken to be a norm or standard of behaviour). For us 'ethics' is much broader than 'rules that govern the professional practitioner's behaviour … usually agreed by the practitioner's profession or employer and … expected to be adhered to by the practitioner' (Clarke and Crickley, 2022, p. 29). Ethics as a topic in community development is about being critically reflective and reflexive about the role of the practitioner, locating the work in a political context, developing sensitivity to individual and social harms and infringements of rights, working collectively for social change, having courage to tackle injustice, and challenging attitudes and actions of employers and governments, for example. We may be accused of extending the concept of ethics into the terrain of political and practical matters, but that, in fact, is our intention. Conceiving of ethics more narrowly, as about rule following, is dangerous and can easily bleed into a kind of managerialism that sees workers as social technicians, working to predefined organizational or government outcomes and targets.

We will now elaborate on our conception of a situated or contextualized ethics through examining a short extract from a community development worker's account of her daily practice given in one of the articles in this issue.

The micro- and macro-ethical work of the community development practitioner

> Since 2019, I have coordinated a weekly food and social-support programme orientated around a barbeque for residents from two neighbouring social housing estates in inner city Sydney, Australia. … The barbeque programme is collaboratively run with residents to reduce social isolation, food insecurity and respond to the changing, specific needs of the inner city neighbourhood. …
>
> As the barbeque plate heats up, Simon appears and hovers toward me. He starts talking: 'I see it everywhere; on the ground, when I close my eyes, when I wake up, he's still there. I can't get it out of my head.' He shakes his head and backs away from me. He furrows his brow and looks back to the street behind him. I listen, remain silent but nod and look down. His hands shake, he changes the subject and starts talking about his electric bike. I know from previous conversations that Simon is referring to the last suicide from the top of the estate, which he witnessed. There have been a number of suicides from the roof of the estate in the last two decades.

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(Neighbourhood community development worker in Australia, quoted in Massola and Howard, 2023, p. 37)

In this extract, one of the authors, Cate, talks about the encounters she has as a neighbourhood community development worker. Here she recounts a situation where she is called upon to recognize the *personal pain* of a resident in the wake of a recent suicide, and to respond carefully and empathically in the micro-ethical moment. The additional information she gives—that there have been several suicides on the estate in recent years—also signifies a *social harm*, and a public issue that demands a collective investigation and policy response (macro-ethics). This interplay between 'micro-ethics' and 'macro-ethics' is one of the hallmarks of community development practice. Micro-ethics is commonly understood as relating to the ethical dimensions of everyday encounters people have with each other and how they respond to and treat each other: 'the view from the inside', as Truog *et al.* (2015, p. 12) describe it. Whereas macro-ethics refers to systemic ethical issues related to the overall allocation, use and management of resources, linked to social and institutional policies ('the view from the outside').

Micro-ethical questions relevant to the encounter between Simon and Cate, from Cate's perspective, might include: how should Cate respond to Simon in a sensitive and caring way, recognizing the intensity and pervasiveness of his feelings? Should she mention the possibility of Simon seeking psychological support? Macro-ethical questions that might be raised about the social harms embedded in life on the estate include: what responsibility should housing providers have for alleviating the damaging social consequences of poor estate design and housing conditions? Is it right that in a relatively wealthy society some people are living in sub-standard housing?

This short vignette neatly illustrates the often-quoted distinction made by Mills (1970, pp. 14-15) between private troubles (Simon's worries) and public issues (poor housing conditions and estate design). It also sets the scene for the role of community development workers in connecting the two through working on the reframing of private troubles as *shared* experiences with *systemic* causes, requiring *collective* action to demand *change*. Indeed, it is the role of the community development worker to move between the micro and macro, making connections between people and issues, and asking what we might call 'meso-ethical' questions about collective and community capacity and mobilization. Meso-ethical questions might include: is it right to fan the flames of community anger about issues on which there is little likelihood of achieving change? Where should the loyalty of workers lie, when the communities with which they are working are in conflict with their employers, local government or the organizations funding their work?

Analysis of this extract helps further explain why 'ethics' is underexplored as an explicit topic in the community development literature and

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theorizing about practice. Much literature is concerned with identifying and unpacking what we have called 'macro-ethical' issues and the building and mobilizing of collective capacity to tackle these in some way. However, what we have called 'macro-ethical' issues are usually seen and named as *political* (about the distribution of power and resources and the role of government) and the processes of community development and mobilization are seen as *practical* (how to build confidence and mobilize groups of people with common interests and needs). The micro-ethical dimensions of practice are often not visible, they are embedded in people's demeanour and moment-to-moment interactions. The level of detail given by Cate is unusual in its particularity—the minutiae of Simon's and Cate's bodily movements and gaze, for example.

We therefore take a wide lens to the issue of ethics, taking in territory that can also be seen as political as well as practical (how to do something). This is because 'ethics' does not exist as a separate domain or activity (nor does politics or practice, for that matter), but is embedded in people's lives—their ideological commitments, beliefs, motivations, aspirations, goals, looks, attitudes, demeanours, movements, responses, judgements, and actions. When Cate is working out how to respond to Simon, she will no doubt bear in mind the nature and history of their relationship, what kind of person he is, and how she understands her role as a community development practitioner. When she and others are deliberating whether and how they ought to tackle the issue of suicides on the estate, they will consider the policies and practices of the housing provider, the political complexion of the local government, and so on. When practitioners work outside their national contexts, as international community development workers, further layers of complexity are added relating to conflicts between local and outsider values. This is exemplified by one of the Korean practitioners in Noh's (2023) study in this issue, who reported in relation to work in Africa: 'We were building a school in the community. Local government officers often disturbed the construction, asking for a bribe. This imposed an ethical dilemma between the principles and the reality' (p. 54).

'Doing ethics' and 'being ethical' in a community development context require a lot of perceptual, bodily, practical, and conceptual work on the part of practitioners, much of which is not visible or spoken about. It may be made more visible when practitioners are called to account for their attitudes or actions or when they pause to reflect on the ethical implications of a particular situation, discussing it with others (including colleagues, supervisors or researchers), or, as in Cate's case, writing a reflective account. The ethical features of practice are also made visible in teaching and learning about professional ethics, as described in the article in this issue by Agisilaou and Harris (2023). Yet, as they point out, separate courses or modules with

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a specific focus on ethics are relatively rare in education for development work. It is in the classroom and practice learning placements that space can be created for in-depth, challenging ethical reflections to take place, with exposure to different analyses and ideologies and dialogue about motivations, interpretations, and actions. It is often difficult to have ethical conversations in the workplace, since to explore real life issues, safe spaces need to be created for disclosure (Shevellar and Barringham, 2019). This is also challenging if discussion of ethical issues is understood as relating to codes of conduct and matters of discipline, rather than being about dialogue and learning. Without analysis and reflection through the conscious use of an 'ethical lens', the ethical features of a situation remain invisible, woven into the complex patterns of everyday conversations and actions. We now consider the nature of this process of ethical reflection and how the concept of 'ethics work' may be helpful in unpacking and examining its components.

Ethics work in everyday community development practice

In their article based on research interviews with community workers in India during the COVID-19 pandemic, Pankaj and Yadav (2023) use the concept of 'ethics work' to analyse some of the practitioners' accounts. 'Ethics work' refers to: 'the effort people put into seeing ethically salient aspects of situations, developing themselves as good practitioners, working out the right course of action and justifying who they are and what they have done' (Banks, 2016, p. 35). Drawing on analysis of accounts given by social welfare practitioners of their ethical challenges in practice, Banks identifies seven inter-related components of ethics work as outlined below (taken from Banks, 2016, p. 37):

1. ***Framing work***—identifying and focusing on the ethically salient features of a situation; placing oneself and the situations encountered in political and social contexts; negotiating/co-constructing frames with others (including service users and colleagues).
2. ***Role work***—playing a role in relation to others (advocate, carer, critic); taking a position (partial/impartial; close/distant); negotiating roles; responding to role expectations.
3. ***Emotion work***—being caring, compassionate and empathic; managing emotions; building trust; responding to emotions of others.
4. ***Identity work***—working on one's ethical self; creating an identity as an ethically good professional; negotiating professional identity; maintaining professional integrity.
5. ***Reason work***—making and justifying moral judgements and decisions; deliberation with others on ethical evaluations and tactics; working out strategies for ethical action.

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6. ***Relationship work***—engaging in dialogue with others; working on relationships through emotion, identity and reason work.
7. ***Performance work***—making visible aspects of this work to others; demonstrating oneself at work and showing accountability.

Framing work is particularly important. This is about how a situation is seen: who and what is foregrounded as worthy of ethical attention; who and what is present in the background as influences, causes or relevant factors; how sharp the focus is on an ethical harm or infringement; and what is blurred, unclear or not in the picture at all. This involves the work of ethical perception, sometimes called 'ethical sensitivity', which entails identifying the ethically salient features of a situation (Audi, 2013). In the case of Cate and Simon discussed earlier, Cate focuses on Simon's mental state and demeanour. Simon is in the centre of the frame, but Cate presents this against the backdrop of a systemic issue of which she is aware (multiple suicides, affecting the whole estate) and which affects her response to Simon, as well as how she might conceive of her role in relation to Simon and in the neighbourhood more generally. In the extract, we get the impression she is listening empathically to Simon, being present, and paying attention to him. In this sense, she could be regarded as engaging in emotion work—empathically and sensitively responding to Simon's pain.

Although the full article by Massola and Howard (2023) places the community development work in a larger socio-economic and political context, its main focus is on the micro-ethics of everyday relationships between people. In other articles in this special issue, meso- and macro-level ethical issues are more prominent, as community development practitioners grapple with their social change roles in the face of negative systemic and structural attitudes, norms and constraints. Here other aspects of ethics work are also visible, including identity and reason work, as we explore in the next section.

Working in the meso-ethical space: encountering structural oppression

> I worked with Dalits and marginalised communities during the pandemic to provide relief material. During the return of labour migrants, they were put in community quarantine, but I observed that the poor and labour class only used to stay in quarantine. Upper caste migrants used to remain in quarantine centres for a while and go to their homes because they did not want to share the space, food, and water with Dalits … because of their caste arrogance … Our fellow community workers also found that upper caste in quarantine centres refused to eat the food cooked by Dalit cook …

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> We were helpless to prevent such behaviours of the upper caste because of local dynamics and the dominance of the upper caste. (Male community worker in India, quoted in Pankaj and Yadav, 2023, p. 27)

The implications of extreme and entrenched discrimination against people from 'lower castes' in India are sharply illustrated here, showing how they persist, even in a time of crisis. In their article, Pankaj and Yadav (2023) outline the workings of the caste system and give several examples of how it served to exacerbate inequities during the pandemic. In this extract, the community worker frames the issue in terms of 'caste arrogance' and the dominance of the upper caste. He can see what is happening and why, but within this framing he and his colleagues are 'helpless'. He does not give an account of any further ethics work beyond the identification of the ethical issues, nor does he present himself and his colleagues as active moral agents playing a role in challenging the dominance of the upper caste. Instead, they are presented as bystanders—seeing an infringement of rights and dignity, but not intervening.

We can understand the community workers' inaction in this situation. It would be difficult to mount a challenge to the entrenched caste system in the midst of a crisis. However, the presentation of the community workers as 'helpless' suggests that perhaps their everyday pre-pandemic work has not prepared them to take the steps needed to speak out and take action on the caste system. This might have involved working with the authorities to enforce the quarantine rules as applicable to everyone, spending time in difficult conversations and negotiations with those living in the quarantine centre about the damaging effects of the caste system, and re-considering how space could be shared in a time of crisis. Developing 'ethical capability' as described by Agisilaou and Harris (2023) requires not just the ability to see ethical infringements, but also the capacity and courage to work out what should and can be done and how to do it. It demands the capacity on the part of the community workers to undertake reason, role and identity work, carefully considering whether, as practitioners committed to equity and anti-oppressive practice, they have a responsibility to challenge the situation, and if so how. This can be aided by the ethos and structure of the employing organization (if it is committed to an anti-caste ideology), by community workers working together as a team and by individuals drawing on their experience of tackling similar issues in the past. This is difficult and risky work, as it may harm some upper caste people who are already suffering in a time of crisis. Furthermore, people in lower castes may not always welcome the unsettling of the status quo, as in the short term this can cause further stigmatization and practical difficulties (see Narayanan and Banks, 2022).

Further insights into the complexities of the caste system are given by Khatoon and Kumar (2023), who recount how the damaging effects of

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stigmatization are resisted by some members of the Nat tribe in Bihar by denying their tribal identity. When working as a community researcher, Khatoon, a member of the Nat community herself, was surprised that the response of the Muslim tribe members to their structural oppression was to deny their identity. This left no role for her to work with them to reclaim their identity and challenge the deep-seated discrimination that pervades their everyday lives. Such situations create very difficult dilemmas for community practitioners, whose values and motives guide them towards exposing injustices, and supporting people to fight for recognition and change in negative societal attitudes and structures.

Many of the other articles feature structural oppression and the role of community development workers, community researchers, and community activists in tackling this. The work sometimes happens in small, incremental ways, as Ebubedike *et al*. (2023) report in their attempts to 'de-colonise' the research process in the war-torn Lake Chad region in central Africa. Even the work of social movements, which aim overtly to challenge existing power structures like those campaigning for food sovereignty as described by Cruz and van de Fliert (2023), entails delicate role and relationship work to facilitate the democratic contributions of diverse interests and voices, reconciling different agendas and identities within the movement. Cruz and van de Fliert (2023) discuss the variations in approach between different food sovereignty movements, based on their framing of the issues according to local contexts (e.g. as a response to colonial legacies, neo-liberal policies and transnational corporations, or as historical struggles of scheduled castes and tribes).

Community development workers in these contexts usually identify as being on the side of people who are oppressed, working alongside them to support them in articulating their concerns and demands and challenging existing power structures. Yet not only are workers sometimes helpless in the face of oppressive regimes, such as the Indian community worker in relation to the inequities of the caste system, they are often part of the very structures of oppression themselves. This paradox has long troubled community development workers, who may work for local states or NGOs, playing a role that is as much about distracting, pacifying, co-opting, or colonizing people and communities as it is about genuine participation, empowerment, or liberation. In their work in the meso-ethical space, community development workers need to be prepared to interrogate the ethical values and goals of the regimes that employ them and be aware of their own roles in imposing values on others. This entails critically examining the macro-ethics of community development as a project, and questioning the nature of the ethical lens through which practitioners are looking.

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Questioning the macro-ethics of community development as a project or movement

In 1953, the United Nations defined community development as 'a movement to promote better living for the whole community, with active participation and if possible, on the initiative of the community' (United Nations, 1953, p. 33). This broad understanding of the community development project is enduring, with its emphasis on holistic and collective approaches to addressing social and economic issues regarded as a distinguishing feature. Although community development in practice may take more of a reformist/ameliorative than a radical/transformative approach to improving lives in communities of place, identity, and interest, its focus on positive change and active participation can lead to its construction as 'essentially a moral activity, concerned with the creation of a better and fairer world' (Shaw, 1997, p. 61).

Underpinning this characterization of community development, as Hope and Timmel (1995, p. 3) point out, is a modernist, optimistic perspective about transforming society, improving the world, and liberating people from all that holds them back. It assumes that progress is possible and that there are universally valid conceptions of what counts as a better, fairer world and a full human life. This is problematic, since the answers to macro-ethical questions (for example, about the nature of human flourishing, optimum distributions of goods, and responsibilities of humans, communities, and nations to each other and to the ecosystem) are highly contested. The ideologies underpinning the community development project are contradictory, based on 'liberation' and 'redistribution' but within limits defined by dominant interest groups. However, faith in grassroots participative processes and micro-level relationship-building and dialogue to resolve macro-ethical dilemmas (Blaug, 1999, p. 117) can also bestow legitimacy on, and moral confidence in, the community development project. Nevertheless, as has become clear over the decades (see Mayo, 1975), and as highlighted in recent research (Khan and Short, 2021), participatory projects can also reproduce traditional, exclusionary, elite-based relations of power—despite their explicitly articulated purpose to the contrary. Indeed, as Mayo (1975, pp. 130-132) points out, one of the origins of community development lies in the projects undertaken in countries that were European colonies in the 1950s, as means of building community-based systems of governance and self-help to prepare for and control the transition to independence.

Freire (2005) warns that even when unintended, in efforts to liberate others, people and organizations can often engage in equal or alternative acts of oppression, because they bring their own unconscious oppressive systems with them. Ife (2016) argues, therefore, that it is essential that

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community development acknowledges and addresses the issue of colonization. Colonization can be understood as the domination, subjugation, and appropriation of one people, place or domain by another. Ife observes that colonization is often pursued by people with good intentions and a sincere belief that they are doing the right thing—that is, pursuing the moral good of which Shaw (1997) speaks. In this way, colonization does not merely occupy physical territories (including people's bodies), but is assimilated into everyday institutions, constructing social norms of acceptable thought and conduct. Such practices become normalized, taken for granted, and rarely challenged.

As with many other movements, disciplines, and professions, there is a growing awareness in community development of the dangers of the colonization of local values, knowledges, and practices by those dominant in the global North, or by those of local elites. This has led to an explicit 'de-colonising' agenda (see Ditlhake, 2020). This is particularly pertinent in international development work, where the sponsoring organizations originate from outside the countries in which they are working (see Noh, 2023, for discussion of Korean workers in Africa). Some of the larger agencies (such as The World Bank and international non-governmental organizations) may fund programmes of community development work linked to structural adjustment programmes in countries of the global South, which aim to redesign local governance and economies by privatization and reduced welfare systems.

Edubedike *et al.* (2023, p 106) give an account of the complexities of their attempts to adopt a 'post-colonial' approach to their community-based research project in Africa, working with people in countries that were formerly colonies of European powers:

> Our intention is not just to understand the complex set of phenomena that explain colonialism's continuing effects both on locals in our research contexts and the institutions within these contexts, but to use this knowledge to respond to the structures and processes of colonial processes, forms of exploitation and power imbalances, and feelings of dependency and inadequacy that colonised groups experience.

Ebubedike *et al*. warn of the inherent dangers of essentializing colonized populations as mere victims of their past colonial experiences, overlooking their agency and reclaimed identity. At the same time, their article demonstrates the struggle to work to the will of the people, when for example, respect for local culture and religion also requires respect for gendered roles and what—through researchers' eyes—could look like suppression of women's rights. 'Grassroots' and 'bottom-up approaches' bring with them challenges of cultural relativity that can be confronting for

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community development workers from outside the context. Indeed, as Khatoon and Kumar (2023) illustrate in their account of community-based research conducted with the Nat tribe in India, even being an 'insider' does not mean practitioners are immune from these ethical challenges.

Kenny *et al.* (2013) argue that the most important issue in these contexts is less whether development approaches are derived from 'the so-called west' or from local values and norms, but rather 'whether activities are owned, supported and, as far as possible, controlled by the people whose everyday lives are affected' (p. 280). However, this still leaves us with questions about who constitutes 'the people', what counts as 'the community', and how to handle conflicts within and between communities. Postmodern accounts of 'community' make this line of argument infinitely more complex, challenging the essentialist appeal to 'the community', and calling into question the authenticity of 'grassroots' endeavours (Delanty, 2018).

Technologies of power: postmodern perspectives on community development

Although modernist ideas of colonization capture the processes of 'invading, conquering, moving in, then taking over another people's land, resources, wealth, culture and identity' (Ife, 2016, p. 185), postmodern perspectives suggest a much more subtle, although no less egregious process. Rose (1999) contends that community has been reinvented in corporate liberal regimes as a mechanism of governance. Communities do not simply develop: they are acted upon, responsibilized, and disciplined to be a *particular kind* of community. Through this lens, community development is thus not merely a grassroots response to the issues of the people, by the people, for the people, but an active and imposed technology of power.

What makes these technologies of power particularly seductive is that they govern through the values, beliefs, and sentiments underpinning techniques of responsible self-government and the management of people's obligations to each other. They are assimilated into everyday practices, to appear normal and desirable and as an act of choice. The article by Mataityte-Dirziene *et al.* (2023), examining the debate over deinstitutionalization for people with disabilities, shows how ethical values are enacted through discourses of community members, and consideration of the appropriate conduct of neighbours. Rose (1999) refers to this array of practices as 'ethico-politics'. In the institution of 'community', people are not coerced or disciplined, but rather educated and solicited into an alliance between personal objectives and institutionally prized goals, activities and values such as consumption, profitability, efficiency, and social order. Through

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such processes citizens regulate themselves. For example, in their study of regional Australia, Cheshire and Lawrence (2005) demonstrate how the structures of government and strategies promoting 'self-help' and 'self-reliance', link the spirit of community and rural ideologies to the values and behavioural frameworks of neoliberalism to re-establish and reinforce hegemonic political objectives. Likewise, Banks (2011) observes the growth of interest in ethics as part of new public management and neoliberalism. It is not simply that organizations impose codes of conduct from above, but rather individuals focus on ethics as regulation of professional conduct, and integrate this into their own honour codes. They wish themselves to be ethical beings and in that wishing, there is an alignment with what Banks (2011) calls 'regulatory ethics'.

Posthuman perspectives

So far, we have discussed two sets of macro-ethical challenges: those arising from seeing community development as a project of colonization imposed by powerful actors from above; and those arising from seeing the dynamics of power as a deeply subjectifying colonizing process from within. We will now briefly consider a third set of macro-ethical challenges that derive from a critical interrogation of the inherently humanist underpinnings of community development. This 'posthuman ethics' invites us to extend our conceptions of rights and responsibilities to non-human entities.

Fundamental to the majority of definitions of community development is a sense of human agency. With its focus upon change for some advancement or improvement of a current condition, community development holds an intrinsic assumption of the human actors who participate, and, in doing so, make possible the participation of other humans. Without human agency, the project of community development is rendered unintelligible. Furthermore, community development is based on a tacit anthropocentric bias that steers teleological (ends-focused) reasoning towards outcomes that benefit human beings (Preston and Shin, 2020). Even the arguments for climate action and environmental justice are often framed in terms of preserving eco-systems so humans can survive and thrive. The special issue of the *Community Development Journal* on climate change (see McGregor and Scandrett, 2022 for an overview) brought this challenge into sharp focus. Engaging with socio-ecological transition discourses helps to reimagine community as 'more than human', and to understand human agency alongside that of non-human actors (see Shiva, 2016). This is exemplified through the voice of one of the participants in the research of Cruz and van de Fliert (2023, p. 72):

> We see nature as living, nature as having rights, so not only do farmers have seed sovereignty, the seed has sovereignty, which is the key issue,

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> because that's what requires from us a duty to protect biodiversity. Not as an input, not as a commodity, but as a living expression of Mother Earth.

From an ethical standpoint, the posthuman perspective asks what it would mean to decentre the human from ethics. What might it mean to engage with ethics if we challenge the idea of humans as being the only agents of the moral world, or, if we cease to invest in human exceptionalism and the placement of human beings at the top of moral hierarchy? Haraway (2013) envisions a posthuman future as a time 'when species meet'. She argues that posthuman ethics encourages us to think outside of the interests of our own species, to be less narcissistic in our conception of the world, and to take the interests and rights of entities that are different to us seriously. An important message for community development is that human beings are inextricably intertwined with other life forms. As Wolfe (2010, p. 140) argues, this points towards 'an ethics based not on ability, activity, agency and empowerment but on *compassion* that is rooted in our vulnerability and passivity'. As the impact of the climate crisis becomes more apparent, and its implications for the poorest peoples and nations, and for non-human species, are felt more severely, the need for the community development project to become a movement for eco-social justice has never been stronger. This is the macro-ethical challenge of our era.

Conclusion

Our discussion has ranged widely from the everyday ethics of particular human relationships to the planetary ethics of the eco-system. This may seem surprisingly broad for an article on ethics in community development, but we do not believe it is possible to practise ethically in the field of community development without skilful and sensitive movement between micro- and macro-ethical being, thinking, and acting. Notions of agency and responsibility are at the core of ethics, linked with recognition of human and ecosystem vulnerability, which call on us to be sensitive, think carefully, and act with integrity. This demands what we might call a situated (or contextualized) ethics of eco-social justice—seeing ethics as embedded in everyday practice and situated in political and ecological contexts. We hope the articles in this special issue, which span a range of ethical issues, will stimulate further ethical debates, reflections, and literature on this topic.

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