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Contesting parallel worlds: time to abandon the distinction between the 'international' and 'domestic' contexts of third sector scholarship?

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Contesting parallel worlds: Time to abandon the distinction between the 'international' and 'domestic' contexts of third sector scholarship?

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Summary

Since third sector research emerged as a fully-fledged inter-disciplinary academic field during the late 1980s, a separation has usually been maintained – in common with many other social science disciplines - between communities of researchers who are primarily concerned with the study of the third sector in rich Western countries and those who work on the third sector in the so-called 'developing world'. While internationally-focused researchers tend to use the language of 'non-governmental organizations' (NGOs), those in domestic settings usually prefer the terms 'non-profit organization' or 'voluntary organization', even though both sub-sectors share common principles and are equally internally diverse in terms of organizations and activities. While there has long been common-sense logic to distinguishing between wealthier and poorer regions of the world based on differences in the scale of human need, the 'developed' versus 'developing' category can also be criticized as being rather simplistic and unhelpfully ideological. As the categories of 'developing' and 'developed' countries become less clear-cut, and global inter-connectedness between third sectors and their ideas grows, this paper argues that we need to reconsider the value of maintaining these parallel worlds of research, and instead develop a more unified approach.

Introduction

Since third sector research emerged as a full-fledged academic area in the universities of Europe and North America during the late 1980s there has been a separation generally maintained – in common with many other social science fields - between communities of researchers who are primarily concerned with the study of the third sector in rich Western countries and those who work on the third sector in the so-called 'developing world'.[1] There has long been a useful common-sense logic to distinguishing between wealthier and poorer regions of the world based on differences in the scale of human need, but the maintenance of this 'developed' versus 'developing' country category is one that today is becoming overly simplistic and

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unhelpfully ideological. This paper argues that we should not allow this binary view of the world to create artificial and unhelpful silos between researchers and practitioners, and within the research field, and that we should instead promote a more unified perspective from which exchange and learning can more easily follow.

In particular, the binary view reflects continuing colonial and post-colonial constructions of separate worlds of knowledge that construct 'the West' and 'the rest'. In his book *Orientalism* Edward Said (1978) famously showed how representations of 'the Orient' were intrinsic components of the expansion of European empires. Perhaps because of the lasting power of this historical formation, it has proved surprisingly resistant and long lasting. In his quest for what he calls 'nonimperial geohistorical categories', Fernando Coronil (1996) argues how difficult it is to move beyond such categories. While academics regularly preface their work by commenting that they are uncomfortable with the language of 'first' and 'third' worlds[2] (or 'developed' and 'developing' countries) what tends to follow is usually the production of newer terms (such as 'developing nations' or the 'global South') that all too easily become mapped back onto the old binary structure. As the anthropologist David Graeber (2011, p.384) recently suggested in his dissection of the history of debt, global markets and the nature of poverty 'one thing that's clear is that new ideas won't emerge without the jettisoning of much of our accustomed categories of thought'.

The old idea of the three worlds became anachronistic after 1989, when the 'second world' of the Communist bloc all but disappeared into a new post-Cold War global geopolitical landscape. While poverty, inequality and exclusion without doubt remain disproportionately concentrated within the so-called 'developing' world, there are important internal differences that all too easily become obscured. The rise of new economic powers such as 'the BRICs' (Brazil, Russia, India and China) begins to render the idea of the developing world too diverse to be meaningful. At the same time, problems of poverty and inequality are important issues that also increasingly face rich countries (and their domestic third sectors). The 2008 economic crisis that affected many of the countries of the West has further contributed to shifts in the balance of global power and helps further to unsettle the old-fashioned dichotomous worldview. Many challenges facing organizations of the third sector in both rich and poor countries are increasingly common ones (such as accountability, resource mobilisation, maintaining legitimacy, dealing with regulation, and assessing effectiveness) - even if they are proportionally different and distinctively shaped by local politics, history and culture.

The problem of parallel worlds of research in which effort is needlessly duplicated and opportunities for exchange are missed is an issue for the organisation of knowledge, but it is also raises important questions at the level of practice. The

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[2] The term 'third world' is one of the longest established of these categories. While it has mainly negative connotations today, it was initially coined with more positive associations. Its origin during the early 1950s is associated with the French demographer Alfred Sauvy, who drew a comparison with the idea of the 'third estate' (the people) during the French revolution. Like the third estate, Sauvy argued that the third world was exploited and ignored and now wanted political and economic power. The term provided the title of anthropologist and sociologist Peter Worsley's (1964) book that proved influential among those who viewed the third world as an arena of progressive struggle against both Western and Soviet forms of oppression.

knowledge communities that exist among researchers in universities and think tanks are also closely related to the communities of practice that have built up within the third sector. In the UK, for example, it has long been observable that that a comparable dualism can be observed and is reproduced within the working practices of third sector professionals. Activists and professionals tend to choose *either* a domestic *or* an international career path within the third sector. The result is that there is very little mobility of staff or exchange of ideas between those who work within one or other of these strictly defined sub-sectors of the third sector.

This binary worldview is not however settled, and is occasionally challenged. Some third sector staff express increasing uneasiness with the rigidity of these customary professional boundaries. This is particularly apparent from the perspective of those who work within the domestic sub-sector, perhaps because of a perception among a few that they run the risk of becoming constrained a narrow outlook that neglects wider learning opportunities within an increasingly global frame of experiences. For the domestic sub-sector in particular, there is the danger of a parochial rather than a cosmopolitan world view, if cosmopolitans are defined as those 'who identify more broadly with their continent or with the world as a whole' (Norris 2003: 289).

Building on earlier work on such themes (Lewis 1999), I argue in this paper that the existence of such 'parallel worlds' of knowledge and action has unhealthy implications for third sector research and theory, and for policy and practice. In the first part of the paper, I present a short personal life-work narrative that explores growing awareness of these issues through my own professional engagement as a university-based academic with students and colleagues in both sub-sectors. In choosing to deploy a personal narrative during this portion of the paper I follow Goodson's (2013: 6) argument that the use of individual life history data goes beyond the personal to make possible an exploration of the wider 'pattern of social relations, interactions and historical constructions in which the lives of women and men are embedded'.

In the second part, I discuss evidence of global trends and shifts that indicate a growing convergence around issues of human need and policy responses in countries formerly characterised as developing and developed. I argue that this change may have potential implications for the ways we organise third sector research priorities. These implications are then briefly explored in the context of some UK third sector, where I return to some life history data that was collected during a research project undertaken in 2006 from activists and professionals working in the third sector. In conclusion, I argue that the changing global conditions of the twenty first century make binary distinctions at global and sector levels even less sustainable than they once were. A case is made for reconfiguring the third sector research landscape in order to take fuller account of such changes.

Encountering 'parallel worlds': a personal journey

During the mid-1990s I became interested in the ways knowledge and practice are organised within the third sector. I had recently taken up a position at the Centre for Voluntary Organisation (CVO), a small teaching and research unit located within the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Political

Science. My academic background was in anthropology and inter-disciplinary development studies, and I had become interested in the subject of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) after carrying out fieldwork in Bangladesh, a country with its own highly developed NGO sector. The CVO had for many years been teaching one of the world's first dedicated third sector Masters programmes. This course, entitled Voluntary Sector Organization, was aimed squarely at people working in the UK voluntary sector. As the reputation of this programme had grown, international interest had increased.

As a result, the LSE had taken a decision to establish a new Masters programme in the Management of NGOs and to hire a new faculty member to cover this expanding new area. My job was to set up the new programme, develop the curriculum, recruit the students and begin teaching. I had little previous knowledge of the field of third sector research as it had been emerging in Europe and America, reflected in journals such as *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* and *Nonprofit Management and Leadership*. My previous research experience to date had been as an anthropologist who had moved inter-disciplinary 'development studies' and I had worked primarily on issues in the 'third world'. For my PhD research project, I had carried out fieldwork in rural Bangladesh and then gone on to work on a research project on NGO-government relationships in Asia at London's Overseas Development Institute (ODI) during the early 1990s.

At LSE, I became intrigued by the scholarship undertaken by my colleagues at CVO were undertaking on organisational issues in the domestic context of the UK (and their engagement with similar research on the 'non-profit' sector in North America).[3] In short, this experience broadened my horizons and led me to something of an epiphany. It appeared to me that although the contexts of Britain and Bangladesh were of course strikingly different, ongoing debates about research, policy and practice in these countries' respective third sectors seemed to share many common preoccupations – questions of accountability, challenges of resource mobilisation, tensions between advocacy and service delivery roles, and the nature of relations with the state. It therefore seemed possible that the differences *within* the third sectors in particular country settings (where research usually indicated wide organisational diversity) were at least *as* pronounced - if not actually greater than - the differences *between* them.

Furthermore, the challenge of understanding organisation and management issues in the third sector posed similar problems in each sub-sector because of the relatively small amount of existing research literature that was available, and both suffered from the unwise tendency simply to generalise from the business management literature. Yet a way of seeing based on a division of labour had emerged. This division of labour was not completely unchallenged, however. The newly formed International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) was beginning to argue for a more unified, comparative view of the third sector, even if much of its early work centred on issues

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[3] The terminological differences were intriguing too, because they seemed arbitrary. Why was a UK third sector organisation that worked internationally known as an 'NGO', while one that similar in terms of organization, structure and values but worked at home was called a 'voluntary organisation'?

of definition and measurement. Comparative research undertaken by Salamon et al (2003) also challenged the traditional binary division of labour across the sub-sectors, even if the origins of the John Hopkins third sector definition were located firmly in the Western context. These early efforts did not on the whole tend to address management and organisation themes, and nor was this yet a research literature with which scholars within development studies were engaging. From my position, it seemed these circumstances had unhelpfully led to the creation and maintenance of two largely separate spheres of knowledge, making learning across contexts and boundaries far more difficult in my view than it should have been.

In 1998, I wrote a brief working paper that tried to make some of these arguments (Lewis 1998). Later that same year, I convened a small workshop at LSE that aimed to bring together scholars from both sides of the divide to discuss the issues. This led to publication of an edited book *International Perspectives on Voluntary Action* (1999) with contributions from leading third sector scholars such as Helmut Anheier, Lester M. Salamon, Jeremy Kendall, Margaret Harris and Marilyn Taylor alongside work from key international development researchers including John Gaventa, Michael Edwards, David Brown, Syed Hashemi and Alan Fowler. The book tried to set out arguments for overcoming the rigid boundaries that separated researchers, and suggested that if such boundaries could be challenged, there could be the potential not only for richer scholarship but also for useful exchange of experiences and lessons between third sector organisations working on either side of the boundary. The book was politely received but overall it attracted very little attention.

Although my own research interests subsequently shifted towards other aspects of development politics in South Asia, the need to challenge what remained an artificial separation between the two worlds of research always remained at the back of my mind. At LSE, the two MSc programmes ran for many years and were broadly successful. Yet the existence of the two programmes also reflected a continuing wider division in the third sector research communities. There was sometimes dissatisfaction expressed among students on both programmes with the idea that one MSc was primarily concerned with the UK third sector (and the sector in other 'developed' societies) while the other focused on the developing world as a residual category. In the years that followed, I drifted away from attending conferences such as ARNOVA, where papers on non-Western organizations and contexts tended to be shunted to the periphery of panels that focused chiefly on North America and Europe. Renewed debates around global change during the past decade such as the rise of the BRICs have persuaded me once again that the time is right to make another call for convergence around research and practice in the two sub-sectors.

Contesting parallel worlds: changing global landscapes

The simplistic notion of 'developed' and 'developing' countries has long been anachronistic. By the 1980s, the rise of Japan, the growth of the so-called 'Asian tiger' economies, and the growing power of oil rich countries in the Middle East and elsewhere had complicated the picture. The end of the Cold War in 1989 made redundant the language that had set out a distinction between the 'first' world (the West), the 'second' world (the USSR, China and the Eastern bloc) and 'third' world (the rest). More recently, the recognition that the developing world needs clearer

disaggregating has taken root in the idea of the BRICs (and various spin-off terms such as the 'next eleven', the MINT, Mexico, Indonesia, Nigeria, Turkey, and others[4]). Finally, the continuing post-2008 economic crisis that that has engulfed large areas of the 'developed' world has also changed the way many see the balance of power in international affairs.

The combination of all these changes help set the scene for a more geographically complex global landscape of countries, resources and relationships. The rise of China in particular presents a significant challenge to the old post-World War Two and Cold War orders, as Sutcliffe (2005) has shown

> the gap between China and the rich countries is closing very rapidly. This produces convergence and is expressed in reductions in most calculations of inter country and global coefficients of inequality. However, within China, inequality is growing fast, and millions are relatively, if not absolutely, left behind in its headlong growth.

The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) *Human Development Report 2013* was entitled 'The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World'. It retained the dualist categories of North and South, but it comments on the trend of growing interconnectedness and interdependence that is gathering pace between the rich and poor countries. The authors of the report suggest that 'the South needs the North, and increasingly the North needs the South… The world is getting more connected, not less'. Alongside a discussion of the economic progress made by China, Brazil and India, the report also identifies countries such as Mexico, South Africa, Indonesia and Turkey as growing in importance on the world's stage. It suggests that each of these newly powerful countries has followed a unique and distinctive pathway that arguably muddies the previously clear water of the binary worldview of developed and developing country categories.

At the same time, concentrations of poverty and inequality persist and in some cases are increasing, but these no longer map as neatly as they once did onto categories of North and South. One interesting result of this is that there is often value in applying ideas and policies formulated in the context of 'developing' countries to those in the so-called 'developed' world, and vice versa. The influential work of economist Amartya Sen that has sought to understand poverty in multidimensional terms was based on the analysis of developing countries, but it has proved equally useful when applied to the analysis of livelihoods more generally, including in the richest countries (see Sen and Dreze 1999). The 'capabilities approach' pioneered by Sen has been influential both for assessing quality of life and the extent of social justice, and also useful the design of policies, including moving from simply measuring poverty on the basis of GDP to include relative wellbeing.

Third, a profound transformation is taking place in the global landscape of foreign aid (Mawdsley 2012). Power is beginning to drain away from the apparatus of international development that emerged after World War Two through which the European and North American nations transferred foreign aid, technologies and

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[4] Both the BRIC and the MINT acronyms were coined by British economist Jim O'Neill, former chair of Goldman Sachs Asset Management.

policies to the third world through the Bretton Woods institutions, the United Nations and the bilateral and non-governmental development agencies. Rising quantities of Chinese aid in particular, in Africa and elsewhere, have within the space of a few short years begun to outpace the development assistance that is provided by Western countries. Many formerly 'developing' countries such as India and South Korea now operate their own foreign aid programmes, which are seen as essential badges of credibility for modern states seeking global influence.

Finally, in the UK third sector, international NGOs such as Oxfam and Save the Children Fund have begun operating 'at home', establishing - sometimes controversially given their histories of assisting distant others - community level programmes that aim to tackle marginalisation and poverty in the UK. In the part of the 'World formerly known as Third' (to use Comaroff and Comaroff's [2012] phrase), the third sector is also changing in new ways, challenging our (Western researchers') preconceptions. For example, Bangladesh's BRAC has grown rapidly to become the largest development organisation of its kind in the world. It now operates large scale development and humanitarian programmes in many other countries, becoming the first international NGO based in the Global South to do so (Smillie 2009). In Japan, the post-2011 *tsunami* humanitarian and reconstruction effort raised important challenges for the third sector – and it was reported that the international sub-sector was able to carry out the work more effectively than the organisations of the domestic sub-sector.[5]

One response to these shifts in recent years that begins to overcome the 'parallel worlds' problem is the discourse of 'global civil society'. This literature on the rise of international networks and coalitions that link local organisations with those at national and international settings is certainly a welcome change, as is the way that researchers and activists have sometimes come together in new ways to engage with wider global struggles. This discourse strives to overcome separation between the two domestic and international spheres, in recognising the regional and global dimensions of local or domestic work, and in creating new opportunities for exchange and comparison. It has also begun challenging the 'us and them' thinking that structures communities of knowledge and practice.

For example, in the *Global Civil Society Yearbook 2009*, the authors engage with a problem of a 'methodological nationalism' that tends to confine discussions of poverty and poor people to limited country-level explanations that often involve 'a strange combination of divine luck and the fault of the poor' (Kaldor, Kumar and Seckinelgin 2009, p.23). Such explanations, they argue, fail to engage sufficiently with the asymmetrical nature of power, and with the realities of 'the rapid globalization of poverty and prosperity'. Using a global civil society framework, they argue, makes it possible to move beyond these limitations with an international perspective that recognises the need to build

> a global alliance of poor people with those in the affluent developed world who suffer numerous forms of social exclusion and discrimination on account

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[5] Personal communication from Professor Yuko Suda, Department of Sociology, Toyo University, Japan.

of race, class, gender and religion etc. In other words, moving away from the shell of national histories of poverty, global civil society radicalises the development of transnational consciousness about the rights of the global poor. (p.22)

Such a perspective also makes it possible to begin building a more cohesive framework for third sector research that more fully recognises the connections between local and global actors and processes.

The persistence of the parallel worlds

Moving to the level of scholarship, the parallel worlds of third sector *research* have their origins in the academic division of labour that emerged during the last century, which was itself shaped by the wider geopolitical worldviews of history and colonial power. In the UK, the study of the domestic third sector has mainly taken place within social policy, while the international study of NGOs has formed part of the entirely separate field of development studies.

Social policy is an interdisciplinary academic field concerned with 'the support of wellbeing through social action' - the roots of which go back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century social reformers in Britain who were campaigning for the introduction of social protection through the state (Alcock et al 1998). Development studies emerged later – and separately - in the 1960s as 'a self-defined field of academic and practical research' that was cross-disciplinary, distinctly British in terms of its colonial heritage, and informed by a range of other diverse influences. These included the positivist orthodoxy of post-war planning, the growing field of development economics, and the rise of popular liberation movements in the late and post-colonial world (Harriss 2005). These two fields of study continue to be separated within the British university system – with a few exceptions[6] – and as a result, the study of the third sector has also tended to remain confined within these largely separate spheres.

The parallel worlds of these knowledge communities reflect wider political and historical processes. Such a worldview has roots within the 'othering' relationship that was constructed in the colonial period between West and non-West (Cooper and Packard 1997). This process of knowledge construction is of course central to the evolution of the idea of 'development' itself, which emerged after the Second World War in part as a project to remake the rest of the world in the image of Western modernity and as a tool for building influence during the Cold War (Gardner and Lewis 1996). Since then, categories used to conceptualise and organise local and global action have tended to rest upon simple essentialised dualisms – the 'first' and 'third' world, 'developed' and 'undeveloped', 'underdeveloped', or 'developing', 'north' and 'south' have persisted. As we saw earlier, the binary distinction continues to exist today within our depictions of global processes and trends. In mainstream

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[6] One of the few successful academic collaborations between the fields of social policy and development studies researchers was undertaken by Ian Gough and Geof Wood and resulted in the book *Insecurity and Welfare Regimes in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

business circles there is now talk of 'emerging markets' rather than developing countries, and for radicals the idea of the 'third world' has been replaced with more politically correct terms such as the 'global South', or the 'majority world'.

Critics have long pointed out that these distinctions are outmoded and oversimplified: first because they are Eurocentric in the suggestion that the ideal of development is simply an end point best represented by Western industrial democratic societies, and second, because they ignore the very different characteristics of individual countries *within* such classifications. This colonially rooted discourse that distinguishes poverty in the West from poverty in the 'third world' is also problematic because conceals the interconnectedness of global social inequalities, and the poverty-related domestic issues of immigration and racism. Such connections have become increasingly difficult to deny in an era of global neoliberalism.

The reproduction of this dualist worldview in the organisation of knowledge about the third sector - the idea of domestic 'voluntary' or 'non-profit organizations', versus international 'non-governmental organizations', based on the organising idea of developed and developing country contexts - is therefore problematic. As Katie Willis (2005) points out, the idea of development as something that happens or is required only in the 'third world' is deeply flawed:

> This distinction fails to recognise the dynamism of all societies and the continued desire by populations for improvements (not necessarily in material goods). It also fails to consider the experiences of social exclusion that are found within supposedly 'developed' countries or regions (p.16)

Such binary distinctions do of course have some theoretical and politically strategic value. For example, radical theorists of underdevelopment such as A.G. Frank have long argued that the poorest countries are locked into permanently unfavourable international structural inequalities that prevent them breaking free of the conditions of large-scale poverty. More recently, within the critical anthropology of development Foucauldian discourse theorists such as Arturo Escobar (1995) have been influential in arguing that such dualism merely reflects and expresses the dominant structures of global power and Western domination. The industrialised countries established a powerful system of institutions and resources after the Second World War through the provision of international aid in which the rest of the world was defined, and then constructed and acted upon, in the name of 'development'. Part of the way that power has been exercised is through the organisation of knowledge and the representation of ideas. The binary distinction can therefore be understood historically as part of the way in which the power of 'experts' has been – and continues to be - exercised through the act of 'simplifying' the world and 'resolving it into simple forces and oppositions' (Mitchell 2002: 34).

Because it oversimplifies complex issues, such a dualist approach has limited value as a way either of trying to understand the world, or of attempting to structure policy and practice within it. It tends to conceal the international political and economic relationships that underpin wider global political economy, and as we have seen is increasingly at odds with the changing balance of power between different parts of the world and the uneven concentrations of poverty and deprivation that are the result of such change. There are three main issues arising from this.

First, neoliberal policies have led to the restructuring of welfare systems through the reduction of the role of the state, the increased marketization of service delivery and the loosening of arrangements to regulate international flows of capital in both North and South since the 1980s. Structural adjustment policies were largely imposed upon developing countries by the international financial institutions, leading in many cases to higher levels of inequality and reduced access to public services. Today there are echoes of this story in the Eurozone crisis, which is bringing a similar experience of painful economic adjustment and associated political instability to many people who live in countries in Southern Europe previously seen as predominantly wealthy and stable.

Second, while poverty has never been confined to the geographic locations of the 'third world', it is increasingly a condition that is also being experienced by many individuals and social groups within societies previously regarded as wealthy, as global social inequalities have increased within countries as well as between them. The extent and extremes of poverty in areas of Asia, Africa and Latin America cannot be compared to disadvantage and inequality in the industrialised societies of 'the North'. While the scale of poverty may be different, the basic causes and processes are similar. They are also, of course, inter-connected. For example, John Gaventa's (1999) analysis of organisations of the poor among the Appalachian communities of the United States and in areas of Mexico revealed the structural interdependence of exploitation and exclusion found within both communities. He wrote of the existence of 'Norths in the South' and 'Souths in the North', reshaped over time by international capital as it moves across borders in search of ever-cheaper labour. He argued that only by de-mythologizing the differences between these contexts would there be possibilities to build more equal partnerships around linkages and learning.

Third, this interconnectedness is increasing. As the processes of globalisation have accelerated, it has become clearer that a binary 'us and them' worldview conceals continuities and connections in relation to migration, displacement, trade, conflict, transnational institutions and many other inter-related elements among broader landscapes of colonial history and globalisation (Kothari 2005). In a thoughtful analysis of the problem of why it is 'alright to do development "over there" but not "here"', Jones (2000: 240) argues in favour of more recognition of the importance of exploring the potential for 'policy and theoretical convergence across boundaries'. For example, he finds increasing areas of common need around issues such as participation and citizenship in both 'first world' and 'third world' contexts.

Contestation through learning and exchange

These are not simply theoretical or abstract points, because they imply that a changing worldview needs to inform action within the third sector itself. As Glasius and Scholte (2009, p.232) wrote in *Global Civil Society Yearbook 2009*

> Rather than persist with untenable notions of 'rich' and 'poor' countries and continents, anti-poverty campaigners might instead do better to highlight the glaring inequalities that have become more tangible everywhere in the world.

There is some evidence that more exchange and learning is becoming more common among activists and third sector professionals *across* the boundary of 'developed' and 'developing' countries.

One example is the well-documented use of micro-credit and micro-finance as tools for addressing household poverty. With origins in the developing world, these approaches have been applied in Western industrialised countries as well. For example, Pearson (2000) documents some early efforts with developing country inspired microcredit approaches being introduced into some UK settings. Another area of exchange has been around the emergence of participatory tools and techniques in community development. For example, the international practitioner journal *Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) Notes* (2000) reported extensively on several cases of North-South exchange around the use of participatory approaches. More recently, planning methodologies such as 'theories of change' originally developed in the context of US community development are now gaining popularity among international development agencies (INTRAC 2012).

In the third sector, there are also increasing examples of such exchanges. In 1995, the British international development NGO Oxfam announced that it would no longer work only in the 'third world' but in the UK too, where it launched a UK Poverty Programme (Whyte, 1996). The programme leader Audrey Bronstein was quoted as saying:

> We see a rich country in which some have vast resources while others have scarcely enough to eat and no meaningful work. The state has pulled back, public expenditure cut and services are not being provided. (p.13)

In 1998, considerable interest was generated when Oxfam brought over an Indian community organiser from Accord who had been used to working in the Nilgiri Hills to do community level work within their UK poverty programme to tackle problems of social isolation, poverty and exclusion on Matson housing estate in Gloucestershire, England (*The Guardian*, April 5, 1998). More recently, Save the Children Fund (UK) had decided to make an appeal for money for poor families in the UK and had received criticism in the form of 'disapproval in some quarters that a charity best known for its work with victims of war and famine in troubled parts of the world should be turning its attention to problems at home' (Gentleman, 2013).[7]

Exchanges of ideas across developing and developed country contexts are also being documented within the professional social work field. *The Guardian* newspaper (2013) recently reported an initiative where British social workers have spent time in India learning from frontline social workers over there, and India professionals have come to the UK. One social worker remarked:

> I learned so much about how their approach differs from ours; especially their emphasis on community development and advocacy, and how that shapes the way social work is done in India. It really inspired me.

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[7] This hostility replayed earlier comments in British press, where the *Daily Mail* newspaper used the headline: 'Get back to the third world" when it learned of Oxfam's UK poverty programme (Whyte, 1996).

Such work challenges the earlier tradition of British social work models being imposed on dependent territories during the colonial era (models that were not suited to local cultures and institutions), a process that James Midgley (1981) famously termed 'professional imperialism'. Today, it makes little sense to obscure or deny the global relationships and continuities that increasingly connect organisations and individuals concerned with social and economic change processes within different contexts. Moreover, the third sector can provide a potentially useful framework both for understanding these connections, and also perhaps for addressing them in more 'joined up' ways. For some activists and researchers, the idea of a 'glocal' perspective is the way forward.

The UK third sector: changing perceptions and practices?

In Britain the 'third' sector has long been divided into two distinct sub-sectors which can be seen to form separate 'parallel worlds' of both research and practice, each with separate terminologies (Lewis 1999). One sub-sector is outward facing and contains the various 'non-governmental organisations' (NGOs) that work overseas in 'developing' countries, while the other is composed of inward-facing 'voluntary organisations' that are concerned with domestic, UK-focused work 'at home'. The identities of third sector professionals are constructed within a highly simplified framework that denies connections between domestic and international policy and history. Furthermore, academic scholarship has tended to reflect this split, based on the longstanding separation between public or social policy studies 'at home', and the interdisciplinary field of international development studies that emerged within British universities in the second half of the twentieth century.

In 2006, I began a research project that engaged with the 'life-work histories' of a group of activists and professionals in UK, Philippines and Bangladesh in order to understand the experiences of people who cross between third sector and government settings (Lewis 2008). The study deliberately tried to work across the conventional divide of domestic and international third sectors, using the argument that such sector 'boundary crossing' was a general feature of all three country contexts, even if it took varying forms and had different drivers in each. Although the parallel worlds issue was not formally part of the study, the life history method is a particularly open-ended form of data collection that allows a wide range of subjects to enter the discussion, as determined by the interviewee. In the course of interviewing twenty boundary crossing professionals in the UK (who were equally divided between the domestic and international sub-sectors), the problems of the 'parallel worlds' occasionally surfaced as part of their detailed reflections on their career narratives to date. I once again became interested in the subject, and here I reflected back on what some of these interviewees had said.

First, the narratives of personal and professional decision-making indicated that the 'parallel worlds' remained a feature of the UK third sector.[8] The distinction served not only to construct non-governmental professional career identities (as either an 'international' or a 'UK' person) but also to segregate certain areas of expert

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[8] A more detailed discussion of this data is contained in Lewis (2011).

knowledge. For example, one informant reflected on the fact that it remains difficult to cross the boundary:

> I do see the international development sector as really almost a 'sub-sector' or a 'co-sector' really, alongside … the UK voluntary sector. And I think there's … little movement probably between international development and UK voluntary sector.

There is a barrier to the travel of people and of ideas, even where there may be useful potential for exchange and learning across contexts.

As a result, movement by professionals between the two worlds is comparatively rare. Where people *do* develop an interest in moving, there are further hurdles arising from the different knowledge communities represented within each sub-sector. From a perspective within the UK, some people view the world of international development differently as exotic and exciting. For the following informant, the view of the international sector is somewhat idealised, and is expressed as part of a desire to 'escape' from the everyday. She suggests that people who do make it across do so as a kind of 'one-way traffic' from which there is an unlikely chance of return:

> I think it's quite difficult to get into the international sector you know, if your experience is mainly UK. And once you're in the international sector people don't tend to want to come back to the UK sector. And I can see the reasons for that. There's some sort of excitement, perhaps, about working overseas, but also the need. You can't really compare the needs of kids in Africa to the needs of, you know, even the most deprived kids in the UK.

This separation poses difficulties for people who do wish to move between the two sub-sectors, or share ideas between them.

People may also find that their professional knowledge and experience is differently valued across the sub-sectors for reasons that are not always entirely clear. For example, one senior NGO staff member interviewed recalled being asked about her earlier career in the UK public sector during her NGO job interview. Under increasingly hostile questioning from the panel about the status and validity of her UK-based knowledge and experience, termed as the question of whether she had really 'got dirt under her fingernails', she tried to explain that in her view both working in inner London and working in international settings could both generate useful experience (Lewis 2011).

A lack of exchange of ideas between organizations in the two worlds was a recurring theme in the life histories. For example, one development NGO manager explained how difficult it is for development people to take seriously learning opportunities between domestic and international settings:

> [T]he saddest thing is that I find in [the NGO] is [that] I don't think we're open enough to ideas coming in from all sorts of places… Like the Humanitarian Department, we've done this [new plan] and we've put a lot of … stuff into getting our humanitarian [approach] really slick … [F]rankly, it's been really hard work to persuade them to go and look at emergency services

in other places, including the NHS. And you just think 'Oh for heaven's sake' … and they finally did go to say, the County Council for example, to look at their emergency procedures …

This lack of openness is attributed to the fact that staff tended to remain in the international NGO sector during their careers, moving between a relatively small number of organisations. Unable to imagine that useful knowledge or relevant lessons might be available from within the UK, NGO colleagues also restrict their consultations with other organisations. Part of this is an unwillingness, according to this informant, to connect 'developing' and 'developing' country contexts.

Another interviewee had worked in the UK public health sector before becoming an NGO manager, but she now felt that her 'development' colleagues undervalued her experience, even where she felt there were potentially relevant comparisons to be made:

> when you get round to it, the skills and the things you do, they are so similar really… I mean, I didn't know much about delivering humanitarian stuff, and then I got into debates about actual beneficiaries and their ability to comment on services and things. And I was thinking, wait a minute, I've been here before with patients, you know, and all the same things are just there …

In order to get around the problem that her knowledge from the domestic sub-sector was not valued by her international colleagues, she explained that she sometimes found it necessary to pretend to know *less* than she actually did in some meetings. This, she said, was a response to the negative power of people's preconceived expectations about the value of 'her' knowledge as against 'their' specialised, differentiated knowledge of development:

> I think I have spent quite a lot of my time slightly pretending I don't know as much as I do about some things, so that people can discover them for themselves. And that's what happened … I feel I've had to learn how to be very … gentle ... [T]here's a very heavy culture and I don't just mean in [this NGO], I mean in that whole sector, you know, … you can get change to happen, but if you look like you're bringing something from … you know … *outside*, I think you've got trouble.

Finally, one informant explained certain other ways in which knowledge was segregated. She had come to know more about the NGO world from her sister who worked there, and had become particularly interested in the evaluation of community-level interventions. But she found her colleagues unwilling to explore ideas from this source. She characterised them as introverted and unwilling to consider the international context as a valid source of knowledge, and looked forward to moving herself into the international sub-sector:

> You don't get the cross-fertilisation, you don't get … the learning from the international development sector coming into the UK. It's like … they're just talking amongst themselves. They don't talk to the broader voluntary sector. I mean, that's my take on it, and I'm quite interested to see, when I move into [an NGO] if it's true.

Conclusion: reconfiguring our worldview, reshaping third sector research

In this paper, I have chosen to revisit earlier arguments about the need to bring communities of knowledge and practice closer together in relation to the domestic and international sub-fields of the third sector. The case for challenging the dichotomies has, I believe, become more acute. As Glasius and Scholte (2009, p.232) point out: 'these neat geographical binaries do not adequately reflect actual circumstances'. Furthermore, globalization in communications and technology means that opportunities for international connection and learning have increased across the third sector, and so research and practice agendas needs to better reflect this.

At the same time, there are profound wider global changes now taking place that may bring implications that go way beyond earlier debates about globalisation. Since the economic crisis of 2008, many countries of the West have remained caught up in recession and fiscal meltdown, prompting stringent adjustment policies and austerity measures reminiscent of the structural adjustment programmes imposed on developing countries by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund during the 1980s. Meanwhile countries such as Argentina, which faced a severe financial crash over a decade ago, and countries of Southern Europe whose economies have been affected by the Eurozone crisis, while suffering severe hardships may be starting to point the way towards potentially different, post neoliberal futures. In Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina, for example, expanded social spending in relation to welfare and inclusion has characterised distinctive political projects of post-neoliberalism in recent years (Grugel and Riggirozzi, 2012).

The anthropologists Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (2012, p.121) have emphasised the depth of these ongoing global transformations, suggesting that Euro-America, or the Western countries, are effectively 'evolving southwards'. They go so far as to turn on its head the traditional Euro-American narrative of modernity, in which modernity and development is believed to follow from the experiences and the examples of the West:

> Contrary to the received Euromodernist narrative of the past two centuries – which has the so-called Global South tracking behind the curve of Universal History, always in deficit, always playing catch up - there is good reason to think the opposite: that, in the here and now, it is regions in the South that tend first to feel the concrete effects of world-historical processes as they play themselves out, thus to prefigure the future of the former metropole.

In this way, they argue, Euro-America might be seen as evolving *towards* the countries 'formerly known as Third' as they begin to experience more intensely a new lived politics of anti-austerity protests, calls for society-wide basic income grants, and structural adjustment measures and cuts - all of which have long been familiar experiences for those people living in the 'non-West'. This may require those looking to their own, or to other industrialised countries of the West, for ideas and models, to begin looking further afield. To be more precise, it is the 'domestic' academic research community that probably needs to change more, simply because the

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international/NGO research community is naturally more familiar with taking a more global, less ethnocentric worldview.

Returning to earlier concerns with the parallel worlds within academia, I think there has been some progress in breaking down some of the barriers between the worlds of voluntary organisations and NGOs, and between the contexts of developed and developing countries. But the advances have been relatively small and the parallel worlds of third sector scholarship remain quite cloistered. Perhaps now is the time for third sector researchers and teachers to move out of their silos and take a more global and interconnected view of the third sector that goes beyond familiar comfort zones, and in ways that take more account of the ways wider global landscapes are rapidly changing. It is only by challenging the dualisms of the past, making more visible the connections between rich and poor countries, connecting up our various research agendas, and learning from *within* and *between* the sub-sectors of the third sector landscape, that we may have a better chance to move forward analysing and addressing a set of pressing real world problems.

There are also real world pressures in universities in the UK at least that favour more integration and exchange as a source of improved efficiency and 'value for money'. In the Research Evaluation Framework (REF) exercise in which a government-led peer review exercise takes place every five years in British universities, the idea of research 'impact' as a field to be judged and measured has also recently been added to the assessment criteria. While the REF exercise is flawed in many ways, it is possible that this new emphasis on impact alongside research quality could create incentives for producing more joined up thinking around impact that might begin to challenge existing disciplinary siloes.

What might a reconfigured third sector research field look like? There are at least three sets of issues to consider. The first is the need to open up the field in Europe and North America to a less parochial position that engages with wider global experiences. A truly international approach needs to include both the systematic comparative study of the third sector and detailed historically embedded empirical research that rejects simplistic binaries. A second is to challenge unhelpful terminologies that have emerged within the separate worlds of scholarship and try to develop more rigorous, conceptually nuanced language to reflect analytical rather than contextual difference. And finally, in the provision of research-led teaching on third sector issues at university level (anywhere in the world), we need to better ensure that students are exposed to systematic comparative studies of the third sector, and to a range of theory and case studies drawn from both 'domestic' and 'international' contexts. If we manage to do this, the benefits will not only accrue to scholars interested in the third sector, but also perhaps to the worlds of policy and practice. There has never been a better time to try to build improved synergies between those with an interest in gaining and applying knowledge about third sector organizations around the world.

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