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Foreword: communicating development with communities.

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Foreword

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Foreword

This book is an account of Linje Manyozo's struggle with dominating knowledge systems and practices, especially as they operate in the field of media and communications. It is at one and the same time a deconstruction of the dominant paradigm in the development communication field and, crucially, a proposal for the theory and practice of a deliberative development in and with communities. A deliberative development framework acknowledges that asymmetrical power relations are never resolved fully. Conflictual relationships have to be worked through if the oppressed, whomever and wherever they are, are to make a positive difference in their own lives, a difference that they can claim as their own pathway to something we call 'development'. This is a passionate and, at the same time, a scholarly book. It is also a hopeful account. Notwithstanding the myriad of ways in which the oppressor – even the oppressor with the best of apparent intentions – represses, wreaks harm, and damage in communities in the global South, this book explains why the potential exists to create spaces within which there can be a celebration of the agency of oppressed groups.

Linje Manyozo has a very special talent. This is to achieve an insightful blending of the personal and the political drawing upon a wide range of critical traditions in academic research and upon his own life experience. The dominant paradigm of communication and/or development is characterized as a spectacle of development rooted in 'bullshit' conceptions of development. Throughout the post-war period, however, alternatives have been articulated. Sometimes these are characterized as participatory communication or as communication for social change approaches, often with an emphasis on the role of the media and various information and communication technologies, but these approaches themselves become complicit in oppression. Training programmes produce local and external 'experts' who find themselves working on communication and/or development initiatives but they cannot engage with communities or they do so without the ability to listen and to value community insights and practices. This book addresses crucial questions: What does a praxis of deliberative development entail and how is it experienced? Is it possible for educators to work in solidarity with oppressed and marginalized groups, despite the domineering pressure created by the spectacle of development?

A pedagogy of listening through communicating and speaking development alongside communities is carefully explained in this book. Listening is critical because *all* those who find

themselves engaged with a process of communicating about development of necessity need to rethink their understanding of, and position in, the world. This is not something that happens once or in a particular media or digital technology project for development. It is instead a continuous process of learning to acknowledge the voices of the subaltern, of actually living with the people, of encountering change in all of its complexity, and of fostering an art of listening. Paulo Freire's comment that 'dialogue is a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it',¹ is the tradition that Linje Manyozo builds upon. He argues that, in this way, it becomes possible to transform the reality of lived experience. The experience of listening and speaking opens the possibility for unexpected meanings and actions to emerge especially through the encounter of the self with others. The struggle for educators is to find ways of creating a critical pedagogy that can be institutionalized within degree programmes and through the practices of agencies operating in the global South, but also in the global North, where a pedagogy that enables action against oppression is also needed.

I am very honoured to be invited to write the foreword for this book. I am a white Western woman who lives, was trained and conducts most of my research in the global North although I have worked in collaboration with academic colleagues, policy makers and non-governmental organisations who live and work in the global South. My own work does not meet Linje Manyozo's criteria for a dialogical approach to development. Reading this book caused me to reflect on what might have enabled me to develop a critical stance towards what Linje Manyozo calls the development industry and why it was possible for he and I to have many productive conversations during his time as a faculty member in my department. This is not fully explained by the fact that the reader will notice that he generously cites an early paper which I wrote while I was a doctoral student. In that paper, I criticized the prevailing paradigm in the development communication field and argued that, despite a turn to participatory models of engagement, the basic assumptions of the traditional model remained deeply entrenched and unchallenged. A close reading of that paper will reveal that I did not offer solutions and would not claim to have done so since.

There are two main reasons that I think we were able to listen and speak to each other in a way that sustained a meaningful dialogue. The first is that we both understand that it is essential to acknowledge that 'without context, words and actions have no meaning at all'.² A continuous engagement with the contexts in which our lives are lived, with the challenges, the disappointments, and the rewards is, I suggest, a preliminary step towards an effective critique

of universal or hegemonic theories and practices of development. In the dominant paradigm of the spectacle of development, context is lost in the name of simplicity and in the race to engage in problem solving where the problems are typically specified by those who are behaving as the oppressor. The second reason is that we bring a commitment to historicizing contemporary struggles. In so doing, we are both committed to the view that sources of knowledge arising from intuition, and which are acquired through practice and personal experience, are vital to transformative action. In a 1990 edited collection of papers, Marglin writes about 'the decolonization of the mind'.³ He highlights the importance of this kind of knowledge or *techne* as contrasted with *episteme* or logical deductions from universal principles which are associated with scientific knowledge. It is the latter which is so frequently accorded an imperial position in guiding development communication initiatives. And it is the singular reliance on *episteme* without respect for *techne* that leads to the replication of the dominant paradigm of development.

Yet historically, and in contemporary times, resistance to the dominant paradigm is present and articulated in multiple contexts. This often leads to an insistence on 'another' approach to development. The Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation's influential report on development and international cooperation in the 1970s, for example, emphasised not just the production of new technologies but the direction or pathway of innovation. In this report it was observed that 'the capacity of technology to transform the nature, orientation and purpose of development is such that the question of who controls technology is central to who controls development'.⁴ The report called for 'another development' that would be informed by a needs-based approach and contribute to self-reliance; one that would not be locked into trajectories of technological, cultural, social and economic change that have been, and continue to be, dominant. As Linje Manyozo emphasises in this book, there are multiple pathways towards change that could be consistent with enabling people to improve their conditions, individually and collectively. Persistent asymmetrical power relations suppress certain voices and privilege others and they privilege certain institutions and practices over others. These relations punish, exclude and disable human beings and it is for this reason that the project of resistance requires constant renewal through dialogue.

In contemporary times with the renewal of the Sustainable Development Goals and in the face of vivid evidence of poverty and conflict as well as the global challenges of global warming, it is more important than ever to interrogate what kind of knowledge counts. The notion that

digital technologies – broadband infrastructures, social media such as Facebook, digital platforms designed to mediate in conflict or crisis situations, or multiple forms of electronic commerce, can simply lift people out of poverty is discredited in the critical academic literature, but its remnants circulate and inform far too many initiatives launched by the development industry. Even when they are labeled ‘participatory’, Linje Manyozo’s strong and convincing message is that the consequence is harm and oppression *unless* the main emphasis is on valuing difference, context and local aspiration. As he insists, if there is no insight into the ‘hidden injuries’⁵ resulting from the privileging of *episteme* over other kinds of knowledge, then counter-discourses and practices will also languish.

Alternative development pathways may be borne through speaking development with and alongside communities. In Linje Manyozo’s words, this is ‘fundamental to deliberative development, which opens up pathways for imagining possibilities of social change, whose seeds will be sown when oppressed individuals and groups learn to accept that their current situation is unacceptable; that positive change itself, even the very idea of it, is revolutionary and confrontational in nature’. For him, this is the route through which the subaltern perspective can be acquired and in a way that informs action. Linje Manyozo’s proposals for theory and practice do not obviate the need for struggle, but they do offer a pathway for a journey which, through experimentation, can create opportunities for deliberative development at the community level.

References

¹ I. Shor and P. Freire (1987) *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education*. Granby MA: Bergin & Garvey, p. 98.

² G. Bateson (1979) *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*. New York: Bantam Books.

³ Marglin, F. A. and Marglin, S. A. (Eds) (1990) *Dominating Knowledge: Development, Culture, and Resistance*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

⁴ Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation. (1975/2006) ‘The 1975 Dag Hammarskjöld Report on Development and International Cooperation’. Prepared on the occasion of the Seventh Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 1-12 Sept. Motala, Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation Fifth Printing, p. 93.

⁵ Escobar, A. (1999) ‘Gender, Place and Networks: A Political Ecology of Cyberculture’. In W. Harcourt (Ed.). *Women@Internet: Creating New Cultures in Cyberspace*, (pp. 31-54). London: Zed Books.