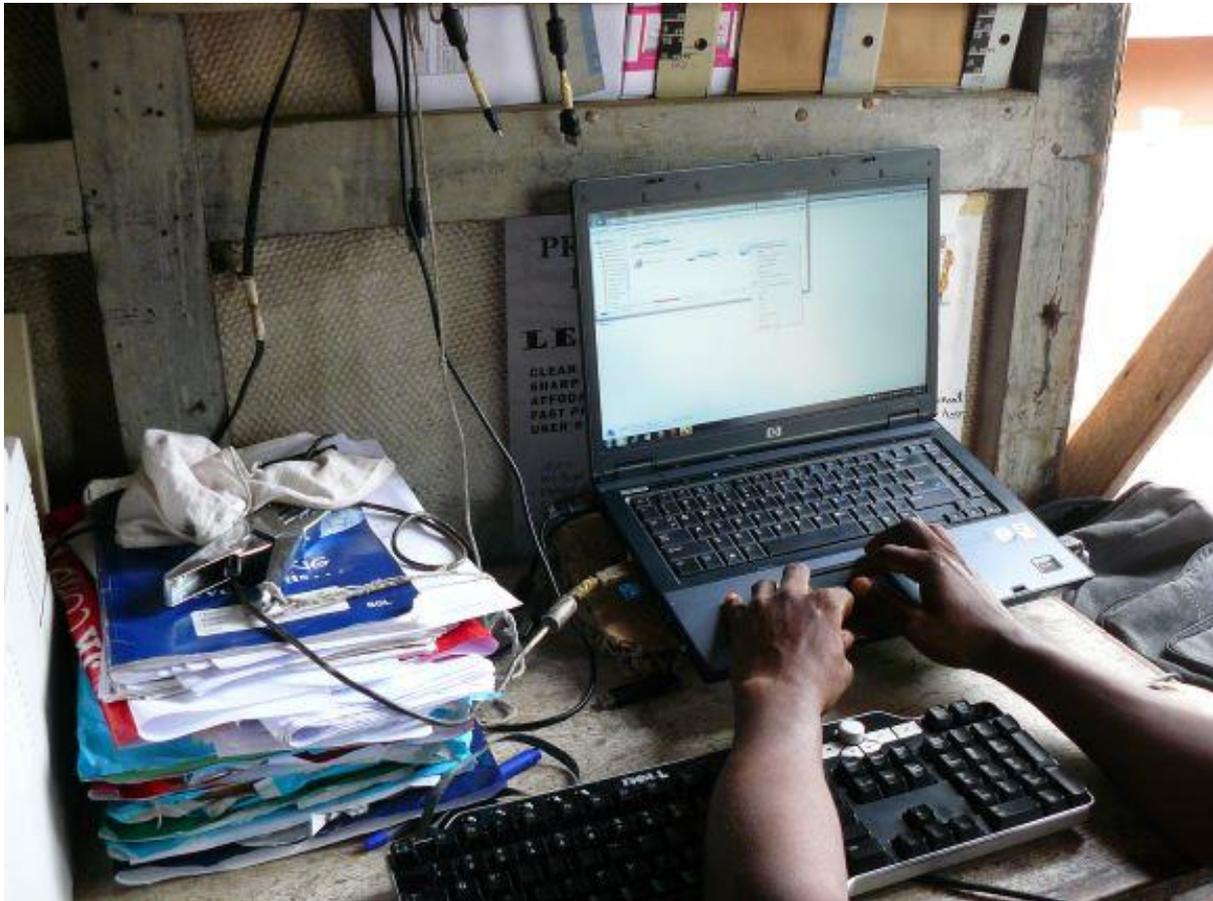


Dr Portia Roelofs - Ifra Methodological Workshop - 30th June 2020

"Contested visions of development: doing desk-based ethnography on international donors"

<https://www.ifra-nigeria.org/training/trainings-workshops/386-online-workshop-12-contested-visions-of-development-doing-desk-based-ethnography-on-international-donors-by-dr-portia-roelofs>



Blurb:

Development has come to be one of the defining concepts through which we understand the world: shaping how many understand their lives and their aspirations. This talk draws on literature on ethnographies of development to challenge the naturalisation of development as a linear teleological trajectory, highlighting instead how ideas of development are constructed and contested, whether by international donors, governments or people on the ground. Drawing on her own research on politics in south-west Nigeria, Dr Roelofs will reflect on some methodological issues. First, at the level of research design, how we can develop research questions that go beyond simply asking how to achieve development, shifting to a focus on what these contested conceptions of development *do*: who they empower, what possibilities they create, and how they structure distribution. Second, there are ways of adopting inductive, ethnographically-informed methods for desk-research even under lockdown or when field-research is not an option. Dr Roelofs will talk about strategies for finding and analysing publicly available donor documents online.

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Presentation:

1. Historicising development:

Cowen, Michael, and Robert W. Shenton. *Doctrines of development*. Taylor & Francis, 1996.

Cowen, Michael, and Robert W. Shenton. "The Invention of Development" in Crush, Jonathan Scott, ed. *Power of development*. Psychology Press, 1995.

- They ask 'What is development?': The intention to develop. Yet, they explain "an intention to develop is routinely confused with an immanent process of development." There is an assumed, if complicated relationship between the two.
- The idea of development is ripe for constructivist analysis: requires huge imaginative work:

"responses to the question of development usually present an image of something created anew, or improved, or renewed, or of the unfolding of potential which has the capacity to exist but which presently does not do so."
- Idea of linear, ongoing and permanent human progress emerged in the Enlightenment, prior to which change was assumed to be cyclical and development merely temporary.

The development industry of today has its origins in the late colonial period.

- Moral Justification of empire / Means to differentiate British colonialism from that of Belgium for example. Trusteeship / White Man's Burden / Mission Civilisatrice.
- Change in late 19th century and early 20th century: The colonial state does have an important role to play beyond being a trading post based on laissez faire. Starts to intervene in social policy, which previously had been left to missionaries.

Hodge, Joseph Morgan. *Triumph of the Expert: Agrarian Doctrines of Development and the Legacies of British Colonialism*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007.

- By 1920s, the colonial state starts to demand specialists. Economists, experts in social policy. A new emphasis on technical and bureaucratic experts. These experts, at independence, were employed by the World Bank and post-colonial development agencies and became the first generation of development aid professionals.

Critical Development Studies: denaturalises 'development' as an activity and goal for human societies. Asks: what is done in the name of development?

<https://developingeconomics.org/>

2. Ethnographies of development:

Ethnography as inductive immersion

Geertz calls “thick description” capturing the “microscopic” detail of daily life (Geertz 1973: 20-23)

The researcher develops a rich understanding of their field of study “by intimately immersing herself in another world, by observing in the midst of mundane activities and jarring crises, [and] by directly running up against the contingencies and constraints of the everyday life of another people.”(Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011, 10)

Inductive – open ended, led by your fieldwork, actively address your own assumptions.

- Ethnography consists of two elements, which can pull in tension:
 - 1) A “sensibility” in research which prioritises the meanings the informants give to their social and political reality. (Cerwonka and Malkki 2008; Schatz 2009, 5)
How human lives “makes sense” (Fife 2005, 1)
 - 2) Participant observation. “That to rely on what people say about what they believe and do without also observing what they do is to neglect the complex relationship between attitudes and behaviour just as to rely on observation without also talking to people in order to understand their perspective is to risk misinterpreting their actions. (Hammersley 1992, 11–12)

Ethnographies of donors and development projects

An ethnographic lens has been used to shine light on various projects, certain donors. Holding in tension a focus on the worlds of meaning created by actors and a focus on not only what they say but what they do.

- Ferguson, James. *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990. Focuses on the effects of the Bank's development discourse:
 - World Bank's Thaba-Tseka Development Project in Lesotho 1970s-80s
 - Lens which defines categories: Less Developed Country - obscures extensive entanglement in modern transnational labour economies.
 - Technical solutions to technical problems – yet hugely political consequences for example in trying to turn cattle into a commodity.
 - The project failed in its stated aims, but had the 'unintended outcome' of extending reach of governmental power into local society.
- Mosse, David. "Is Good Policy Unimplementable? Reflections on the Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice." *Development and Change* 35, no. 4 (2004): 639–71. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0012-155X.2004.00374.x>.
- Li, Tania Murray. 2007. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*. Duke University Press.

Limitations of these 'canonical' studies

Broadly couched in terms of deconstructing power, and 'studying up'.

- Nader, Laura. "Up the anthropologist: perspectives gained from studying up." (1972). <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED065375> (open access)

But

- Positionality
- Curious absence of race
- Downplays power relations present within development studies within the academy
- ➔ See for example: 2018. *Decolonising the University*, Edited by Gurminder K. Bhambra, Dalia Gebrial and Kerem Nisancioglu Reviewed by Sujata Patel. Pluto Press.

3. Deconstructing development as decolonising

Pailey, Robtel Neajai. 2020. "De-Centring the 'White Gaze' of Development." *Development and Change* 51 (3): 729–45. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.12550>.

- Watch: <http://www.open.ac.uk/ikd/dsa2019>
- Read open access: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336195397_De-centring_the_'White_Gaze'_of_Development
- Not the first scholar to raise these issues:
 - Owomoyela, Oyekan. "With Friends like These . . . A Critique of Pervasive Anti-Africanisms in Current African Studies Epistemology and Methodology." *African Studies Review* 37.3 (1994): 77.
 - Adebayo Olukoshi (2006) African scholars and African Studies, *Development in Practice*, 16:6, 533-544, DOI: 10.1080/09614520600958116
 - Mustapha, Raufu. 2006. "Rethinking Africanist Political Science." In *The Study of Africa: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Encounters*, edited by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza. Vol. 1. Dakar: CODESRIA.
- But Pailey offers an unusually clear and direct statement of the problem, linking critical development studies to critical race theory. Moreover, if the critique is old, there's a tendency to assume things have got better since then.

i. Research Assistants: subverting development

Archie Mafeje 1936-2007 South African Social Scientist, barred from a lecturer position at UCT due to Apartheid, PhD from Cambridge University.

Critiquing the enduring colonialism of anthropology from a position of semi-inclusion.

- Nyoka, Bongani. *Archie Mafeje: an intellectual biography*. PhD Diss. 2017. University of South Africa
http://uir.unisa.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10500/23899/thesis_nyoka_b.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (open access)
- Ntsebeza, Lungisile. "Mafeje, Archie (1936–2007)." *The International Encyclopedia of Anthropology* (2018): 1-3.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781118924396.wbiea2292>
- Branch, Adam. "Decolonizing the African studies centre." *The Cambridge Journal of Anthropology* 36.2 (2018): 73-91.
<https://www.berghahnjournals.com/view/journals/cja/36/2/cja360207.xml> (open access)

ii. Ethical Collaboration?!

Ethical?! Collaboration?! Keywords for our contradictory times. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*. Volume 31(3) 2019

Duncan Omanga & Pamela C. Mainye (2019) North-South collaborations as a way of 'not knowing Africa': researching digital technologies in Kenya, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31:3, 273-275, DOI: [10.1080/13696815.2019.1630262](https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2019.1630262)

Digital technologies to map and monitor election violence in Kenya in 2013, with a focus on Kibera and Mathare:

“The project drew from a unique context of contrarities: Kenya had experienced a serious bout of electoral related violence in the previous poll in 2007 and yet, in that period, had built a reputation as a hub of digital innovations in the region. ... The term 'silicon savannah' emerged at this point, a fitting metaphor for Kenya's claims to technological innovation in Africa, amidst a generalised uncritical global discourse of 'Africa Rising'.¹ Looking back we now realise that we were largely expected to affirm this metaphor, albeit in a scientific, academic project.”

Overall they conclude “there is a need to examine how collaborations between North and South based scholars are at risk of being processes of actually not knowing about Africa.” (2-3)

Other interesting pieces from the same collection continue this work of subverting the white gaze in development:

- Chisomo Kalinga (2019) Caught between a rock and a hard place: navigating global research partnerships in the global South as an indigenous researcher, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31:3, 270-272, DOI: [10.1080/13696815.2019.1630261](https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2019.1630261)
- Grace A. Musila (2019) Against collaboration – or the native who wanders off, *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31:3, 286-293, DOI: [10.1080/13696815.2019.1633283](https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2019.1633283)
- M. Neelika Jayawardane (2019) 'The capacity-building-workshop-in-Africa hokum', *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 31:3, 276-280, DOI: [10.1080/13696815.2019.1630265](https://doi.org/10.1080/13696815.2019.1630265)

4. Research Questions:

- Looking at any development idea in a specific context, we can ask what does this discourse make possible?
In my research I ask this about the good governance agenda – transparency, accountability, efficiency – in southwest Nigeria.
 - Who does these discourses empower? How does it create or legitimise new resource flows? Who benefits?
 - How are ideas re-appropriate, translated, contested and subverted? What is the landscape they arrive into? How are they repurposed through alternative vocabularies of aspiration and social action?
 - How does the discourse create new constituencies and interests? The factors driving the creation of a discourse, may be different those sustaining its hegemony.
 - How does it contribute to or broader *processes* of change
 - Are there unintended outcomes /unstated aims?

Example: Financial Inclusion

Roelofs, Portia. "Beyond programmatic versus patrimonial politics: contested conceptions of legitimate distribution in Nigeria." *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 57.3 (2019): 415-436.

- In 2014 – Loans to traders empowerment event in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. N300m Loans given out to six supportive organisations.
 - “re-framed in official discourse as a developmental targeting of marginalised and vulnerable individuals with loans that had transformative economic potential.
 - A representative of the Central Bank of Nigeria: ‘financial inclusion’. Justifies distribution as it is going to “the most vulnerable” who run micro-sized enterprises”.
 - Financed via the Central Bank of Nigeria’s (CBN) “Micro, Small and Medium Entrepreneur Development Fund (MSMEDF)” which was formed as part of the CBN’s 2012 National Financial Inclusion Strategy.
 - World Bank’s Universal Financial Access goal, for which Nigeria was a target country. Ajimobi announced that the state government had its own target of 80% financial inclusion by 2020.
 - Ajimobi referred to the loans as his ‘own stomach infrastructure’

5. Methods:

An ethnographic sensibility in digital research

Hjorth, Larissa, Heather Horst, Anne Galloway, and Genevieve Bell. 2017. *The Routledge Companion to Digital Ethnography*. Taylor & Francis. **Available on google books.**

- Hjorth et al 2017: Digital ethnography can mean either the ethnography of digital cultures, *or* using digital technologies within ethnographic research. I'm using it in the second meaning.
- Obviously there are major differences between traditional ethnographic fieldwork and digital ethnography. Can you still benefit from "experiential encounters" (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009, 9) without "being there"?
- Can reading documents online ever even approximate what has been described as research by "hanging out"?

In reality there has always been a blur between deskwork and fieldwork (Schatz 2009, 6). By adopting an ethnographic sensibility as we engage with online world and documents, we can retain the inductive open-mindedness of field-work.

- In participant observation we would seek to "all your senses, not just what you see. What does it feel like to sit where your participants sit, uncomfortable chairs, crowded constraining area. What can they see from their desk out the window." (Fife 2005)
→ This is still possible to a degree with digital ethnography but it takes different forms. The aesthetics, the design, how up to date it is, whether the information is hidden in the middle of a document or included in the executive summary.
- Limitations: access to digital platforms stratified by class, gender, age etc. Both of researchers and subjects. (Murthy 2008) Direct access: be aware of the limitations of what you can discover.

I believe, and I show below with examples from my own research that online research, done ethnographically, does allow us "to present phenomena in new and revealing ways" and "enable[s] us to free ourselves from those frameworks that we employ so routinely that we have come to take them for reality." (Hammersley 1992, 13–14)

The task of digital ethnography of development is made possible (or at least significantly easier) by the rise of audit culture over the past 30 years (Strathern 2000; Shore and Wright 2015a; 2015b). The pressure for organisations to demonstrate transparency and value for money, has led to an explosion in monitoring and evaluation, much of which is available online. Modern development leaves a huge paper trail.

Research process

Stage 1: Historicise your keys concepts via literature review (as above)

Stage 2: Identify starting point

- hunch / contradiction.
- A specific programme / organisation.
- Or a broader topic: i.e. local / international partnerships in peace-building in North Nigeria

Stage 3: Compile corpus / Stage 4: Analyse material

- Alternating waves of first scavenging/harvesting/gathering for resources and then analysing them. Keep pen and paper 'field notes' notes at the same time.
- From your first round of analysis identify new search terms and repeat.

Sources:

<p><i>Official:</i> https://ppi.worldbank.org/en/ppi https://documents.worldbank.org/ e.g for the First Urban Water Sector Reform Project there are 34 documents. https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/ https://www.usaid.gov/reports-and-data https://web.archive.org/ The Wayback Machine stores an archive of webpages, giving you the option of restoring them to a previous date.</p>	<p><i>Paid / Subscription Services:</i> AllAfrica.com Factiva</p>
<p><i>Social Media:</i> Facebook, twitter, instagram Slideshare LinkedIn – People are on LinkedIn to promote themselves and their achievements, they often share information about their employment histories that you might not find elsewhere.</p>	<p><i>Search Engines and tools:</i> Google – new -> tools -> set time frame Site search e.g. lam adesina site:https://www.premiumtimesng.com <search term. Site:<website URL> Search on the page: Control + F</p>

As you collect your materials:

Correct referencing / ensuring traceability:

Compile your corpus of materials in a way that allows you to refer back to it in the future and cite evidence appropriately when you come to write it up.

- If you have limited access to the internet, download materials to word documents and image files for offline reading.
- Copy and paste key articles into word documents – no guarantee it wont get removed.
- Tweets etc – screen shot (Print screen, Control+V into paint). Record the date, the URL, handle etc and when you accessed it.
- Citation software can do this for you (Zotero is free, but it requires you to be using your own computer/ create an online account).

Ethics

- Don't deceive people to access information. i.e. pretend to be someone in an online forum. Don't use data from private accounts – it should be in the public domain.
- If you do want to collect more individual interactions or collect personal data you should follow your university's ethics procedures.

Examples of puzzle / some sort of conflict that emerges from sifting through documents:

PPPs create to a growing market for consultancy

- The push for PPPs has created a huge market for consultancy. At times this has been explicitly foreseen, if not intended:
“In the case of expenditures on capacity building and technical services, about US\$ 11.7 billion would likely be spent on international and domestic consultants. **To facilitate development of the domestic consultancy industry**, business organizations in Nigeria might consider development of lists of qualified national firms and individuals.”(African Development Bank 2013, 48)
 - In the same document, the AfDB advised that as part of their infrastructure for development programme, US\$1.8bn should be ear marked for:
“Transaction advisory services that will be needed to assist in the formulation of PPP-type investment with private investors”(African Development Bank 2013, 44).
- ➔ This seemed like an unexplored example of how PPPs i) it created new revenue streams ii) it could lead to the formation of new constituencies (the domestic consultancy industry) with an interest in the continuation of this form of public provision.

Multi-national company issues long defensive twitter statement on waste management project:

Visionscape is a partner in a PPP in Lagos State to provide waste management services. On 7th November 2018 it's usually sunny twitter account issued a 35-tweet thread on 'misconceptions' about its role in the state. It starts with:

“It has become imperative for us to clear the air regarding our current operations and contract with the Lagos State Ministry of Environment. We hope that after this all misconceptions will be effectively put to rest. This is a thread.. [#LagosWasteCrisis](#)”

- ➔ I haven't looked into this in detail but this seems like an example of an interesting point of conflict. What's the story here? What were the processes that led up to this?

Additional references:

- African Development Bank. 2013. "An Infrastructure Action Plan for Nigeria - Closing the Infrastructure Gap and Accelerating Economic Transformation." Text. Banque africaine de développement - Bâtir aujourd'hui, une meilleure Afrique demain. African Development Bank Group. August 1, 2013. <https://www.afdb.org/fr/documents/document/an-infrastructure-action-plan-for-nigeria-closing-the-infrastructure-gap-and-accelerating-economic-transformation-33031>.
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- Cerwonka, Allaine, and Liisa H. Malkki. 2008. *Improvising Theory: Process and Temporality in Ethnographic Fieldwork*. University of Chicago Press.
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- Fife, Wayne. 2005. *Doing Fieldwork: Ethnographic Methods for Research in Developing Countries and Beyond*. Palgrave Macmillan.
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- Strathern, Marilyn. 2000. *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics, and the Academy*. London; New York: Routledge.
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