Do you want to improve the world?
learning with the lowers

Lower[s]: people who are in a context subordinate or inferior to uppers. A person can be a lower in one context and an upper in another.
Robert Chambers, 1997

Who's participating in whose process?
Centre for Developmental Practice, Woodstock, South Africa

Do you want to improve the world?
I don't think it can be done.

The world is sacred.
It can't be improved.
If you tamper with it, you'll ruin it.
If you treat it like an object, you'll lose it.

There is a time for being ahead,
a time for being behind;
a time for being in motion,
a time for being at rest;
a time for being vigorous,
a time for being exhausted;
a time for being safe,
a time for being in danger.

The Master sees things as they are,
without trying to control them.
She lets them go their own way,
and resides at the centre of the circle.

Tao Te Ching, 29
Lao Tzu, translated by Stephen Mitchell

I was attracted by these verses because they say to me (in the right gender, for once) that it is OK for me to feel the messiness of experience that has characterised my more obvious attempts to "improve the world"… and the futility of that intention. It emphasises my role as a witness ("The Master sees things as they are") and validates my states of being (exhaustion, vigour, safety, danger) that have competed for attention during my work in India, Ghana, Vietnam, Brazil, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

In this chapter, my inquiry is made up from multiple strands concerning the nature of my interventions as a white Western woman, in systems I know little about. This multiplicity reflects the complex settings for this work[145]. First, professionally, how do I influence change without being controlling, invite rather than impose, make contact and use my power without overwhelming, open spaces for conversations that otherwise may not have taken place, listen to and witness what's going on around me and still meet the demands of my clients in Geneva (and their even more distant funders in Sweden and the Netherlands)? Second, I explore the gradual nature of making this part of my work more participative and engaging for the people it is ultimately intended to serve. Finally, on a more personal level, I question how I experiment with being open to experience in unfamiliar places, under the time pressure of back-to-back meetings and short visits, whilst still taking care of my self.

The previous chapters have explored the potential for a deeper, more fulfilled engagement with presentational knowing in inquiry. They evoke a kind of a dream for what could be, and what sometimes is, in the context of workshop settings (like clowning), specific disciplines (like Goethean science) and for some people's lives (people who might get called "artist" for example). In the experiences and illustrations in the previous chapters, I bathe in possibility. Faced with the different realities of my work in service of "lowers" I am travelling on a slower trajectory of building confidence, trust and relationships with my clients such that together we can gradually enlarge what's feasible without alienating each other. Here, I walk within the space defined by politically-aware clients and conservative funders, my own aspirations for what's possible and the life experiences of the people and communities this work is ultimately serving. You will see me plunging into different contexts and making sense through my own presentational forms. You will see me reflecting on the implications of working in these contexts and you will notice a gradual shift towards using presentational knowing in more participative ways as this aspect of my work has developed.

[145] On 6 May 2004, I was invited to work with a group of change agency students at the University of Surrey. As part of this work, I facilitated a hybrid role play/psychodrama/constellation type session about my work in India with the students – it went on a bit long, but for me the key moment was first seeing and then asking the person in the role of me how he felt – he looked bewildered, with palms raised, looking around, and said he was very confused, there was too much data coming at him, he didn't know why he was there and he didn't know what to do, or where to place his attention. The similarity between his reactions and my own makes me wonder if my individual response to these contexts isn't so unique – that the structure and context of the intervention would bring forth similar responses in many people.

As this chapter unfolds, you will see me complexify the issues in ways that have mirrored my experience, almost to the point of paralysis. I recognise that much of this complexification is the offspring of my intellect[146], and want to point out now that, in spite of this (and because of this), my decisions and choices are made after ruminating, sleeping on it, going out walking and resting whilst "on mission". My guiding intentions for this work come from somewhere outside of (but partly informed by) my intellect, from my guts and heart, which perhaps aren't quite so directly cracked out from the mould of the Western mindset. Those intentions are simple: that through this social marketing work (or third person interventions), the people I am serving are offered experiences which are enjoyable, entertaining, life enhancing and carry the invitation or possibility of opening up more generative life choices.

My aim in this chapter is to blend the voice of my direct, in-the-moment experiences (as can be seen particularly in the freefall writing pieces) with the voice of the me that looks back, makes sense and reflects on those experiences. I want to witness my being in those contexts, the "me" that does the best I can whilst simultaneously being plagued by self-criticism (as an *over-privileged-taking-more-than-my-fair-share-leeching-on-society-exploitative-Westerner*… to give you a flavour of that particular voice). I will spend some time piecing together an evocation of the different aspects of this work, and then use that as a basis for sense making afterwards. In this sense, I am choosing to put some space, some air between the descriptive parts of my work and the explanatory parts, such that you as reader can actively form your own impressions and opinions before having mine imposed on the events and encounters.

During a CARPP PhD supervision workshop (20 November 2002) on what constitutes evidence and data in action research, I made the following notes (a combination of verbatim transcript from others' talking and my own thoughts and responses): "descriptions can be so vivid or 'thick' that they contain the explanations within them. The usual way is where the description is of a lower order than the explanation (ie: presentational knowing is rated lower than propositional knowing… But artists can portray through their art in a way that carried both the description and the explanation in itself, and that can inspire a holistic response (for example, in poetry)." Perhaps, in some of the freefall sections of writing to come, you might experience a holistic response, indicating that my description and explanation have come together in ways which are self-evident. This is something I aspire to, and recognise that I cannot consciously reach for such holism, which I believe is an emergent property.

Since 2000, I've worked on international development projects for the International Labour Organisation in Africa, India, Vietnam and Sri Lanka and for the German Development Agency, GTZ, in Nepal. My work has centred on providing social

[146] A *brain-child*, perhaps?

marketing “expertise” for business development services aimed at informal, micro- and small enterprises. This subject matter is familiar to me since many of my early consulting projects focused on similar work in the United Kingdom and the United States. The locations and contexts, though are new and unfamiliar.

As a daughter of parents in the airline industry I have travelled widely, but mainly between rich industrialised countries such as Canada, the United States and New Zealand. My latest destinations - Accra, Anuradhapura, Colombo, Delhi, Gabarone, Hanoi, Kathmandu, Kumasi, Kurunegala, Moradabad and Polonnaruwa - are new to me and, as such, the experiences relating to this work are relatively fresh and raw.

Why do I do this work?

I want to be free - free to know people and their backgrounds - free to move to different parts of the world, so I may learn that there are other morals and standards besides my own.
Sylvia Plath, Reflections of a 17 year old

In “The Post Development Reader”, the Iranian editor of the book, Majid Rahnema poses the question “Who are we – who am I – to intervene in other people’s lives when we know so little about any life, including our own?” (Rahnema, 1997: 395).

He goes on to say: “Even in the case where we intervene because we think we love and care for others, how is it possible to say in advance that our intervention will not eventually produce a result opposite to that expected? It is because of its unknown and unpredictable effects that, in my view, intervention should be considered as an act bordering on the sacred… Many questions should be explored first. What prompts me to intervene? Is it friendship, compassion, the ‘mask of love’, or an unconscious attempt to increase my powers of seduction? Have I done everything I could to assess the usefulness of my intervention? And if things do not proceed as I expect them, am I ready to face the full consequences of my intervention? To what extent, that is, am I seriously committed to the intervention?” (Rahnema: 1997: 395).

Rahmena articulates one of my core inquiry areas in this work. Who am I to be doing this? What prompts me to intervene? On 20 April 2006, I wrote my way into an answer:

What prompts me to intervene is a sense of self, a sense of identity, being seen, being asked to do something, being chosen.

What prompts me to intervene is a sense of anonymity, I could be anyone travelling and arriving, a sense of no one knowing where I am or who I am or how I am

behaving. A sense of me not knowing who I am anymore. A sense of possibility to be someone else, to reinvent myself in some new shape more carefree, starting again, imagined lives not lived. Hiding. Getting away and running away. Flying down the Iraqi border at night. Lights in the darkness and distant mysteries. Sahara. Tabriz. Himalayas. Not knowing.

What prompts me to intervene… to go out dancing and drinking with people who don't know me.

What prompts me to intervene… to be able to speak from experience and not just books and holidays when I am with the MSc participants, to see things I couldn't otherwise see. I want the first hand experience.

What prompts me to intervene… the possibility of fleeting contact. A glance. A touch. A smile.

What prompts me to intervene… to design something that might be fun and entertaining in people's lives where they might not otherwise get much attention, to stop someone else doing something boringly conventional with the project.

What prompts me to intervene? The complexity, the unknowing, the intensity, the aliveness. Working on one thing for a longer while, escaping thin time slices and divided attention.

What prompts me to intervene? Life un-cosseted, alive, vital, un-precious. A little danger. Trust.

What stops me from intervening? The airmiles, the carbon, the travel, the abrupt change of climate / season / time / space / place / culture, the intervention, the domination, the guilt, the unknowing, the grossness of it all.

What stops me from intervening more? Making a living, the dog, my home, friendships, a semblance of community and continuity, fearing getting too sucked in to become a development professional, stopping feeling, the guilt, stopping feeling at all having seen it all before and not being surprised or shocked any more.

What prompts me to intervene – is it making people's lives better?(Too "Miss World"). Wanting to do something that feels meaningful. Is it looking for meaning? Is it starting conversations for people to have more choices in their lives? How grand the hubris.

Three large scale interventions

In this section, I introduce three project interventions in particular (whilst occasionally referring to others where appropriate). They are each concerned with using available media and channels of communication as a means to inform, educate and stimulate conversation amongst people working (or potentially working) in informal, micro- and small businesses. As such, they fall into the category of third person inquiry (or interventions), for *them*, aspiring to stimulate conversations that otherwise may not have taken place on issues such as safety at work and options for being enterprising.

One project is centred on health and safety issues for wood- and metalworkers in Accra, Ghana's capital city, another is working with artisans (again on health and safety issues) in Moradabad, a town in North East India responsible for manufacturing much of the world's brassware and the third is concerned with stimulating a more positive cultural view of enterprising activities amongst Sri Lankan villagers in four rural districts (Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura, Kurunegala and Puttalam). Before I continue with this writing, I want you to have a brief overview of each of these three project areas so that you have some context for what is to come.

Ghana project

For this 2-year project in urban Ghana, which started in 2001, I was funded through the International Labour Organisation to find ways of using social marketing and mass media to communicate health and safety messages to the small, micro- and informal job sectors. Mass media approaches for this work were new to the ILO, and so the project was considered experimental and "on the edge" of what the ILO does. We chose Ghana for the pilot campaign due to its thriving home-grown entrepreneurial activity, serving local markets and relatively unhampered by corruption. For the project, spanning five "missions" and dozens of meetings, I engaged the services of Color Consult, a local marketing company and combined them with a creative team from St Helen's, a London advertising agency (who offered their services on a voluntary basis as part of their "social shares" scheme). Together, we researched, produced, aired and evaluated a series of TV and radio adverts featuring the accident-prone Kofi Brokeman injuring himself at work. I broke my Achilles tendon at the end of the second mission to Ghana in October 2001 and, unlike Kofi Brokeman, was able to come straight to Europe for medical care.

India project

Moradabad is one of hundreds of towns around India which are highly reliant on a single industry. In Moradabad's case, the brassware industry supports its 50000 inhabitants. Much of the world's brassware – candlesticks, platters, bowls – comes from this one city, which has high levels of polio, child labour, pollution, and great inequality between the various industry players such as: "household artisans" doing

piecework at the request of controlling "karkhenedars" or workshop owners who organise the financial and materials flows and are in turn controlled by exporters who sell to Western buyers. The exporters live and work in large walled compounds dotted about the city; artisans live in two or three rooms with dirt floors and the Western buyers make a 70% premium on all that they sell, mainly at Christmas. Moradabad works flat out for 9 months a year to service Christmas, with 3 months unemployment in November, December and January. The city is a jumbled mix of Hindus and Moslems living packed in narrow lanes and alleyways. Modern Chinese factories out compete Moradabad's traditional medieval hierarchy and times are hard. One of the local ILO-India team tells me that people are happy there because they don't know any different. Here, again, my work for the ILO (in 2002) required me to devise a social marketing (or, more acceptable in this context is the term "social mobilisation") campaign for safety and health issues amongst the informal, micro- and small enterprises that make up most of Moradabad's working population. My work ended up with recommendations including "home grown cinema" with local brassworkers filming and interviewing each other and their town for showing in the local cinema. As far as I am aware, this campaign ran out of funding and has not been implemented in full.[147]

Sri Lanka project

Many rural Sri Lankans live agrarian lives hitched to the cycles of paddy farming in stark contrast to the more entrepreneurial pace of IT, property development, tourism or media more typical of the capital, Colombo. Working conditions can be poor and life choices seemingly limited. My main ILO contact moved from Geneva to Colombo a few months before the tsunami in 2004 and soon invited me to come and do some more social marketing work with him and his new team. As well as the ingrained structural barriers to rural Sri Lankans starting their own businesses, the ILO team had identified and named a cultural reticence and even dislike of the idea of enterprising activity – particularly amongst the majority Buddhist population. My role was to work with two social anthropologists to "test this hypothesis" (which turned out to be affirmed) and develop some kind of campaign plan to intervene in a way that opened up conversations about and possibilities for more generative attitudes towards enterprising activities. This was in the belief that, by undoing (or at least exploring) the cultural barriers to enterprise, more people would become more enterprising. Over a series of three visits, we developed a plan for a campaign of applied, participatory theatre, identifying partners, job roles, budgets, activities and timescales.

[147] It is hard to get feedback once my short intervention is finished. ILO staff move around and their network is spread widely, project funding comes and goes, and publicity materials have a habit of un-useful optimism which gives the impression that all is going well. Occasionally I hear by chance that the work I have done has had some kind of influence on the ways ILO team members conceive projects. This leads me to wonder if my role has been to open up new ways of thinking at that level, rather than make direct change – am I serving the lowers and/or the uppers?

I have a partially-composted view of my self in these contexts, and a great deal of direct experiential material to work from. As I look for ways to write, I sometimes recognise the witness of my writer-self falling into the emotionality of the remembered moment. Here, I can become rather earnest in my descriptions, particularly in the more personal accounts you'll see later, for example at Arurit's workshop and meeting Suhail's wife in India. My neat desire to have my sense-making voice somehow separate from my in-the-moment voice gets overtaken by the messier, richer, non-linear reality of experiencing and sense-making all at once – of living multiple ways of knowing simultaneously.

I can't *make* you as a reader see or feel my experience there, but I do wish to *evoke* both what Ruth Behar (writing from an anthropological stance about being a *vulnerable observer*) calls an "intellectual and emotional engagement" from you as the reader (Behar 2000: 20). I am inviting an active readership. This is in my belief that the greater level of engagement I have in my writing (of any sort, but particularly "from the neck down"), the more profound a change I may contribute towards both my own existential development and the "common good." One thing I can do is re-enter the experience my self and write to you from there using narrative to evoke what I sensed there. As such, my writing about these experiences is "person[me]-specific" and I am learning "how to make the most of my emotional involvement with [my] material" (Behar, 2000: 8,6). Recounting these experiences and reading to others from my own writing sometimes triggered sleepless grinding anxieties and sometimes tears of… what? Sadness? Frustration? Grief? Shame? Compassion? All of these?

In writing these accounts, the ordinariness of the repression of women (and, in different ways, men), child labour and the end of the line for exploitative Western consumerism became very real for me. I was witnessing at first hand what is either usually hidden from me by Western-style capitalism or hidden from myself through a veil of disconnection that (possibly) shields me from being an outraged activist.

As I write this I can feel a plaguing self-critic seeping in. Not the writing critic that demands ever greater authenticity and fluency, but the deeper critic that tells me off for allowing "weaker" dark emotions of guilt, shame and sadness to drown the stronger outrage and anger that I "should" be feeling when I expose my self to poor working and living conditions. Surely, I "should" become an activist, angrily protesting at the injustice of global capitalism, donating my earnings back into the system when a day or two of my work can be the equivalent of a years' salary in rural India… or not doing the work at all on the grounds of the environmental damage caused by my travel… there is no end to the list of reprisals I can and do inflict on my self.

Anusha, a local International Labour Organisation (ILO) colleague and key ally, took me out for dinner on my last night in Delhi. I spoke to her about my experiences and

confusions in Moradabad and she said: “There are thousands of villages and towns like Moradabad all across India. People are content because they don’t know any different[148]. You being there is an intervention in itself. You showing up as an educated woman travelling and working alone shows that there are other possibilities for being in the world. This is probably more important than the project work itself. Just turn up and be yourself”.

Of course. Just as I am a witness on my travels, I, too, am being witnessed. I am a presence to be seen. I influence the system I am in simply by turning up - an influence of being, an influence of non-action. James Hillman says this is “a matter of influencing all events simply by your presence as things flow around, through and by you. It is like a rock in a riverbed. The rock does not move, yet influences the course of the river” (Hillman 1995: 141).

The role of the witness, then, is both to be present at and to give an account of an event. Arthur Frank says that “becoming a witness assumes a responsibility for telling what happened. The witness offers testimony to a truth that is generally unrecognised or suppressed" (Frank 1995: 137), and Ruth Behar writes of “the role of witnessing in our time as a key form of approaching and transforming reality” (Behar 2000: 27).

I am witnessing for my colleagues and clients, for the students and learners I work with in England, for my friends and for my self. I am present for the people I meet and work with on my travels, and for my own self-development. One of my CARPP PhD learning group colleagues described this part of my work as a “gift” for my own personal development and I agree, having time and again been placed in situations where I have had no “pre-established patterns of being with the environment” (von Emmel 2002: 9).

In doing this work, I feel a desire and responsibility to be fully present. In Moradabad, for example, poor facilities, widespread child labour and the appalling working conditions I’d gone to see mean that very few Westerners visit the town. I have seen no other visibly non-Indian people there. Buyers from companies like IKEA[149], Habitat and the Conran shop are kept (or keep themselves) at arms length and even my ILO colleagues from Geneva rarely stay in Moradabad for longer than a couple of hours. I am at once open to the experience of being there and I can’t wait to get away again. I don’t belong there.

[148] Paulo Freire says: “when superficially analyzed, this fatalism [of people being content because they don’t know any different] is sometimes interpreted as a docility that is a trait of national character. Fatalism in the guise of docility is the fruit of a historical and sociological situation, not an essential characteristic of a people’s behaviour” (Freire, 1996: 43).
[149] Now, in 2006, I am working with an MSc participant at the University of Bath who works for IKEA and has also visited Moradabad. He agrees about the state of the working conditions there.

Brassworker removing brass shards from his eye with a piece of paper, Moradabad.

I notice that I am more willing to show the fullness of my humanity back in England as a witness than I am as a presence "in the field" (as they say in the ILO… a culture still languaged by "missions" and "the field"). On home territory, I feel able to express my experience in an unsanitised, ambivalent, interested, enthusiastic and, at times, despairing way. On my travels, though, I am more inclined to keep my confusions and despair to my self, hiding the full extent of the pain of accidents like my Achilles break in Ghana, my injured foot in India, my feelings of isolation and loneliness in Moradabad and my class confusion in Sri Lanka.

"I didn't realise that you might have wanted some company in the evenings. You should have asked. You could have come over to my house," Anusha said as we drove to the restaurant for that last night in India.

I felt relief during that evening of conversation with Anusha and some of my self-imposed pressure to do the work "right" fell away. Perhaps the bigger reason for my going there really was simply to be there. Being there and being seen to be there counts both ways: the qualities of my presence and my witnessing form a bridge over the North-South divide.

I’m reminded of a traditional Zulu greeting:

“I see you”…
“I’m here to be seen”.

Just turn up and be myself. That’s all. Both out there “on mission” as they say at the ILO, and now, again, here at my computer, experimenting with ways of crafting an evocative narrative to engage a different audience. I’ll start with where my international development work started, a phone call in a car park in South East England…

Just turn up and be yourself

"Do you want to submit a joint proposal for a piece of work for the International Labour Organisation?", my New Academy of Business colleague asked me down a bad mobile phone line. I was standing by my car, shielding myself from the wind behind the driver's door, just about to continue a journey to London. "It's about social marketing and I thought you might know something about it. Problem is, the proposal needs to be in by the end of this week".

It sounded interesting enough. Something different. I wrote what I thought I knew about social marketing … marketing ideas and beliefs rather than products and services, so the few gurus say in this area (for example, Andreasen 1995). Here's what I wrote for the proposal back then in August 2000, a time when I'd done a little social marketing in the UK and the US, and none at all in Southern countries. I am including these thoughts here to give a shorthand idea of the nature of the projects I've been working on overseas.

1. *The vast majority of employees in small businesses in developing countries are family businesses. Few of these will have any contractual or formal terms of employment. The ILO's terms of reference for this project appear to assume a western model of employment.*
2. *Social marketing may have little impact on business unless it takes an approach that stresses what is good for workers is also good for the profitability of the business. If it is not, entrepreneurs are unlikely to act.*
3. *The efficiency of mass marketing approaches can be difficult to measure and assess. This is especially the case when campaigns are diffuse, with potentially long-term outcomes and complex messages. Add to this a low budget and organisations can find themselves competing for attention with no substantial means of assessing the outcome or impact of their work.*
4. *The advertising industry typically uses frequency, reach and audience, readership and circulation analysis to assess the suitability and impact of campaigns using specific media. The sophistication and availability of such analytical data will differ from region to region, and we need to understand that the precision with which awareness raising campaigns can be targeted will be variable.*
5. *The impact of mass marketing approaches to micro- and small enterprises (MSEs) in poor countries can be maximised by ensuring that messages have a clear call to action, and are time bound in some way. This reduces frustrations typically associated with 'awareness' advertising on a low budget.*
6. *Similarly, campaigns using media designed for large, dense conurbations are likely to have more impact than 'weaker' media circulating in more diffuse rural areas, which may have less direct local impact.*
7. *It is important to research mass media approaches within the context of overall campaigns – and differentiate between 'stand alone' approaches and 'integrated'*

marketing communications (where mass marketing approaches typically form an initial stage in a longer process, also involving person to person communication, and distributing more detailed information).

8. *For this project, we also wish to distinguish between purchasing advertising space in the mass media and other approaches such as regular sponsorship and editorial involvement (which can carry more credibility than purchased advertising). This is particularly important when considering minimising cost.*
9. *In addition, the importance of informal mass communications should not be underestimated. Word of mouth communication is still the number one means of sharing information in the MSE sector, commanding the greatest trust, credibility and, potentially, speed. We wish to look for mass media approaches stimulating word of mouth as part of our work, and particularly look at the role of community leaders, influencers and women workers in this type of communication.*
10. *Any model for activity in this area may take the form of a set of guidelines that are both contingent on local conditions and generic in the sense of communicating a pragmatic, common sense approach to advertising. Some elements of the model will be circumstantial, whilst others will be constant.*

Looking back, I can see that my initial intuitions were concerned with:

- Questioning the usefulness of Western models and ideas in non-Western contexts;
- Evaluating the impact or influence of such interventions;
- Validating the importance of informal communications;
- Emphasising the need for a contextual, pragmatic approach.

We submitted our proposal on the Friday and were told the following Tuesday that we'd got the job and could we go out to Geneva for a briefing. Two other teams, one from the US and one from Australia, had also submitted proposals, and, apparently, we had said all the right things and by chance had come in within $400 of the $63000 budget they'd set for the work. It was all a bit of a surprise. Now, six years, 6 trips to Africa, 2 trips to India, 3 trips to Sri Lanka and a visit each to Nepal, Brazil and Vietnam later, I wonder why I said yes to preparing the proposal in the first place. My retrospective sense making looks like this:

- My habit of saying *yes* first and then sort out the details later was strong at that time, as I sought to shift the patterns of my working life;
- I'd never visited "real" developing countries before and was curious to see what was going on out there;
- The work felt worthwhile, and something I felt technically competent to do;
- I wanted to witness something of the global situation that had been made manifest in the MSc at the University of Bath (both as a "student-learner" and an "educator-learner"… how could I only be speaking *about* this issues and not, at least to some extent *from* them during my work at Bath?).

The purpose of this writing is to evoke the wholeness of experience of my work in poor / "under-consuming" / contextually underprivileged countries whilst viewing that experience both personally and politically, drawing (to a greater or lesser extent) on ideas of power, post-colonialism[150], post-development and participation. The writing moves between projects in Delhi and Moradabad (India), Accra and Kumasi (Ghana) and various parts of Sri Lanka, whilst less directly drawing on wider working travels including Nepal, South Africa, Brazil, Romania, Vietnam and Botswana.

I can not pretend to have any real grasp of Ghanaian, Indian or Sri Lankan cultures, and the nature of my interventions – typically one or two week flying visits cram-packed with meetings – has followed fast, focussed, in-and-out "eurolimited" pace (Mir, Mir et al. 2001) like a stab, precluding anything beyond the broadest learnings, and certainly reducing my chances of getting to know anyone in the connaître sense mentioned previously[151]. From a post-development perspective, Rahnema (1997, 392) says: "A first condition for such [work] is to look at things *as they are*, rather than as we want them to be; to overcome our fears of the unknown; and, instead of claiming to be able to change the world and save 'humanity', to try saving ourselves from our own compelling need for comforting illusions… Paradoxically, it is through fully experiencing our powerlessness, as painful as that may be, that it becomes possible for us to be in tune with human suffering, in all its manifestations."

This also means that the accounts I write are, on the whole, from my own experience. I hear Macguire's call for "polyvocal" accounts (Macguire 2001: 66) and I feel unable to respond to Macguire's call with the full richness I believe these accounts deserve[152], although on various occasions, I have specifically collected views from people I have worked with and I include these "other" perspectives on my work.

My intentions here have three interwoven strands which mirror Heron's extended epistemology, moving from experiential through to presentational knowing, through to propositional knowing and finally on to practical knowing (Heron 1999: 122)

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[150] Post-colonialism refers to theories on the legacy of colonial rule, particularly regarding building, recognising and expressing national, cultural and individual identities. Post-colonialism values and places indigenous voices centrally. I have concerns about whether my ILO work represents an unbroken continuation of the colonial legacy of white, Western imposition and appropriation (and claims to superior knowing) moving into a neo-colonial form. I waver between thinking that the ILO's work reinforces the global domination of the Western mindset and thinking that the organisation's work explicitly seeks to dismantle and counter such globalisation. This "seeing double" mirrors the slipperiness I sense between neo- and post-colonialism. My experience of working in the organisation tells be that both neo- and post-colonial practices arise at the same time.

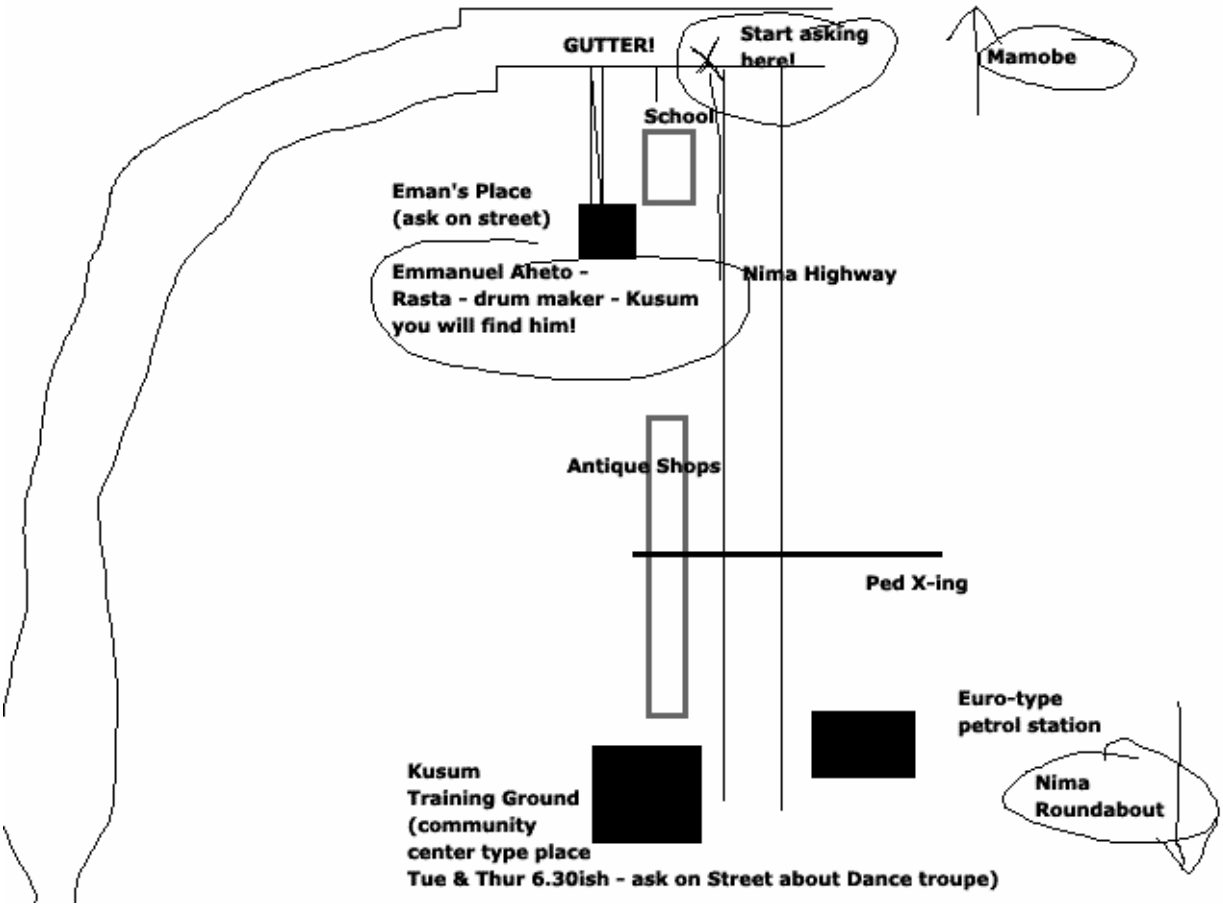
[151] One practice I have developed over the course of this stream of work is, wherever possible, to go aimlessly walking in the evenings. This was particularly effective in Viet Nam, in Sri Lanka and in Nepal (mmm… all the mainly Buddhist countries of those I have worked in). Later, I found that such aimless walking has a name and even some status as a kind of art: the *dérive* (and coincidentally, the dérive is something performance artist Richard Layzell has been involved with). This is not an activity which appears in my project "terms of reference" nor my "mission reports," and yet it feels essential to the work.

[152] Why is this? Working through translators whilst briefly disturbing hard working people as I am passing through certainly mitigates against in-depth explorations and feedback discussions. I am more likely to gain feedback from the other people I am working with in local teams, and where available, I have included this throughout.

- First, in **Notes from Ghana, Notes from India** and **Notes from Sri Lanka**, I use words and pictures to evoke the richness of my experience of the work in these countries. Here, I seek to evoke directly something of that experience and show the qualities of my attention (experiential and imaginal learning and knowing);
- Second, in **Here it is: a mess**, I want to blend these accounts with others' ideas, particularly looking through a post-development lens at working systemically, how power gets used and misused, and how these ideas serve my own emergent sense making (propositional and conceptual learning and knowing);
- Third, in **Wherever you go, there you are**, I want to come to a better understanding of my own faltering attempts to both recognise and appreciate the power and legitimacy of my own being and presence in these contrasting situations (practical learning and knowing).

Before that, though, I want to offer you a short introduction to the nature of my experiences and reflections to give you more of a flavour for this work as it began with on first night of my first trip to Ghana in August 2001.

Start asking here…



I sat on the edge of the hotel bed and looked at the map and then, the telephone. Steve, an American friend I'd met through swimming, had connections with Ghana and he'd sent me instructions on how to meet up with his drum-maker, Rasta friend, Emmanuel. I was to call someone in the shanty where Eman lived to check that he was in town, and then get a taxi to Nima gutter and "start asking here." I rang the number and couldn't understand a word when someone answered the call. In the hope that my accent might be understandable, I explained who I was and that I was looking for Eman, I was a friend of Steve's and had just come from England and told them the hotel I was staying at. I put the phone down, feeling disappointed and uncosmopolitan. It was Saturday and I'd arrived the night before. Either I was going to get in that taxi or I'd be sat here alone for the next 24 hours until my ILO colleague arrived the following evening.

"Are you sure you want to go to Nima?" the taxi driver said.
"Yes. Here's the map. I'm looking for a friend".

Nima gutter turned out to be just that, a wide open sewage stream with a collection of shanty houses clustered on either side of its concrete banks. Islamic, Christian and Rasta people crowded the streets and alleyways, praying, chanting, buying and selling clothes, food, schoolbooks, eating, chatting, sitting around. I got out of the taxi, feeling the difference in my clothes, the colour of my hair, the colour of my skin. I asked a young man if the Rasta drum-maker was around. He smiled and ran off into the labyrinth of dusty alleyways, and came out a while later with a young man wearing a basketball shirt and long shorts. He grinned and shook my hand.

"You're the white woman Eman's looking for – he's just gone to look for you at your hotel. I'm his brother. He's doing a CD launch with his band at the Golden Tulip tonight – you could meet him there".

So, now, day one on Ghana, I have an invite to a party, and someone to meet there.

I'm reminded in this account of how important playfulness, laughter and humour are in smoothing the path of my work in such situations. Participatory rural appraisal (PRA – or, as he now calls it, "participation, reflection and action") and development practitioner and thinker Robert Chambers advocates playfulness in "development" work, moving from "frustration to fun" in order to establish rapport (Chambers, 1997: 154-5).

Elsewhere, though, the move to playfulness comes with a warning: "we should be wary of such universal claims that play is necessarily good at all times…practitioners talk of the 'relaxed' nature of the research meeting. In such cases, facilitators are making cultural assumptions about the best milieu in which to conduct research"

(Mohan 2001: 160-1). I would suggest here that such working in a 'relaxed' manner may equally serve facilitators' needs to quell their own anxiety as stimulate a more open and meaningful discussion with participants. To go back to Mitchell's *Tao Te Ching* translation at the start of this section, I'd make another contribution by saying that there is "a time for being playful; a time for being sombre".

In Ghana, I have experienced much fun and laughter both in and around my work, but just how serious *should* I be, as the "expert", and in the face of working systems and conditions considered by the ILO team I was working with to be some of the poorest the world has to offer? In practice, I've been keener to take on the spirit of the place rather than enter stage left as a po-faced, judgmental or worse still, horrified Westerner. Or, at least, this spirited, open individual is my fantasy about who I'd like to be in these circumstances, and it's something I've found most possible to live out in Ghana and Sri Lanka, where in both cases I have got to know people unconnected with my ILO work. I've been to a wedding, I've been to a funeral, I've sat getting drunk in a shanty with a group of Rasta men, I've danced with prostitutes, I've danced in the warm rain, I've eaten at idyllic restaurants and I've been out to see gigs. And then, there also comes a point where I have had enough and want to retreat back to the relative affluence of my hotel, a glass of white wine and the cool aloneness of the swimming pool.

In such situations I am both open to experience and encounter, whilst also feeling a guilt- and shame-tinged urge to retreat to familiarity. Surely, as a rich white Westerner brimming with unearned privilege (McIntosh 1989), (or "poor little rich girl", as CARPP PhD learning colleague Rob pointed out), I really *ought* to open myself precisely at the point when I most want to run away … the points of my greatest discomfort, guilt and shame. How I chuckled, then, when my new friend, Eman, showed me the photos from his month-long drumming tour of The Netherlands and told me how he'd had enough of Europe after three weeks and came back home to Ghana early. Perhaps I confuse my desire for *familiarity* with a desire for *affluence*: by accident of birth, relative affluence *is* my familiarity.

And so, with this small example, begins the litany of paradoxes and confusions that characterise my work in Africa and Asia. Who am I here? Who should, or could I be here? What are "right" actions (or in-actions) in this context? How can I use the powers invested in me through my education, my role as an "International Expert" and my affluence both responsibly and effectively?

The next pieces of writing, *Notes from Ghana*, *Notes from India* and *Notes from Sri Lanka* are taken from a body of (mainly) "freefall" writing designed to find storied means to evoke the richness of my experience and show the qualities of my attention (which I realise draw on my four years of basically visual undergraduate art education

and the practices of working with images in my early career as a designer, as well as the practices of improvised clowning[153]).

Such evocation is in accordance with Bruner's "narrative mode", which "deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It seeks to put its timeless miracles into particulars of experience, and to locate the experience in time and place", as opposed to his "paradigmatic mode", which "seeks to transcend the particular by higher and higher reaching for abstraction" (Bruner 1988: 100-101).

In her book *The Vulnerable Observer*, Ruth Behar comments on the value of such evocational accounts in the field of anthropology (where the subjective experience of the researcher counts as "valid data"), and I believe that her ideas are equally relevant for an inquiring development "expert" like me. She says, "an [inquirer's] conversations and interactions in the field can never again be exactly reproduced. They are unique, irrevocable, gone before they happen, always in the past, even when written up in the present tense. The ethnography serves as the only proof of the [inquirer's] voyage, and the success of the enterprise hinges on how gracefully the [inquirer] shoulders what Geertz calls the 'burden of authorship'. The writing must convey the impression of 'close-in contact with far out lives'" (Behar 2000: 7). What follows is experimental evidence of my quest to "bring the ethnographic moment back" (Behar 2000: 9) as an essential component part of my doctoral journey.

The accounts you are about to read were either written in the moment whilst I have been "on mission", or in some cases, written later during freefall writing sessions and at other times. The texts have been minimally edited for spelling and grammatical errors and very lightly adjusted such that they can make sense as stand alone pieces. This has been in an attempt to stay close to the immediacy of the experience, the event, the encounter, without killing it off with too much editorial fiddling or intellectual overlay. I have added occasional comments when there has been a follow-on pertinent to the story, and have included my own photography of Ghanaian working conditions at the Accra Timber Market and a little of my and others' photographic work and film stills relating to the *Notes from India* and *Notes from Sri Lanka*. I was more comfortably inclined to do some photography within the cultural context of Ghana than of India and Sri Lanka. My aim is to build a tapestry of vignettes to show my inquiries and attentions during the doing of this work.

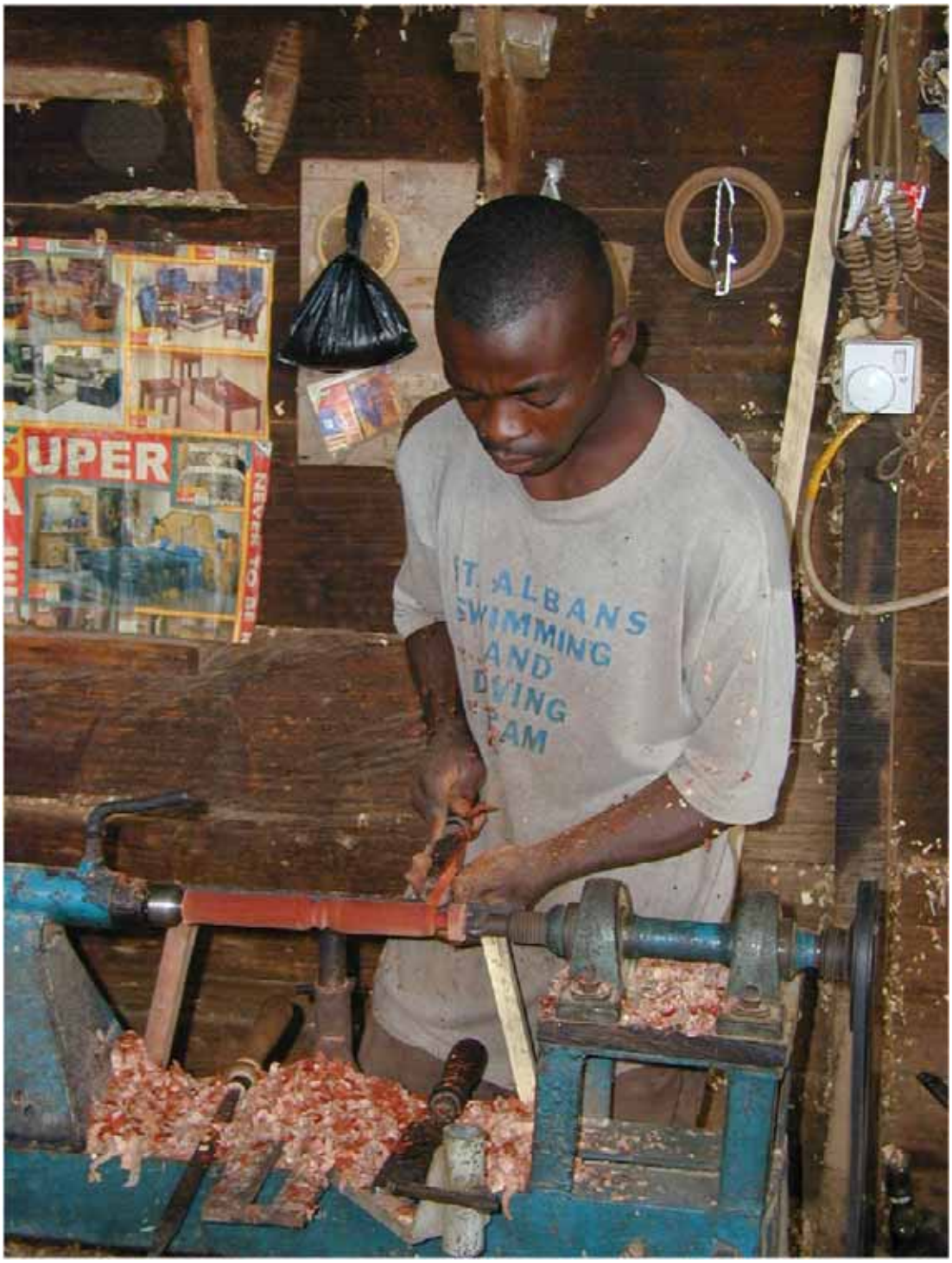
[153] The improvised clowning which I have been learning can be considered to be an attentional practice (just as, for example, Buddhist practice, Quaker meetings and Gurdjieffian self-study-with-others might be (Torbert, 2001: 250)). Through clowning, I have been developing a wider arc of attention – ranging out from my inner experience (which the clown amplifies in-the-moment), other objects and clowns on stage (whether visible or not), the audience as a source and mirror for instant feedback, and then beyond to the world outside of the audience… all of which the clown interacts with and responds to (this differentiates the clown from the actor, who works with the convention of the "fourth wall," artificially separating her from the audience and everything beyond the stage). In addition, the spontaneous, improvised nature of the practice of clowning invites me to notice my embodied, unmediated responses to situations prior to any intellectual sense making.

Notes from Ghana

10 October, 2001 – written in the moment, on the bus from Accra to Kumasi

I'm on the government-run bus from Accra to Kumasi. It's now 6am and the bus has, until now, been overseen by a rather stern woman wearing a white lab coat. She directed the 50 or so passengers to their seats like a mean usherette. She's gone now as we're on our way for the journey, which may take anything from 4 to 5 hours – a delicate balance between dehydration and an unfulfillable desire to visit a toilet. I've been warned about this, and when I got up at 4.45am I drank lots quickly so that at least I could start off fully hydrated. Accra is already busy, the main bus station full of traders selling dungarees, trainers shoes, inner tubes and t-shirts. Around the roundabouts red and yellow flowers that look like gladioli are growing. Tapes, books, apples, newspapers. Come and Experience the Miraculous Power of Jesus! Jet wash. Christ in "U": the Hope of Glory. The sun is just coming up and I feel tired-eyed from the early start and, perhaps the traffic pollution and dust as well. I'm a bit wheezy-sneezy, too. I worry that my bladder is already filling. No Food for the Lazy Man, another sign says. God's Grace Beauty Salon. Beds, fridges, cars – European second-hand cars with D, NL, CH on the bumpers. The traffic's already slow and heaving and people walk around the bus holding up puddingy white bread for sale. The bus is silent, apart from the radio, and nobody buys the bread. I sneeze (again).

Metal workers reshaping old chemicals containers, Accra, October 2001



Furniture maker turning wood, Accra Timber Market, Ghana, October 2001

10 October 2001, Rainforest remnants, written in the moment on the bus from Accra to Kumasi whilst driving though land that used to be rainforest

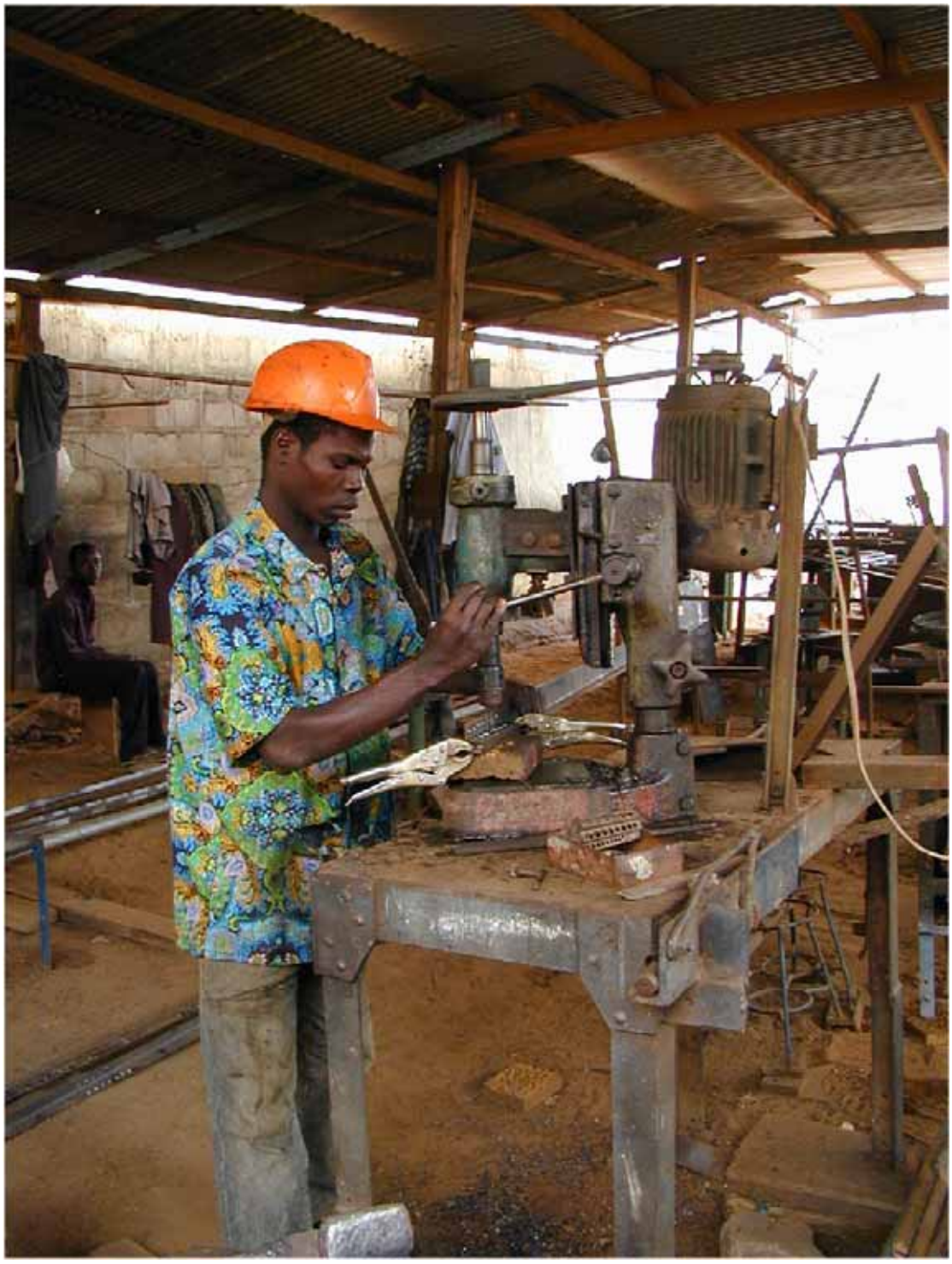
Damned by the magnificence of their own straight trunks
to become furniture, firewood and premature compost

A whole tree felled to make one bed and the rest discarded
Waste by the side of the road, parched like femurs. Buttress roots

I imagine my palms touching warm, dry bark
and the warm, dry bark touching me

11 October 2001, Accra, written in my hotel after lunch with the St Helen's team

Simultaneously thinking
that the pizza was cheap
that the cost of it is a month's salary
and would take someone over the poverty line.
A pile of notes like a brick
Obscene wad



Metal worker drilling holes, Accra, Ghana, October 2001

12 October 2001, Accra, written on Freefall Writing course, 17 April 2003

Diane's lilac shift dress stuck to her sweating body and she pushed stray blonde hairs back from her wet face into the plastic slide that held the rest of her hair at bay. In London, that dress might have been trendy, but here it was functional, and barely functioning at that. Damp patches spread across her chest and her back. She stood by the flip chart and waved a marker pen around. "So, Yao," she said, letting the pen flop in his general direction, "can you summarise for us?"

Yao looked up and tapped his pen on the table. He was sat back in his chair with his arms resting on the table in front of him. He touched his glass of fresh pineapple and ginger. Was this participation? I thought. Was this it, or was it just putting someone on the spot? Yao summarised the process so far: "Well, we started by analysing our possible markets, and what the message is that we have. Now we have come up with criteria for targeting our markets and we've invited the man from the Factories Inspectorate to have a look and give his input."

"Right," said Diane. "and now we're going to split into two teams – the planning team and the creative team."
Jonathan swung his video camera round the group.
I supposed that I'd have to be part of the planning team. I was holding the purse strings and, in any case, I didn't count as a "creative" in this group, I was the expert, the manager, the convenor of this Ghanaian-English team that had come to work together on the campaign for 10 days.

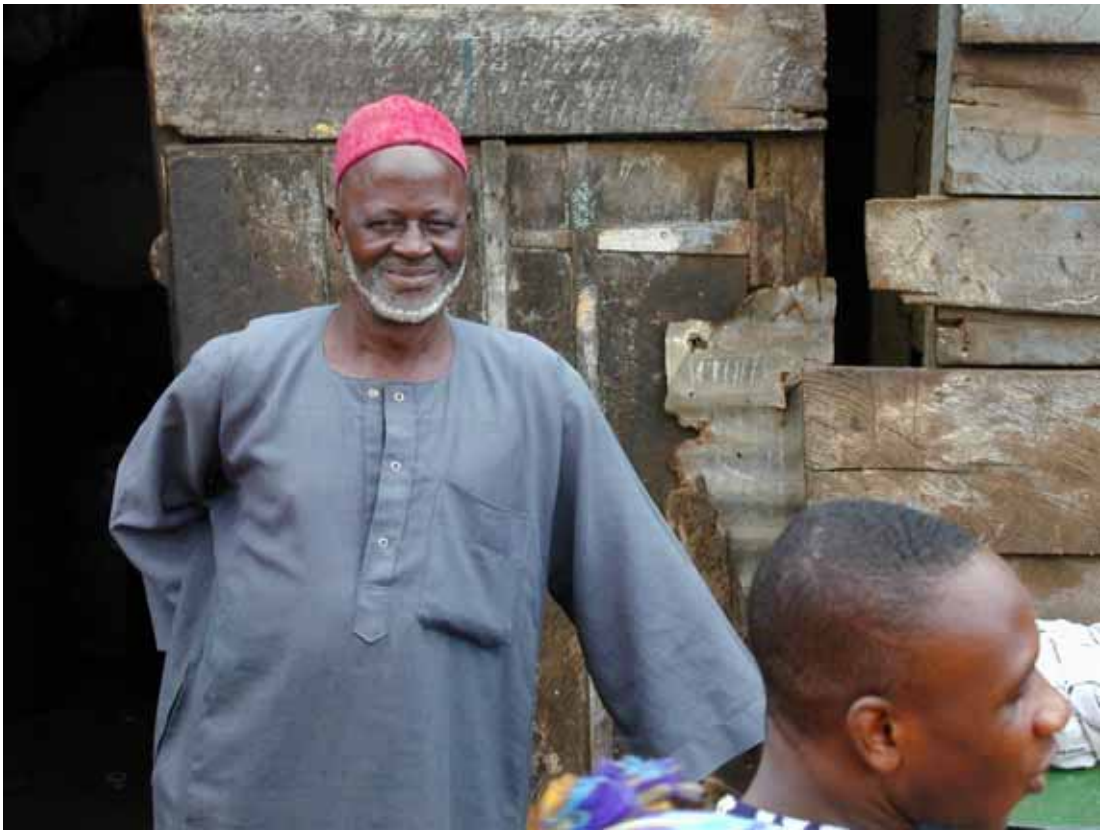
"I guess I'll be in the planning team" I said.
All the younger people went in the creative team. They were all men. The planning team ended up being three women and one man. The three women were Diane, me and Eliza, the incredibly well groomed, long finger nailed, completely-in-control-director of the Ghanaian marketing company we were working with. The man was a fat local man called Kwame. Kwame wore a loud batik shirt and had his finger in the Political pie. He quit the group as soon as it started and left the rest of us to it. "I have to go to a meeting in town" he said.

"Any questions before we break for lunch?" said Diane, looking like she didn't want anyone to delay her escape from this fishbowl heat trap of a glass room. She glanced at the shady trees outside.
"Yes, I need to check again on the budget. How much is allocated to the media spend, and how much for the production costs?" one of the Ghanaian team said. All heads turned and looked at me. I felt the ghostly presence of my ILO colleague and budget holder at my shoulder. "It's up to them to tell us how much they need," he'd said before he'd boarded his plane back to Geneva a few days before. I wanted them to choose. I wanted my lunch. I didn't want to tell them what to do, even though I had a

good idea of the figures myself. I didn't want them to think I couldn't make a decision without having my ILO colleague's apron strings to hold on to.

"You need to come up with the figures and then I need to ring my colleague and check them through with him". I felt like a pawn, unwilling to wield the power my role had given me and yet unable to muster any authority in the position I had chosen to take. Disappointment slid through me. What other choices had I had just then? Just confidently tell them the, no, THE answer, grab the ground and tell them who's boss? Go into some elaborate explanation about my dilemma – wanting them to participate and yet not knowing my own role here. Was I just my colleague's messenger-girl? Was I the "expert" it said I had to be on my contract? Wasn't it better just to tick the boxes and get the job done? I had to do that anyway, didn't I?

Later, on 11 June 2003, I discussed my misgivings about being labelled as "expert" with Robert, one of my key Ghanaian contacts. I wrote down his response verbatim:
"[The ILO client contact] will need to represent people as experts…
he needs to be able to refer to you as an expert, and, at the end of the day, he needs results. But, if it suits you to let people have ownership and throw in bits and pieces of advice, that's fine. Our client simply has to show his boss that he's sent someone over who has made a difference, and it's up to you how you do that."



Small business owner, Accra Timber Market, Ghana, October 2001

13 December 2001, Accra, written in the heat of the moment during my first trip back since the Achilles break, my leg has been in plaster for around ten weeks at this stage

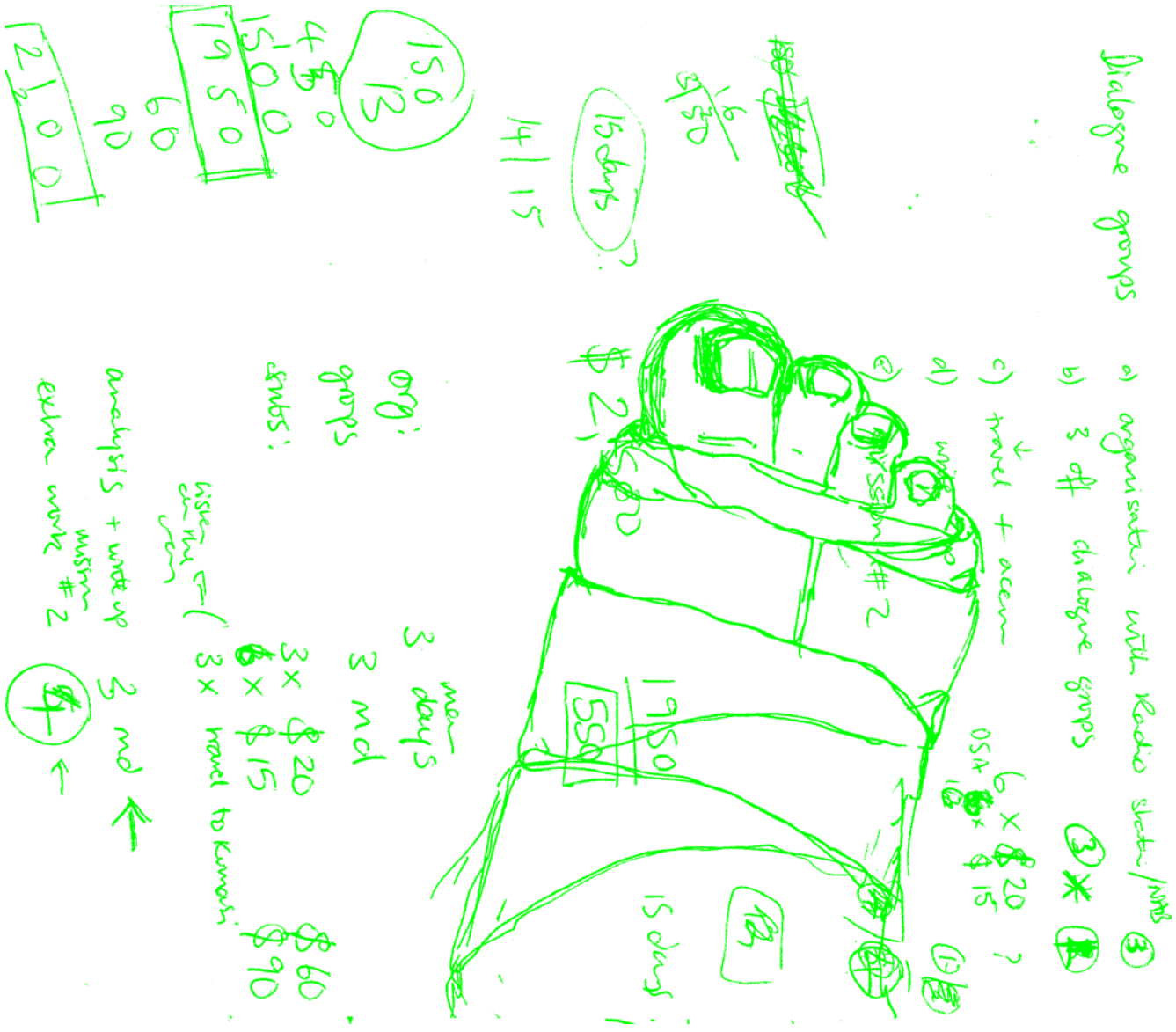
I am sitting in the classroom of the Ghana-Netherlands Votec resources centres project, a part of the Accra Technical Training Centre. I'm alone surrounded by neatly arranged hardwood desks and I've tried to aim at the breeziest part of the room. Behind me, dirty curtains are billowing at the windows, with the sound of busy traffic honking outside. Beneath the neat "U" of chairs and tables, the floor is made of concrete reinforced with broken seashells. It's smooth, like unpolished marble. I have a small bottle of water in front of me and I don't want to drink it all at once – I have no idea how long this meeting is going to take. My skin is clammy. Fine dust sticks to me. Rivulets of sweat are running down my spine and my plaster-clad (POP in Ghana… no coloured fibre glass here) leg feels hot and uncomfortable.

A white man just walked into the otherwise empty room and sat down at a cream-coloured computer. He glanced at me and said "hello" on the way by. "Hello", I replied, looking up from this writing. The traffic is incessant. Being driven here just now, I could see, taste and feel the traffic pollution. A haze in the air, a cough, dirty skin, a mark on my top from a rarely used car seat belt. The white man turns to face me.
"Are you working on a project here, too?" Dutch accent.
"No, I'm working on a social marketing project for the ILO. Looking at job quality for small businesses. Today, we're having a meeting here with suppliers of health and safety equipment to see if they want to get involved".
"Oh. You're English".
"Yes – and you – Dutch?", I venture.
"You can hear the accent".
"Just a bit".

Ghanaian men start to arrive and I wonder if there'll be any other women apart from Catharine from Colour Consult. The Dutch man leaves. I feel a bit relieved and I don't know why. I'm looking forward to getting back to a cool shower-on-one-leg. I want to hang back and observe this meeting as much as I can. I wonder, in the power mix, where being a white woman on crutches places me in the eyes of Ghanaian business men. I'm curious to observe and find out. Eight strip lights are uselessly on above me, and two large ceiling fans stir lazily. I can see four overhead projectors around the room and some metal racking with course notes and files on them. The computer the Dutch man was using is covered up again with a dark brown cloth at the back of the room. Nobody speaks. I continue to write, and wonder how I might be getting back to my hotel this evening. I don't know where I am in the city, or whether Robert, who brought me here, is planning to take me back. The curtain behind me billows some more and laps over my right shoulder, touching my face and ear and then resting there, its dusty arm around me. I push it of out the way, imagining its fine grain of dirt

adhering to my sticky, moist skin, creating a new grime all of its own. I think my POP is encasing a similar horror.

Now, there's only me and one other in the room. He nods acknowledgement to me and rests his forehead in his hand. His gold coloured watch glints as he slowly rubs the sweat on this brow. The meeting was due to start 15 minutes ago with 19 people attending. I feel incredibly tired, wanting it all to be over before it's even begun. My foot aches. The man in the room answers a call on his mobile, and speaks so quietly that I can't hear a thing. He is wearing a long sleeved stripy shirt and a pair of army green gabardine trousers. The man walks out and I am alone again, so I idle away a few seconds picking at my crusty toes with their lime green nail polish. I draw my plastered foot and the toes come out looking as scrunched up as they feel. Outside, shouting children join in the street noise and I can only hear the whirring of the fans inside the room if I concentrate very hard.



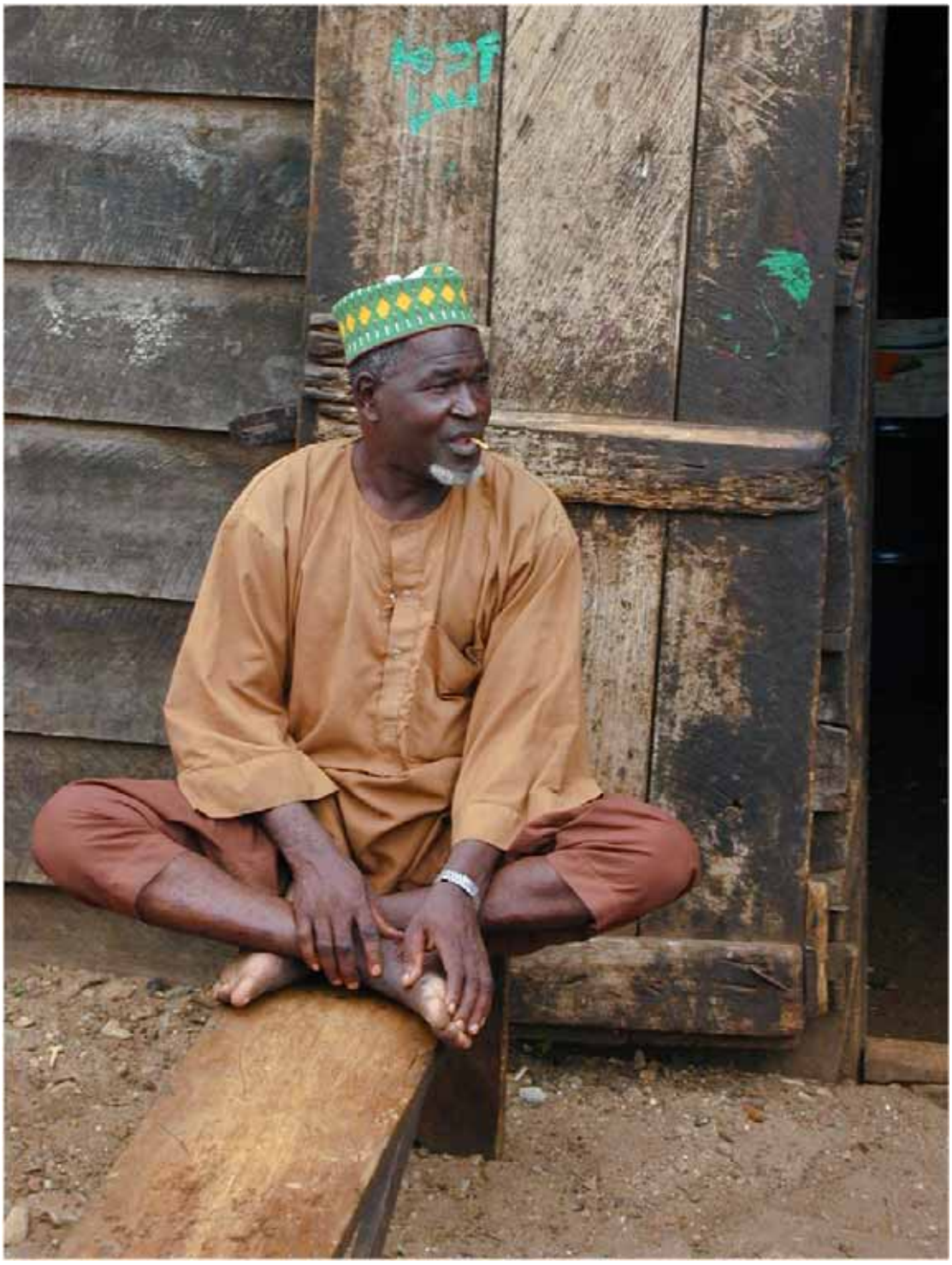
Estelle, from *Safe Home*, arrives, wearing purple and black and a splendid cleavage. She looks very friendly. She tells me that they had no idea at the gate about this meeting. Another man arrives, wearing flowing peach Islamic clothing. A mobile phone ear piece dangles down at the neck of his outfit. Somehow he's wired himself up to be able to talk during the meeting.

"Is this where we're having the meeting?"

"Yes", Estelle and I both say. Estelle hands the newcomer the sign-in list and we sit in silence. I could so easily move into chat mode, and choose not to. I am tired and I want to save my energy for trying to understand the quick fire half pidgin conversation that will flow in the meeting. Mobile man gets his cell phone out of his peach pocket and moves towards the door to make his call. Estelle sits with her fingers interwoven in front of her on the desk. Nothing happens. Robert, who organised the meeting, comes in at last and says that unless we have 6 participants by 3pm, we'll call it off. Robert's cell phone rings and it is Catharine from Colour Consult calling to say she's not coming. It is now 2.45pm. I've been sat in the room for an hour. At 3pm we rearrange the desks for an informal meeting, which will last until 4pm at the latest. I'm now to present the social marketing campaign. My leg is throbbing and very uncomfortable. So is the rest of me. Still, not long now.

Looking back at this account it is easy for me to forget just how uncomfortable I was. From the moment I arrived on this short trip, I was counting the days until I could get back on the KLM flight that would take me to Amsterdam and then home. The hospital had cut a slit up my plaster to allow my leg to swell in the heat – which it had done, leaving an inch wide gap showing the cotton wool liner. I imagined all manner of tropical bugs getting inside. The still open wound hadn't yet got infected and I was proud (stupidly, as it turned out later) that I'd said no to "precautionary" antibiotics for this trip.

And yet, reading again about the stultifying wait for that meeting, I still wonder why I didn't chat, become engaged, ask questions. Was I really that absent? It was as if the heat, the dust, the noise, the discomfort and the concentration needed to try and understand sapped all my available energy, leaving me transported to an imagined future of cool water and clean sheets, quiet and healing.



Small business owner, Accra Timber Market, Ghana, October 2001

Notes from India

19 May 2002, Delhi, written on Freefall Writing course, 16 April 2003

I'd been told that there were official taxis, which quelled my occasional white slave prostitute fear (or was it becoming a fantasy? Surely not) and all faces were on me, a suddenly conspicuous limping huge white woman in a sea of sinewy tight small Indian men and women jabbering on and on in the night time humid warmth. I found the taxi booth which was full of maps, official-looking calendars, receipts and two Sikh men with huge turbans and twisted beards tightly drawn up in do-it-yourself chin lifts. I wondered if the tightness of the beard arrangement stopped them from swallowing properly. Did their turbans muffle their hearing? Did they have lovely long glossy hair underneath ready to come tumbling down like the Sikh bomb disposal man in that film where Ralph Feinnes was all burnt. The English Patient. The Sikh had made love to Isabella Rosellini's character in his tent in the garden and his hair had tumbled over the pair of them.

"20,000 rupees please. Go round the back, we'll meet you there. Here's your receipt". I went round the back and held my receipt out until one of the taxi drivers seemed to recognise it and ushered me towards his old 1940s style taxi with its bench seats.

Delhi Taxi (broken down), May 2002

Young men jostled to help me with my bag and I couldn't sort out tips, what with the rucksack and the walking stick and the foot. I wanted to be left alone. I wanted to turn around and go home. I got in the front of the taxi and slid across the vinyl seat.

The driver got in – another Sikh man.
I put my seat belt on.
Better to be in the front.
Better to start a first trip to a new country on the front foot…
(or, at least, the good foot, in my case).
Better to be brave.

"Have you got a long night shift?"
"Yes, but it only gets busy when the flights come in"
"Is it a long way to the hotel"
"Not too far"

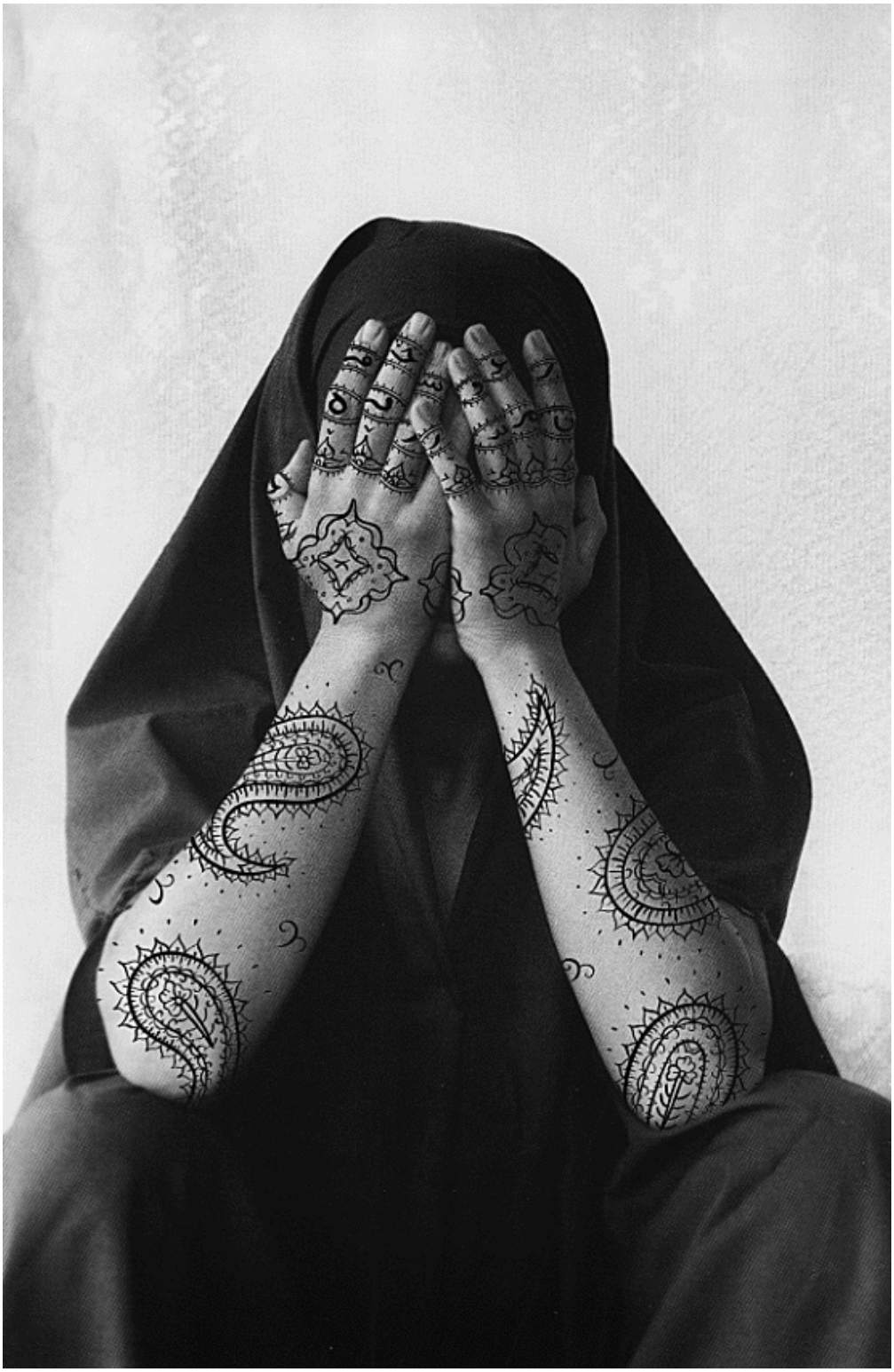
Wide streets whizzed by as we went round roundabout after roundabout. I lost all sense of direction and became convinced we were going nowhere. Tuk tuks and mopeds made up their own lanes on the road as they went along and my taxi sped deftly through the lot of them, flanked by high white kerbstones and large houses set back from the road behind metal gates. I wound down the car window and breathed in warm diesel fumes.

"Do you come from Delhi?"
"Yes, I've lived here all my life"
"Do you have a family here?"
"Yes, I have 3 daughters and my wife"
"Three daughters! I bet that keeps you busy."

This was going well. Good chat in the taxi, and a clean bed waiting for me as we pulled up at the huge brick hotel. A doorman moved towards the car and another white woman sat outside on her suitcase, waiting for her trip home. My driver reached over to undo my seat belt.

"No, it's OK," I said, "I'll do it."

He undid the buckle anyway and then guided the belt back across my body brushing his hand slowly across my breasts as he leant over. Shit. I should have got in the back. I looked at the woman sat on the suitcase. I wanted to be her, leaving not arriving.



"Shirin Neshat quietly corrodes the most violent metaphysical imperative assumptions about the nature and function of an 'Islamic' femininity… Enduring assumptions of what constitutes an 'Islamic woman' are at once domestic to that culture and colonially crafted on it"

(Dabashi in Neshat's photographic book, "Women of Allah", 1997)

22 May 2002, Moradabad, written later that day at the ILO's local office

Sheer black fabric-concealed eyes looked round back at me. Wide. Unblinking. "It's right here, second entrance along on the right," Chandra said, not noticing the woman and I look towards a turquoise building with a carved wooden door. A rickshaw came to a halt outside in the narrow lane and I watched to see how the woman, and the two young girls with her, got down from their high rickshaw perch. The youngest girl looked round at me. She was wearing a lilac salwaar kameez and her dark hair was drawn into a tight bundle at the nape of her neck, clasped in place by a slide. I looked back at her and smiled. She turned and followed the woman towards the door of the turquoise house.

The woman moved in slow motion while others rushed between us. Entering the house, she lifted her hands to remove her veil and stepped into the darkness of the doorway. In one move she turned and lifted her veil, looking over her shoulder at me with those unblinking eyes. We looked at each other for a moment forever. Then, she was gone.

The men ushered me towards a plastic chair across the other side of the crowded alley. I took my rucksack off and sat down. A boy walked by with his eyes glued to me and a bent man pulling a cart loaded with sacks of rice struggled by in the other direction, doggedly pushing and pulling past rickshaws and bicycles in his way.

I looked past at the barred window in front of me while the men chattered on. That face, her face, appeared again, this time from the darkness within, staring through the metal grill. Hot tears sandpapered my eyes and I looked down. "You can go in now," and Suhail gestured towards his home, smiling.

Inside was clean, plain and surprisingly light once I was away from the street. Women and children chattered and laughed in a myriad of living spaces and I was led to a yellow room with a wardrobe and two thin sleeping mats. A wrinkled woman dressed in white sat next to a young sleeping boy on the mats. She rested her elbows on her knees and looked up at me through one eye. Two young girls with mendhi-henna decoration on their hands came in and one said to me in English, "This is my mother" as she gestured towards the entrance and there, the smooth-skinned woman I'd seen before came in, dressed in sunshine yellow and smiling broadly. She gestured towards my bandaged foot and looked back up at me. I nodded and showed her the stick I was using, shrugging my shoulders a little. I wanted to be able to ask her if there was anything I could do for her. We looked at each other and held out our hands. Hers were cool, slim and soft to my touch. Suhail came to lead me out. We continued to hold hands. My arm stretched out behind me. We continued to hold hands. Then, contact was lost and I was gone.

Brassware artisans, Moradabad, May 2002

22 May 2002, Moradabad, written on Freefall Writing course, 16 April 2003

What I really want to write about is the sheer bloody awfulness of Moradabad and the people working there like in the bowels of hell seating sinewy men all skin and bones with big staring eyes looking out of the gloom and the vapour of the ingot casting workshop with its pit of a furnace and its dirt floor and sweat and scrap metal piled up and the third man who waits outside for his turn in the hole, his turn melting the metal or pouring it and carrying the white hot ingots with huge forceps close to dark brown skinny flesh and dirty check cotton dhotis and soaked vests, glossy back hair. I stood in the hole trying not to breathe wondering what the vapours held for my lungs, feeling the heat of ingots being carried past me almost close enough to brush me, close enough to fall on my bandaged foot, close enough to maim and kill and melt the flip flops of the man carrying the metal. Nothing was said. They looked at me like Golem from the Lord of the Rings. I looked at them like the Queen being shown round an inner city housing estate. How did it come to this? How long did they do this for before they got ill or died? Were they so skinny because the sweat poured off them all the time like this?

Ibrahim Almir, a local workshop owner of some standing, was showing me his suppliers. Mr Almir wore spotless crisp white Moslem clothing. He had a beautiful, kind face, with perfect almond eyes and a long, clean curly beard. He controlled 150 workers who endured these conditions day in day out. He took me to Arurit, a Hindu man whose job it was to take the brass ingots and cast them into tat for the Western market to sell for Christmas. As we walked down the alley way connecting Ibrahim Almir's workshop with the ingot casters and Arurit's home, we went past a vulture in the street an unmoving dog with sores on its hocks and three teenage boys crouching down in a dark doorway, chin on knees, soldering arms onto brass cherub candlesticks.

Arurit greeted me with an open, unlined face and a gentle, knowing smile. He wiped his hand on his dhoti, looked at it and held it out for me to shake. His forehead was smooth and he crouched down in the dirt in front of a pile of fine black sand. Next to him, a small fiery hole in the floor held a crucible of molten brass. A sooty curtain hung just beyond the furnace. It moved and two children laughed pushing it aside to see what was going on. Arurit looked over and smiled softly at them.

I followed his gaze and saw a young girl crouching down in the dirt. She was wearing a faded dress with pink flowers on it and puff sleeves. She looked up at me with her white teeth showing. I smiled back. Next to her on the floor I saw a pile of brass platters. They were the kind of thing you wouldn't actually want to eat food off, but might be presented from one businessman to another, engraved to commemorate some great meeting. The filigree edging of the unfinished casting glinted sharply in the light.

Moradabad

Arurit was a small man who moved easily around his workspace without ever really standing up or sitting down. His legs looked flexible and strong as he leaned back on his haunches with one elbow resting on his knee. He brushed his hands together lightly to clean off that black sand, making a small clapping sound. I could see a few hairs on his chest poking above his cotton vest. He had a full moustache and thinning hair combed over his chestnut scalp. The light hit the left side of his face strongly, leaving the right side in darkness and playing over the contours of his features in a gradual shift between the light and the dark. He had clear almond eyes, with dark irises smudging into creamy whiteness. His had long eyelashes that curled outwards. His forehead was smooth and he smiled a relaxed smile, looking up at me openly. His teeth were the same pale cream as the whites of his eyes.

He picked up the mould he was making the plates in and undid a metal catch, releasing the fine sand and tipping it into a pile on the floor by his feet. Leaning forward now, his hands moved deftly and he worked at a steady pace. His eyes didn't need to look at what his hands were doing as he crumbled and reworked the sand for later use.

In the neck of the mould, there was a small residue of cast brass which he had broken off the latest casting. He fished out this "y" shaped piece of waste metal and sent it

clattering into a tray along with some of the sand. Then he passed the tray and its contents out into the alleyway through an open wooden entrance. Turquoise paint peeled off the panelled wood. It was the kind of paint finish interior designers might take an age to recreate.

Outside, two boys took the tray into the sunlight and began to sort fragments of brass from the sand like they were panning for gold. When they'd finished they passed the sand and then the metal back to Arurit. He blended the sand into the pile in front of him and put the metal pieces into the crucible. He nodded at one of the children, who picked up the crucible with long metal tongs and lowered it through the hole into the furnace under the floor. Arurit took a finished platter and began to make a fresh sand mould for the next casting.

I looked and I saw squalor and craftsmanship and kindness and contentment and poverty and National Geographic brown-eyed brown skinned chiaroscuro beauty, brown, black, turquoise, flaking paint and shining hair, fiery metal and glinting brass. I felt like a voyeur. I felt like a pornographer. I felt like a thief, an overblown beached whale of a white woman, grossly privileged, not knowing I was even born. I wanted to take photographs. I wanted to paint the scene. It was the colours of a Caravaggio. It was the end of the line for Western consumerism. It was this man's life. It was his tradition. He called one of his children over to work a small hand bellows powered by a bicycle wheel set in a groove in the ground near to the furnace.

"Is there anything that would really improve the quality of your life?" I asked, momentarily seeing myself as the Queen, or worse, the Duke of Edinburgh, on an official visit to an inner city housing estate in the North of England. Arurit looked from me to my colleague Chandra for a translation. He listened, nodded, smiled and spoke.

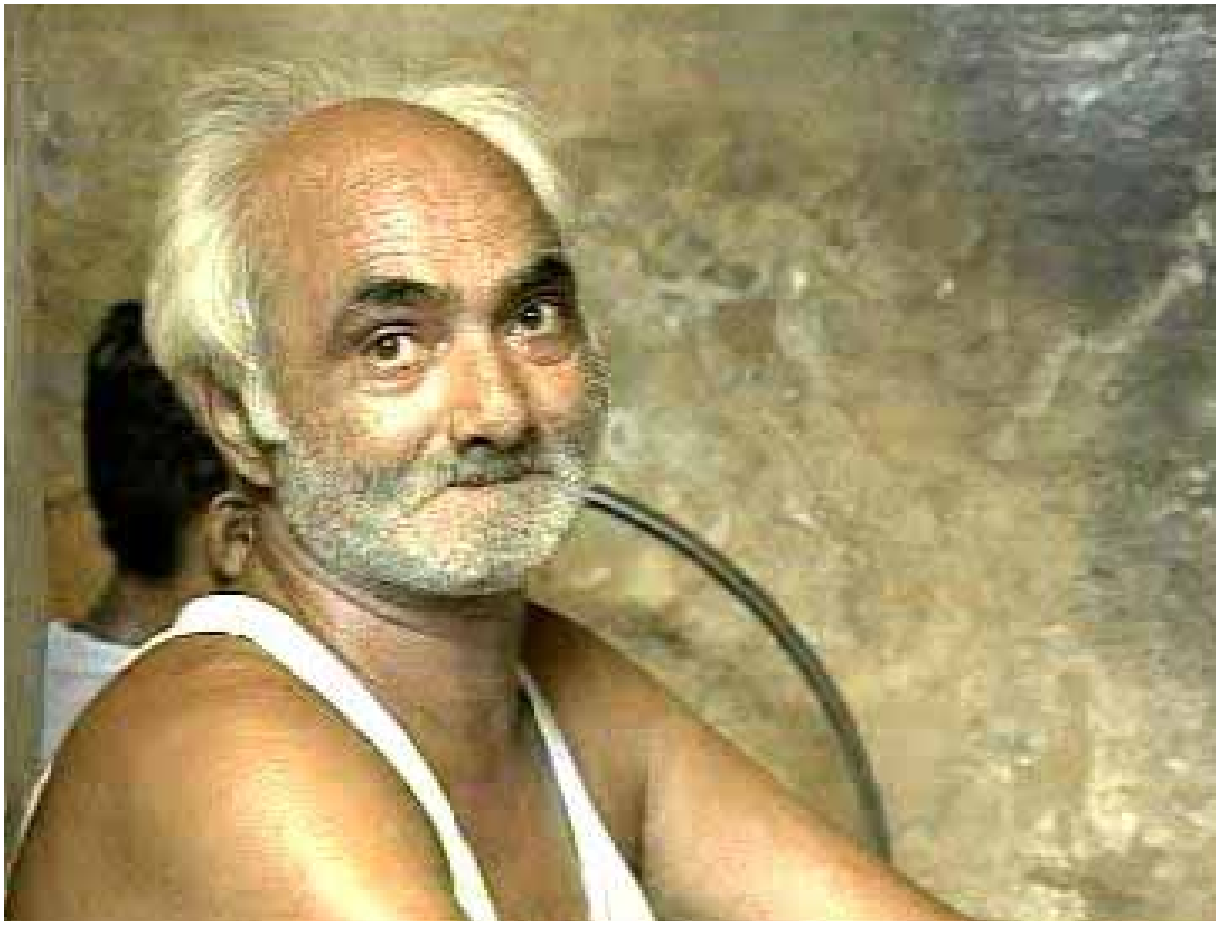
"He says the electricity supply is terrible, it keeps going off and he has to get his children to work the bellows. The light goes off, too, so he can't work so fast."

"Can you ask him what he does when he is not working, in the evenings and during the three months when there is no work"

"He says he likes to go for walks round the alleys, he watches cable TV from Delhi and he plays with his children. He is very proud of his town".

Moradabad brassworkers

Four months later, on 18 October 2002, I visited Arurit again. One of his children brought me a wooden bench to sit on, but my foot was better now and I didn't have my walking stick this time. I was wearing the dark red tie dye salwaar kameez dupatta I'd had made in Kathmandu. I sat on the bench so I could get closer to Arurit, who crouched on the floor. I felt more like Lady Di this time. He shows me how he casts a decorative platter using moulds like cake tins and fine sand mixed with molasses. His hands and forearms are covered with black sooty powder. He presses the mould tight shut with his bare foot and pours vaporous metal from its small crucible. While he does this, he leans over into the flaring smoke close to the mould. Soon after, he removes the fresh casting with his fingers and returns the used moulding sand to a heap on the floor. He places another piece of fairground junk in his pile of finished goods. He shows me his new extractor chimney, made from scrap metal as a result of the project I am working on there with Chandra. Arurit moves his hand underneath the vest that hangs from his body and points to his chest. "He says that, now he's got the chimney, it's the first time this summer that he hasn't had skin disease on his chest".



Link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/c_seeley.html

18 September 2002, Moradabad, email with unexpected night time text response

From: "Chandra" | This is Spam | Add to Address Book
To:
CC: chris.seeley@just-business.co.uk
Subject: Message from Chris
Date: Wed, 18 Sep 2002 12:25:07 +0530

Dear Carole

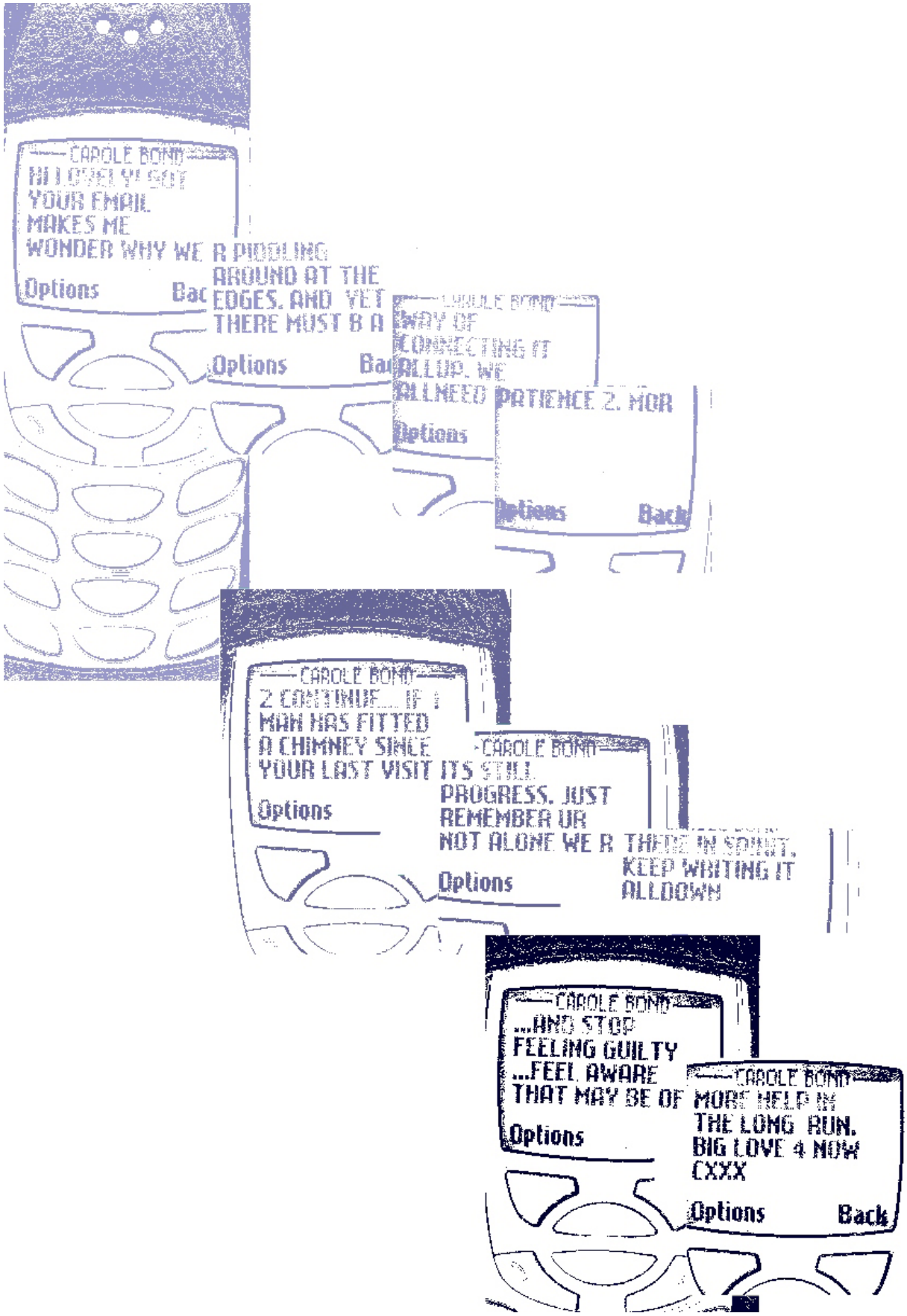
I'm borrowing someone else's email address here, so don't reply to this one - I won't get it! I may be able to get my yahoo stuff on Friday, though. This is a bit of an attempt to express how I feel being here. It's not meant to be a whinging session for its own sake... more of an admittance of how bloody lucky I am in the rest of my life...

Well, here I am back in Moradabad again and I can't wait to get back home, or at least to Delhi. It really is the end of the world here. The hotel room hasn't got any windows, 2 strip lights, power cuts and mosquitoes. It stinks of moth repellant and the kind of disinfectant that usually inhabits urinals. The air conditioning / fans are so noisy I was awake half the night and gave in in the end, put the light back on and had a read for an hour or so in the middle of the night. I have another night here tonight, then the drive on the hair-raising road back to Delhi tomorrow afternoon. How I wish that was today. I must admit that I spent most of the way over here with my eyes shut. Reduce the headache and to my shame I just visually cut it all out a bit. The gulf between us haves and what I see here is enormous. I saw a man today who casts brass, called Arurit. I'd met him before on the last trip and this time he has had a chimney installed to get rid of some of the fumes (toxic stuff) in his workplace. He says that this summer, he didn't have the usual skin problems he has because of work. And he says others won't be able to afford the investment which is about 8 pounds per chimney.

It feels so isolated here. In all ways. I have just spent the last 20 minutes trying to get a yahoo connection. There's hardly any cars or anything - it is all ox carts with frothing, straining animals and rickshaws and rubbish and dust and people and cows in the street. People everywhere. When I was driven into the old city today, the car I was in hit two cyclists and a pedestrian - not to hurt them, but hard enough to knock them off balance. If there is a car or truck around, they all just beep their horns like mad for no reason I can tell, because everyone ignores them anyway.

If this is what I mean by a less environmentally devastating society than ours (which I guess it probably is) then it is not attractive! Ah, so confusing. Chandra, who I work with here, tells be that the place is an intellectual, cultural and relationships desert. People are passively content, but, he says, do not care for each other. Oh, yes, and it is one of the last remaining strongholds for polio. Lovely.

I'm ashamed to say that being here makes me wish my time away and it is very hard to turn it into good, generative, Judi-style living inquiry when I find it so unpleasant to be here. My inquiry question is - how can I make the time go faster so I can get out of here sooner? Everything happens so slowly here. It is like coming to visit my own nightmares. So, there you have it... it's now 33 minutes and still the yahoo home page is being elusive... I wonder if this will send... Looking forward to seeing you soon (can't be soon enough!), love Chris xxx



Notes from Sri Lanka

Here I wish to offer some insight into how this work comes about, my preparation and the kinds of thought processes and questions I now consider as it starts to develop.

Just before Christmas 2004, I received an email from my ILO contact who I'd been working with on the Ghana, Vietnam and Moradabad jobs. He had moved from the main office in Geneva (where he was crawling up the walls) to Sri Lanka earlier in the year. I'd sent him an email to wish him well, and, almost as a throwaway line, added in that should any opportunities for work together come up, then I'd be interested. For a while, he had been asking if I could work directly with ILO, rather than through the New Academy of Business (NAB), where I was an associate. I'd felt a loyalty to both NAB and ILO and consistently told all parties that I felt awkward about this and that I was unwilling to negotiate behind anybody's back. Then, NAB shifted form (becoming a virtual network) in a way which allowed for my direct working with ILO. I knew my ILO contact would hear about this as the outgoing director of NAB emailed around with his plans to leave and for NAB to evolve.

I had resolved with this ILO work to respond to it as it arose, but not to actively pursue developing this part of my client base. I could see that very quickly, this work could take up all my time, and, whilst the work still feels meaningful, and full of learning, I have questions about intervening at all, it is (rightly) not well paid (by western standards) and would mean more travel than I would like to be doing. The pattern of engagement with ILO is based around a small core of full time staff, mainly in Geneva, some, like my client contact, "on assignment in the field" on extended fixed term contracts in poor countries and others, like me, engaged on an ad hoc basis on short term "missions".

The email I received just before Christmas, then, was an invitation for me to come and work with my client "on mission" in Sri Lanka, should his assignment contract be extended[154]. I felt excited and flattered to be asked – and now at a time when I could break free of the NAB intermediary and work directly with the ILO. I left the email for a day or two before responding to allow my flattered self to calm down so I could assess less impulsively whether this work still felt right for me to be doing. I didn't want it to become habitual, yet I also recognise that, to some extent, a part of my sense of identity is wrapped up in doing these projects (especially the discovery, research, travel and self-sufficiency aspects of the work, as well as the ways in which these projects necessitate me un-cocooning myself from Western "security"). In spring 2004, before agreeing to go to Brazil, a CARPP colleague said to me "you've got to do this, it's part of you, don't stop". Her words won over my discomfort at the thought of air miles (how can the work I do possibly justify the CO_2 emissions?) and

[154] Ironically, job security – one of the core beliefs of the ILO's mission – for all but the core Geneva staff is low and unpredictable for its contract workers.

over G's more pointed comments about me "buggering off at the drop of a hat – you don't think anything of going to these far flung places, but you complain at me when I'm away a lot".

These "missions" aren't holidays. I have found ways of easing the work to make it less intense and more reflective, and I have found it really difficult in short timescales to make this work participatory across the cultural and power differentials of a Western visiting "expert" and the ultimate beneficiaries of the ILO's work.

I emailed my ILO client in Sri Lanka with a holding response saying I was interested in principle, and that over the Christmas break I'd look at the documentation he'd sent me in more detail and respond to it then.

Boxing Day 2004 meant that I was playing with the new digital radio G. had bought me for Christmas. I'd wanted to make the BBC World Service my main source of news and had just managed to tune it in when the first reports of the tsunami came in. I emailed a Sri Lankan on the MSc course at Bath and my ILO client to ask after their wellbeing. He was in Geneva, and the MSc participant was OK, sending through a detailed and moving account of what happened. I asked my ILO client whether this would affect our potential work together to the extent that it was no longer worth our while for me to read the documentation he'd send. No, go ahead, he said, he wanted my responses and sent me through an additional presentation and paper written by an Viennese anthropologist he'd met in Thailand. What did I think of this, he wanted to know.

Later, another message arrived from my other ILO contact, a Danish woman still working in Geneva. She was clearly excited about the Viennese anthropologist's work and, for the first time I'd seen, was questioning the cultural packages we, as industrialised Westerners, might be bringing to our work. Is the ILO model one of (soft) Western imperialism? I sent her a copy of Peggy McIntosh's paper "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack" as food for thought (McIntosh, 1989).

In the New Year, I gathered all the emails and papers on this work together and began a response to my ILO contacts, wondering how forthright I'd be about the strength of my own feelings about ILO's work with entrepreneurship and the possibility that it merely accelerates the speed with which more and more people are sucked into (seduced by) a materialistic / consumerist capitalist existence.

After the New Year, the ILO went quiet – my Sri Lankan contact working on post-tsunami projects and the Danish woman silent until an unexpected email saying that she'd accepted a position with the ILO in New Delhi and that her husband had resigned from his dream job to join her and their two children there. She assured me that our work together would still go ahead, and I suggested that we meet before she

left Geneva. First we met in London, in February 2005, and had no idea how the project might unfold. Here's what I wrote at the time: *"I'm standing in the wings like my clown self with an empty stage at Paddington Station, not knowing how my conversation will evolve with [my ILO client]. I trust that something worthwhile will emerge between us…"*

Later, along with Anna, the anthropologist from Vienna, we found a date at the end of May 2005 to meet in Geneva over two days to plan our Sri Lanka work in detail.

At the same time, reading ecophilosopher Joanna Macy's memoir, "Widening Circles: A Memoir" (Macy,)2001, I found the Buddhist Sarvodaya movement, which has an offshoot, "SEEDS" (coincidentally, the same acronym as the division in the ILO I work with, "SEED"), concerned with enterprise development. Sarvodaya is run by and for Sri Lankans and I wonder whether ILO shouldn't just help fund them, or at least partner the two SEEDS together. I developed several questions to take to the meeting in May 2005:

- What is it that we (ILO) think we might be bringing, or have to offer over and above Sarvodaya's own services?
- Do Sarvodaya's work and Buddhist philosophies have any more or less cultural relevance than Western norms in the mainly Tamil north, where we'll be working?
- How might we incorporate many ways of knowing into our work?
- Do we want to specify our work to be with women-only?
- What feedback might we look for - and where might we look - in order to know (well enough) that the interventions we initiate influence towards the development and flourishing of enterprising cultures that are culturally sensitive?
- Do we work, specifically, with individual or collective creativity?
- How do we stay close to what the people, women we will be working with might define for themselves that they most need?
- How do we intervene to allow an informed self-ascription of interests?
- Can we influence any resulting enterprises such that they are working for, and not against, the vital needs of both the human and more than human worlds?
- How can we work in (and evaluate in) a (non-neo-colonial) context-transcending way rather than just training people to fare better within the current context (context-bound)… Rather than be bound to either the existing local or dominant global contexts.

I was looking forward to the meeting, and wished to maintain a particular awareness of three issues: first, the nuances of language we use as an English, Danish and Austrian trio of women; second, that I keep close to the intentions, framing and purposes of our work together (avoiding getting trapped or lost in an abstracted "development language" of missions and projects and outcomes); and third, I work to keep us inquiring about our own cultural assumptions and our power as Western

money-spenders in this work together. Arriving in Geneva I wrote down my thoughts and intentions for the meeting:

Geneva Airport, 31 May 2005
How do I take this meeting as it comes?
And stay true to myself in ways which are generous and kind to others?
What, then, is staying true to myself?
Looking for opportunities for "withness" rather than "aboutness".
Looking for opportunities for participation in planning, decision-making, design.
Asking questions - framing questions – addressing issues of imposition… culturally sensitive enterprise?
What am I doing here?
Looking for concrete, practical ways that ILO can intervene to Stimulate, allow, vibrate culturally sensitive enterprises for fulfilling work, human flourishing and creative labour.

ILO Offices, 31 May 2005
Here I am now at the ILO's offices sitting by a vast tapestry donated by the French Government. The annual conference happens to be on at the same time as my visit. This conference, I heard on the World Service this morning, is concerned with forced labour, with possible sanctions coming against Myanmar. What I like about being/working here is the global nature of the work. I am guessing that people from all over are gathered here now. I wonder if they are/we are all of the global élite? Now what was it the other day, someone else had a different term for the global élite … Peter [Reason] was talking to me and he said that Joanna Macy had different wording. I wonder what it was, I must ask him. I also wonder what Joanna Macy would or does make of this place relative to "The Great Turning'?

Later that evening, staying at a friend's home near Geneva
I'm sat downstairs taking a moment after my shower, before the dinner party, to write a few thoughts on today. One of them is that, at times I had that "blender-head" feeling of too much talk, too many abstractions. During the day, I felt quite comfortable that we covered what we needed to the best we could. I advocated for us to start with some work on "hopes and fears" and whilst I was able to frame and take the conversation back to intentions and purposes, I felt that my ILO client was eager to move into action. I tried to keep my framing pragmatic, and would like to have had a clearer fixed or shared idea about our process for the day. [My client's] seeming impatience, and maybe [the social anthropologist's] lack of prioritizing process left me feeling small and unable or unwilling to push for that process framing. Perhaps that is something I could do tomorrow. So my desire was to work at the level of purposes and link this to pragmatism. Perhaps the day wasn't too far off achieving this… Now, I feel slightly shy about going back upstairs to the dinner party and can already imagine myself seeking refuge in bed for the night.

An aside concerning money

- It takes me two days to earn a years' local salary in Moradabad.
- Working for the ILO, my day rate is less than one third of the amount I usually get in England.
- In England, it takes me about twenty minutes to earn the money it takes to purchase an extractor chimney in Moradabad and get rid of skin disease. It takes a local man about 2 weeks to do the same.
- It takes an ILO "National Consultant" four days to get paid as much as I do in one day as an ILO "International Expert".
- My friend Malcolm said he couldn't bear to do this work because of these stark differentials, and stepped out of the field altogether.
- One of my monthly mortgage payments is equal to half a years' wages in Moradabad.
- In Sri Lanka, people were willing to do a years' work for 12.5% of the rate the ILO were willing to pay.
- My ILO colleague says she'll go and pick up the lunch and negotiate with the three-wheeler drivers because they'll rip me off as I have white skin.
- I bought a piece of jewellery in Sri Lanka. The jeweller said "forget the price it says on here, you're English and that's the rate we charge the Americans".
- What's right? What can I live with?

In "People, Place and Power", conflict transformation negotiator and peace activist, Diana Francis says: "Skewed global power relations are also reflected in very different rates of pay. The purchasing power of a given currency in its own country is very different from its purchasing power elsewhere. The average standard of living also varies greatly from one country to another. It is already problematic that a large proportion of funds raised in the West for use elsewhere is used in fees for Western consultants. The level of those fees, while it may (and I argue should) be modest in terms of Western norms, is still very high compared with comparable fees paid in the places where they work. To pay locals at Western rates would be to set them apart from those around them, disturb the local financial ecology and attract into the field people whose overriding motivation is financial. To pay Western consultants at local rates when their main living costs are in the West would make it well-nigh impossible for Western consultants to do this kind of work except as a kind of hobby. Yet to pay local and 'international' colleagues vastly different amounts is invidious. These realities are uncomfortable, divisive and potentially poisonous for relationships, both interpersonal and inter-organisational. Perhaps the best that can be done is to talk about them honestly and work for a mutually tolerable and transparent formula, made on the basis of agreed principles" (Francis, 2002: 237).

In December 2003, I spoke to Diana, who is a CARPP PhD alumna, about this issue. What did she do? How did she square the inequality in ways that enabled her to continue doing the work? We talked about transparency and we talked about talking. I

said to Diana that, on my travels, I told people I was working with in various countries, no, I didn't have a TV, I lived in a small village, I have chickens and a dog, that I worked hard, that I was hugely privileged in that I could afford a great education, that I liked to learn. I looked for similarity, not difference. Some things are luxuries for me, too. I asked my ILO clients in Geneva if my local ILO colleagues were paid a decent rate by their local standards. Yes, they were.

In 2005, with the new Sri Lankan project, I got to put this strand of inquiry to a more meaningful test. The Austrian anthropologist (Anna) and I were to work with a Sri Lankan anthropologist. According to the ILO paperwork, we counted as "International Experts" at $400 per day and our new colleague (Mihirini) officially counted as a "National Consultant" at $100 per day.

On 9 June 2005, I received an email from my ILO client in Colombo. He'd met with Mihirini the day before and sent this message:

By the way, Mihirini made clear to me that she is not a "national consultant" who does the legwork for the internationals. I had already told her before that that she will be a full member of the team. Unfortunately she expects to be paid as such as well...

The next day, I sent this email message to Anna to check with her that we had the same view on this:

I am interested in Mihirini's (right) response about differentials in day rates and notice [our client's] comments about [our other client's] financial concerns. I'd like to suggest that [our client] considers "topping up" Mihirini's day rate from the International Consultant's budget and that you and I reduce the resource we put into pre-planning as he suggests (whilst really holding on to the proposal that we meet before during July / August - this strikes me as really good value for money), and that we perhaps consider offering a shorter second mission each - say 5-6 days instead of 10 in Nov/Dec. What do you think?

Later that day, Anna responded directly to our ILO client very simply:

…all the same money - like Chris said, this is how it should be…

Later, when we were all together in Colombo, Anna and I both discussed the whole episode with Mihirini. How had it been from her perspective? "Well," Mihirini said "You choose to live where you do. You could come and live here and get things cheaply, but you don't. That's my advantage."

Lovely.

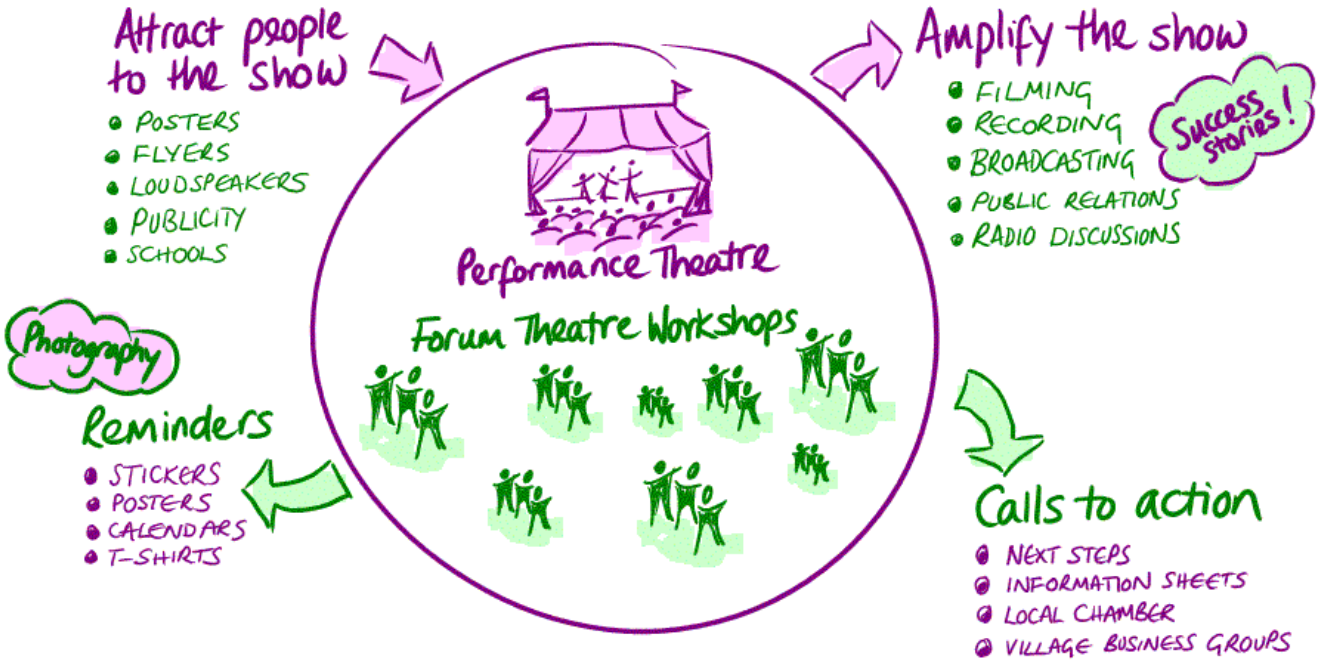
More of the same only different in Sri Lanka

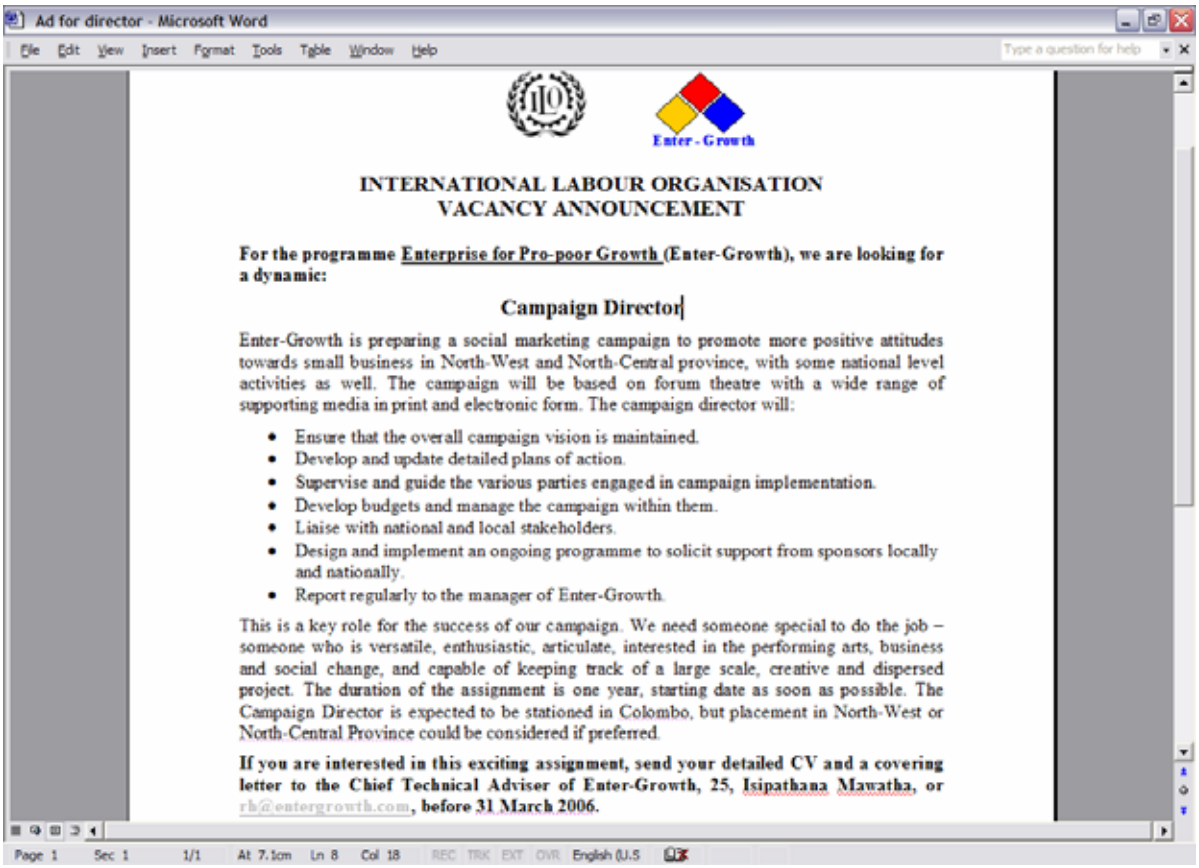
The work in Sri Lanka began in late 2005, with three "missions" of meetings and night-time sense making, of report writing and explanations, of gradual clarity and endless questioning, of checking for transparency, confidentiality and potential overload in communications around the team (which included me, my local and international ILO colleagues, local suppliers of design and video services, a local and an international anthropologist, a volunteer UK-based researcher and a volunteer UK-based advertising executive). The pattern was by now familiar, and through my previous experiences, I was getting better at taking care of myself, of working more "sparingly."

This time, the "official" task was to develop some way of influencing cultural norms regarding entrepreneurial activities, to try and encourage more rural Sri Lankans to consider self employment as a viable and attractive life choice. Unofficially, my intention was that this campaign would be more invitational and participatory, and correspondingly less passive than previous mass media campaigns.

We ended up with a campaign design using applied theatre techniques, a logo, a video, job specifications, presentation materials and agreements about how to move forward.

Pálama — *(a traditional type of footbridge)*
Ope vyaparaya – ape anagathaya — *(Your business – Our future)*





Ad for director - Microsoft Word

File Edit View Insert Format Tools Table Window Help

Enter - Growth

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANISATION
VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT

For the programme Enterprise for Pro-poor Growth (Enter-Growth), we are looking for a dynamic:

Campaign Director

Enter-Growth is preparing a social marketing campaign to promote more positive attitudes towards small business in North-West and North-Central province, with some national level activities as well. The campaign will be based on forum theatre with a wide range of supporting media in print and electronic form. The campaign director will:

- Ensure that the overall campaign vision is maintained.
- Develop and update detailed plans of action.
- Supervise and guide the various parties engaged in campaign implementation.
- Develop budgets and manage the campaign within them.
- Liaise with national and local stakeholders.
- Design and implement an ongoing programme to solicit support from sponsors locally and nationally.
- Report regularly to the manager of Enter-Growth.

This is a key role for the success of our campaign. We need someone special to do the job – someone who is versatile, enthusiastic, articulate, interested in the performing arts, business and social change, and capable of keeping track of a large scale, creative and dispersed project. The duration of the assignment is one year, starting date as soon as possible. The Campaign Director is expected to be stationed in Colombo, but placement in North-West or North-Central Province could be considered if preferred.

If you are interested in this exciting assignment, send your detailed CV and a covering letter to the Chief Technical Adviser of Enter-Growth, 25, Isipathana Mawatha, or rh@entergrowth.com, before 31 March 2006.

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Link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/c_seeley.html

Here is the feedback from the Sri Lankan team of local professionals, noted verbatim as far as possible, during our final round of feedback to one another on the final day of my "mission" on 7 March 2006. In it I notice both how quickly we progressed as well as comments that somehow our working relationship could have developed faster[155]:

"It got better. It was not so great to start with, but we have got some momentum now."

"Very good teamwork. There are challenges ahead and our roles and responsibilities need to be very clear. There's a bit of pressure now – this month is very crucial"

"It has been very educational and interesting. I've learned quite a bit"

"It is an interesting area, asking what to do and how do we do it. So far, we're on the right track and it is very structured"

"When we started, I thought we were all over the place. Now we are working as a very good team"

"You never see a statue put up for a committee. I choose to take that path, and I really enjoyed it and respected each person. It's certainly more interesting than marketing shoe polish…"

"It has been a great 10 days. We've made a lot of progress. We were a bit slow to start, but it got better. I learned a lot. I was very impressed by how everyone brought something special and unique to the team"

"I've found it a very satisfying process we've gone through. A lot has been achieved this week as a team. That's not generally the way it works in advertising. I was trying to encourage much more teamworking, which is quicker and more productive than the myth of the super-creative hero. A lot of output came out of that. We got there relatively quickly, too… we did a great job getting there. The work we've done this week has necessarily been quite fluid, but from now on you're going to have to start working more as a team, more organised, more professional."

"Things were quite amorphous when we started, it was a bigger than average team to work with. It's been a real challenge keeping everyone together. It took some time but we got somewhere bigger."

[155] This brings up two opposing thoughts for me: was I not as good at developing the team as I thought I was… and, was the team's understanding of what it takes to create processes within which enough trust can rapidly develop somewhat unrealistic?

Later, I met with one of the two UK-based colleagues from the advertising industry I'd invited to accompany me on the trip to exchange feedback on the process. He said that he found me a "great psychological support", that I was "channeling a huge amount of energy" during the "mission", but that "there were moments when [he] could have been more involved and had more delegated to [him]" and that "right at the end, [he] had a sense that I [Chris] was grabbing the thing with both hands" in a way that may have left others "feeling quite out of it".

I felt disappointed with myself, seeing this as the consequence of eagerly trying too hard. I find it hard to let go quickly enough when so much of my energy is completely given to these early, formative stages of the project, and yet the part I play in the intervention is over so quickly.

In February-March 2006, my third "mission" to Sri Lanka took place, bringing a new and unanticipated experience…

Class, contact and seduction in Sri Lanka

Part one, 7 March 2006 (written June 2006)

The doorman sat by the lift. It was one of those with a metal sliding screen of a door set into the expanse of gloss painted cream wall. I asked him which floor I needed. My voice echoed across the tiled floor. Third floor. Did I want the lift? No. I'll walk. I started up the concrete stairs wary of going too fast so I didn't get hot and tired too quickly. My footsteps resonated loudly. I removed my sunglasses as I went up into the dark stairwell and I was greeted by bright sunlight through the open window spaces on the first, second and finally third level.

Three men were repainting the glossy wall outside of the apartment I'd been invited to (or had I really invited myself?). A row of frosted internal windows lined the corridor, punctuated by a geometrically carved hardwood door. I stood for a moment before knocking to catch my breath, imagining the party remains of some kind of bachelor pad on the inside. What might I be interrupting? I knocked, loud and confident, using the small brass hand that served as a knocker. The bang of brass on brass fell into the silence.

No-one came to the door.
I looked at my watch.
Had they forgotten?

Perhaps they'd been out and would appear from the rickety lift any moment. I stood back, listening for footsteps from inside, biding my time before knocking again. Nothing happened. The men carried on painting and no-one looked at me. It was as if I wasn't there. What was I doing there anyway, just before leaving for England, at a time when I should have been writing my final report. I banged on the door again, louder this time. Somebody was coming.

A short, smiling woman who might have been in her early sixties opened the door wearing red lipstick and casual Western dress. "I've come for lunch" I said. "Yes, come in" she said. I went in and shook her hand. Who was she? The maid? Should I be shaking her hand? What was the etiquette? I followed her through to the living room. This was no run down bachelor pad. Buddhas, artefacts, paintings and tropical hardwood furniture mingled with bright cotton handloom fabrics, all discreetly, minimalistically arranged. I thought about what a cluttered mess my house is in. Dark wood shutters were thrown back to let the ocean breeze in. The ocean itself filled the view. A warm drift of air ran over my skin. I wanted to ask who the woman was. But didn't. "Would you like a drink?" "Yes, please. Some pineapple juice, please." "I'm Ravith's mother" she said, as if I should have known. Ravith was the person I'd come

to visit, someone who I'd met on several occasions before on this and previous trips to Sri Lanka. "Ravith" she called, "your guest is here. Can you bring some pineapple juice." Ravith appeared, languid in expensive-looking casual clothing. Cool. Empty handed. I guessed that maid(s?) were preparing the juice. He shook my hand and offered a small kiss on the cheek. "How are you?" he said, and we embarked on a stilted conversation. Why was this difficult? I looked at the table, already immaculately laid for six (who might the others be?).

"What do you do?" I asked the mother.
"Oh, I see my friends, go to parties. And I look after Ravith."
"Ah. That keeps you busy, then. Ravith, what's it like to still be looked after by your Mum?"
"Good."

I didn't know anyone that just goes to parties. I didn't know any "grown-ups" who was still being looked after by their Mum.

"And Ravith's Dad, what does he do?"
"He plays poker."
"Ah."

Parties and poker. No wonder I was feeling out of my depth.

As the lunch party progressed, both Mum and Dad appeared as well as Ravith's two children (who I'd never heard mention of before) from his now finished marriage. Two maids served us, I thanked them repeatedly, but was the only one to do so. This formality and luxury was like how the other half live. I felt my working to lower middle class British roots losing their way in this colonial legacy of public schooling and manners. I'd never mix with this "class" at home, and didn't know how to behave. I felt humoured. I went to the toilet to gather myself. Could this be how the rural Sri Lankans felt when I tried to make contact with them? The local professionals I had gathered together to work with as the project's creative team? Humoured? Patronised?

The toilet was decorated as if it was outdoors, with soft earthy organic shapes. I admired the monsoon shower, the lush towels, the antique furniture. That was when the naughty urchin in me woke up and I reached out to a small tray of seashells next to the clean white sink and popped one in my pocket. Yes, the difference that made a difference here was class, and I was on the "wrong" side of the divide for once.

What might this stolen shell symbolise? Here, I'd unexpectedly found myself on the back foot, acting in my inherited, pre-conditioned role in the class hierarchy in the company of a more privileged, local élite. And what had I done? Misbehaved like a childish urchin. I wanted to know what it felt like to run with that "naughty" impulse. Here, I was the slave who bowed and silently farted when the master went by as I made polite conversation and took something for my own in a miniature act of rebellion. As crude as my action was, the "deflation of authority" is mentioned in Goldberger, Belenky et al's seminal work on "Women's Ways of Knowing" as "a powerful learning experience" (Goldberger, Belenky et al, in Shaver and Hendrick, 1987: 224).

My parents, uncles and grandparents were shop keepers, plasterers, embroiderers, seamstresses, typists, airline ground staff, dinner ladies, home carers, stationary cupboard keepers, orchard workers and (one) engineer (who was mercilessly teased by his brothers for having "ideas above his station"). What to me were ordinary people using their labour to keep their heads above water and without an academic qualification between them[156].

Here, at the Sri Lankan lunch, I couldn't pass as "one of them" even though my white/European status (and desire to learn instilled by my family) had at least notched me up far enough to be there at all. I tried to ask questions that would interest my hosts. What other behavioural choices might have been open to me? How else might I, as a self-appointed lower in this situation, have acted in order to initiate generative change? How might I have made better contact while I was at once seduced and repelled by what, to me as an English woman, was rare throwback to a lost (colonial) era? I had the creeping feeling of trying too hard.

When bell hooks writes about the times when class is the difference that makes the difference in a book chapter called "Crossing Class Boundaries", she says: "It was among privileged class folks that I developed both an awareness of the extent to which they are willing to go to protect their class and a disrespect for their class

[156] I notice this difference, too with G. where on many occasions, activities he might consider "normal" I think are incredibly "posh" or should be rare luxuries. Somehow my (self-righteous) view or conditioning or expectations seems (to me) to be more appreciative. When we first met, I commented that I thought that, like me, G. was immensely privileged, which he balked at: "I've worked damned hard for everything I have" he snapped back, perhaps not taking the bigger world stage into account.

values… what must we do to maintain solidarity in the face of class difference?" (hooks, 2000: 145-51).

And yet, I found myself mistrustful in the face of this affluence. What motivated Ravith's post-tsunami projects, and how dare I, an outsider, bring such prejudice? Rahnema questions the input of local élites when he says: "…many of those [local] elites now believed, deep in their hearts, that only the model of society incarnated by the North – and the kind of power associated with it – could now allow their populations to wipe out the consequences of their 'underdevelopment'… they were no longer in a position to address the complexities of the modern world without a sustained programme of development, and… the only way for their people to re-emerge as dignified human beings was to prepare them with all the sacrifices necessary for them to 'catch up with the West'" (Rahnema, 1997: 378). Was this the case here? How might I know? Caught in the shame of my seashell act, and my ideas about polite lunches, I failed to find any way of deepening the conversation, silencing myself from the issues I would have preferred to discuss.

Can true humility and compassion exist in our words and eyes unless we know we too are capable of any act?

St Francis of Assisi (trans. Landinsky, 2002: 37)

Part two, March-June 2006

On my return home, I was interested to see what kind of contact I could make with Ravith over the class / culture / geography / gender / you-name-it divide. hooks says: "It did not take long for me to understand that crossing class boundaries was not easy… I wanted to show my family and community of origin that I could go out into the world and be among more privileged class people without assimilating, without losing touch with my being" (hooks, 2000: 144-5). I wrote a few wooden emails to Ravith. What did I really want to say, human being to human being, regardless of difference?

I was interested in something he'd said during the lunch (in response to me talking about inquiry), that "you Westerners just do too much. You're always working. What are you striving for?" I felt I'd be doing a lot over the preceding years to not be striving too much in meaningless ways and was living a fairly unusual working life

(but I couldn't claim a Buddhist heritage, as Ravith could). I felt affronted that this investment banker / property developer member of the Sri Lankan élite should be questioning me on this. It felt like a gross simplification. And it seemed to me that he was living a pretty Westernised life himself. "But – you don't even know me, how dare you assume…." were my unspoken words. Again, I wonder how often I'd inferred equivalent behaviours and stereotypes on the "poor" people my ILO work was intended to serve.

In an email, I asked Ravith what he'd meant. On 25 March 2006, he responded: "As for enquiring vs. dwelling, it's very much the human state to strive and approach life in a linear manner, but it's also within the human state to 'just be'. The latter implying a circular understanding of the universe with an infinitely still centre. Since both are very much a part of what it is to be human, I suppose we must give expression to both. This duality is what makes the Buddhist idea of the middle path so profoundly important. However I look at things, I always come back to this very simple but elegant idea. In a roundabout way, my answer to your question is to strive on as long as it matters to you to strive on, while being mindful that there is another way too - one that should not be neglected in your explorations. Having said that, maybe it's all a bunch of bollocks - who knows?!"

Two and a half years before this discussion, I was already working the edges of that striving vs. dwelling inquiry. In late 2003, I worked for two weeks in Hanoi, Vietnam, again for the ILO. While I was there, on 10 October 2003, I wrote: "In the spirit of just being, I'm 'wimping out' and having a beer and some food in the restaurant at the Army Hotel, where I'm staying, night two, and the adrenaline of night one buzzing around Hanoi – with its vibrant night-time restaurants and out in the open community living has been replaced with the heavy tiredness I feel in warmer places when I've been overloaded or overwhelmed with 'input'. After a day and a half, I've had seven meetings and visited three businesses. I'm not so shocked by the working conditions now and didn't feel a need to stay long at a meat processors', some woodworking workshops and a metal working business. It's becoming a local variation on a worldwide theme of appalling working conditions and I wonder again if ILO (my) interventions aren't just a new form of colonisation".

Tsunami survivor, Sri Lanka (photography: Nireka Weeratunge)

Part three

I was due to meet Ravith again in the UK, four months after the seashell incident. How, I wondered, would the encounter feel when I am on home turf? What differences would make the difference this time?

Two days before this meeting: it seems to me that I need to suspend and step aside from the informing theories of uppers, lowers, class and power if I am not paralyse myself in an intellectual tangle which prevents person-to-person contact. What constitutes a more generous response (yet not complicit) this time around?

Three days after this meeting: Yes, it did feel different on home turf, more even-handed, and more of a feeling of simply not having much in common to chat about, having nothing much to build on conversationally. As we sat in the pub, I noticed myself trying a bit too hard, and then stopping, withdrawing, my head full of ideas about how the encounter "should" be. When I stepped aside from those ideas, I felt more like an *other* than a *lower*. And Ravith. became someone, an other, just different from me. To paraphrase Chambers' definitions of lowers and uppers at the start of this and the next chapters (based on Chambers, 1997):

Others: people who are in a context neither subordinate nor dominant, superior nor inferior to others. A person can be an other in any context.

What do this series of events and my experience of feeling "lower" tell me in turn about how I encounter people who are contextually underprivileged in comparison with me?

- First, simply put, meet on "their" turf, in "their" context.

- Second, be clear in my acceptance or rejection of any invitations, and ensure that any invitations I might make myself have integrity (that is, they are "real" invitations, to which any response is acceptable, rather than coercions or impositions disguised as invitations).

- Third, discern the difference between failing to make contact or gain empathy due to upper/lower relationship building ineptitude and finding it difficult to make contact simply because of being different people with different interests and concerns. Perhaps all I can do is invite people into context (and accept reciprocal invitations) where some form of contact is implicit in that invitation (for example, becoming co-researchers on an issue)[157]. Finally, remembering the sea shell, do not expect the full story to be able to be told.

[157] Which carries with it the very ordinary and human fear, upset and disappointment of rejection or indifference… Part of me very definitely wants to be accepted, taken in, cared for.

Here it is: a mess

By now, I am anticipating that you have a good flavour for the kinds of issues and activities I am part of in this work, as well as the qualities of attention and questioning that occupy me. Here, I want to draw on these encounters, confusions, ambiguities and presentational knowing and blend them with others' ideas and theories to continue making sense of my experience.

The stream of propositional knowing relating to this work has been slow to unfold. Over the next few pages, I trace its path as an introduction to this section.

In 2001, I started pleased with the common sense stance of Robert Chambers' ideas of putting the last first (Chambers 1997), but in becoming more involved with the work, found it a great informing principle which didn't go on to address the complexities of my experiences in satisfying enough detail.

Following directly on from this, Paulo Freire was an obvious choice in terms of resistance, emancipation and – of key importance – the "oppressed" not seeking merely to replicate the patterns of the "oppressor" but create new ways of being that move beyond crude power dialectics (Freire 1970)[158]. Black American feminist bell hooks is clearly influenced by Freire in this respect when she says: "I am located in the margin. I make a distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as a site of resistance – as location of radical openness and possibility" (hooks 1990: 153). Whilst many people in this field call for and work with resistance[159] (for example, dian marino's work I mentioned earlier in *Uncharted Territory*), it is the final clause of hook's quotation that keeps me linked to this ILO work – marginality as "location of radical openness and possibility"[160].

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[158] This subsequently led to my interest in Forum Theatre and attending a workshop run by with Freire's great friend and founder of Forum Theatre, Augusto Boal in 2004, which in turn led to forum theatre becoming pivotal in the Sri Lanka work. Forum theatre is part of a suite of techniques from Brazilian Augusto Boal's "Theatre of the Oppressed" (Boal, 1979), which has been developed over more than 30 years as a means of bottom-up social change. "Forum theatre consists, in essence, of proposing to a group of spectators, after a first improvisation of a scene, that they replace the protagonist and try to improvise variations on his actions. The real protagonist should, ultimately, improvise the variation that motivated him the most" (Boal, 1995: 184). Boal is currently developing the "Aesthetic Education of the Oppressed."

[159] Does this also mean that I am (just) an unradical, avoiding-the-issue, comfortable soft white supremacist? Henry Giroux says "What has been increasingly lost in the North American and Western appropriation of Freire's work is the profound and radical nature of its theory and practice as an anti-colonial and postcolonial discourse" (Giroux, 1992: 1). "But I don't *know* such resistance from experience" I say to Giroux's text. "Freire's work has been appropriated in ways that denude it of some of its more important political insights [in ways that] reimpose the discourse and practice of colonial hegemony" Giroux continues. I plead, squirming: "but I can only be me, and my own work is more about accepting and letting go… not resistance."

[160] Just as in my life I have sought enterprising work, having been self employed for the past 15 years, I recognise that I hold a fundamental belief that such a choice can offer an opportunity for emancipation and developmental growth beyond stereotypical ideas of "thrusting, money-grabbing wheeler-dealer entrepreneurship". As such, my ILO work is essentially about creating spaces where others (in their own ways) might also consider this a viable and generative life choice.

I realise the extent to which, at some level, I hold that emancipatory ideal in my heart. I wonder what Freire would have had to say about this: if the brassworkers are held in place in Moradabad through a complex and centuries old structure, what or who is it that they have to resist? Even with a detailed understanding of the injustice of the whole supply chain what are these thousands of people meant to do in a one industry town? The whole supply chain would need to change in order to dissolve its structure. I remember opening a conversation about this in the ILO's New Delhi offices in an attempt to place the project I was working on in a wider context and knowing its affects would be limited (though potentially still worthwhile). Given the disproportionate strength of buyer/retailers such as IKEA or Habitat, how could the structure be influenced to evolve without their participation? Let alone that of the consumers[161].

I went on, feeling that I "should" (and was being encouraged to) look into post-colonialism for this work (delving into Said (2003), Mir and Mir (2001) and Loomba (1998), for example), and was encouraged to do this for my PhD inquiries. Together with my colleague and supervisor, Judi Marshall, I co-facilitated two sessions on post-colonialism for MSc groups at the University of Bath. All the time I was thinking that somehow this wasn't putting its finger on the button like that phrase of bell hooks' does. Post-colonialism still seemed deficiency-based, rather than possibility-based and I was drawn to critical views on *participation-as-an-antidote-to-post-colonialism*, such as academic economic geographer Giles Mohan's "Beyond Participation" in "Participation: The New Tyranny" (Mohan, in Cooke and Kothari, 2001: 153-67)[162].

Next, in Spring 2005, by chance I found out that Steven Lukes, who had originated a useful theory on power that we often use with the MSc group at Bath (Lukes 1974), had written a new edition of his 1974 book "Power: A Radical View". The new edition (Lukes 2005) applied his theory in ways which complexify power adding in more contingent subtlety. I found this new analysis helpful in making much more detailed and systemic sense particularly of my work in Moradabad.

Finally, on a long train journey from Cheltenham to Edinburgh in November 2005, I stumbled on a chapter in "The Post-Development Reader" which reflected back to me very clearly the complexities and aspirations I'd been experiencing in this work. One

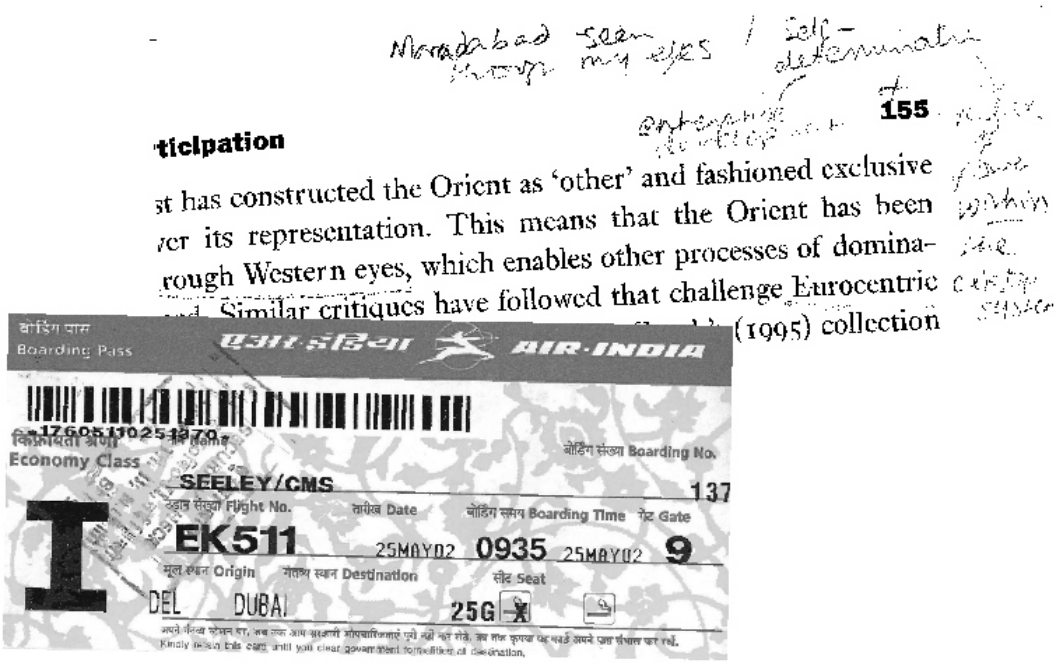
[161] An invited guest speaker on the MSc at Bath told me a story which relates to this. I later emailed her to ask for some more details and she replied: "it is not my own story, it the story of that Sandra Ramos the director of the women's organisation MEC (Maria Elena Cuadra) in Managua, Nicaragua. They were running a pilot workshop on economic literacy with women talking about the World Trade Organisation, the World Bank etc... and some of the women [garment workers] starting crying [when they saw they were right at the bottom of the chain]. The organisation stopped the workshop in order to re-examine the methodology they were using, called 'the Pared', it has been developed by a Canadian researcher, Suzanne Doerge. It is called something like 'Transforming the Economy from Women's everyday lives so it moves from everyday life of women to the big picture." The guest speaker then went on to say that this issue was unresolved for her and that she wanted to develop some research into the practicalities and responsibilities of such conscientisation work.

[162] Remember here the story in the chapter *Uncharted Territory* about the very experienced Sri Lankan social anthropologist who said that villagers see development people coming and play the participation game because they're polite…

of the book's editors, an Iranian former ambassador and UN commissioner (who was also inspired by Freire), Majid Rahnema, wrote an especially useful final chapter "Towards Post-Development: searching for signposts, a new language and new paradigms" (Rahnema, in Rahnema and Bawtree 1997: 377-403). This also led to reading around the positive, capabilities-based work of Nussbaum (2001) and Rahman (2001).

I notice that many of the theorists and writers I have been most inspired by are from under-consuming countries, or are "lowers" in over-consuming countries by some difference or another… and I notice that my assumption is that (given that they have published) they are members of the élite of the groups to which they belong. Giroux says that: "it is important to highlight intellectual work as being forged in the intersection of contingency and history arising not from the 'exclusive hunting grounds of an élite [but] from all points of the social fabric'" (Giroux, 1992).

Giles Mohan's critical paper "Beyond Participation" (Mohan 2001) reflects the multidimensional complexity I feel when I reflect on my work as a financially relatively rich white woman in financially poor countries, in a way that the iconic work of writers like Chambers and Freire does not (Freire 1970; Chambers 1997). As I already mentioned, both Chambers and Freire serve as a source of high level inspiration and aspiration, and Mohan takes the mundane consequences of the work, dealing with more of the mess, paradox and ambiguity of felt realities from the perspective of a relative upper. I first read Mohan's paper while waiting for a flight from Delhi to Dubai in May 2002 and soon the margins began to fill with my tiny pencil scribbles.



In trying to make sense Mohan's dense set of "concepts derived from postcolonial studies" (Mohan 2001: 152), I note that he says "almost anything can be considered 'postcolonial'" (Mohan 2001: 154). Similarly, Mir et al say that "postcolonial theory, like all theories which have the word 'post' prefixed to them, is amorphous and defies neat explanation" (Mir, Mir et al. 2001). The mushy eclecticism of these views is reflected both in the literature I have encountered and my experiences as I engage in this work[163].

At this point, I understand postcolonial theory as a broad, shifting way of considering the world rather than a single fixed lens or viewpoint. Within this, however, Mir et al say that postcolonial activism may take a position of "strategic essentialism", consciously choosing "definite subject positions as an attempt to confront the ethnocentricity embedded in various discourses" (Mir, Mir et al. 2001)[164]. So, it seems that from within the mess, I can choose from various lenses to look through for ethnocentric assumptions, just as I have done already when considering playfulness and fun. Additionally, in spite of the mess, I have my project contracts and deliverables from the ILO, which require me to carve out clear deliverables. Together, the messiness and my contractural responsibilities interact to form a kind of conviction or resolve for each individual piece of work interlaced at the same time with a longer term questioning of the broader field of activity.

Mohan sees postcolonialism as both a *condition* - "ontologically, a given community can be considered postcolonial" and/or as a *critique* – "postcolonial criticism attacks epistemologies that have privileged Western ways of knowing" (Mohan 2001: 154). The countries I am considering here – Ghana, India and Sri Lanka - are postcolonial by *condition* (although this categorisation is in itself defined from a Western perspective, which is also problematic, as are my necessarily Eurocentric accounts, even if I am attempting to come to know in ways that value non-dominant experiential and presentational ways of knowing). However, it is being informed by the issue of post-colonial *critique* that initially seems most relevant for making sense of the projects I have been working on.

"Post-development" builds on this to encompass the practical consequences of the ideas of post-colonial critique. Majid Rahnema traces its emergence from the post-colonial like this: "The disintegration of the colonial empires brought about a strange and incongruous convergence of aspirations. The leaders of the independence movements were eager to transform their devastated countries into modern nation-states[165], while the 'masses', who had often paid for their victories with their blood, were hoping to liberate themselves from both the old and the new forms of subjugation. As to the former colonial masters, they were seeking a new system of

[163] And, again, was reflected in the so-so feedback I (and Judi) received following our first workshop session on post-colonialism with one of the MSc groups at the University of Bath.
[164] The idea of "standpoint epistemology" also addresses this issue (Denzin, 1997: 53-89).
[165] The leaders of "oppressed" turning into the image of the "oppressor"?

domination, in the hope that it would allow them to maintain their presence in the ex-colonies, in order to continue to exploit their natural resources, as well as to use them as markets for their expanding economies or as bases for their geographical ambitions[166]. The myth of development emerged as an ideal construct to meet the hope of the three categories of actors[167]… For quite a long time, this temporary meeting of otherwise highly divergent interests gave the development discourse a charismatic power of attraction… Development, even more than schooling, was then such a sacred cow that it appeared totally irresponsible to question its relevance… students trying to see the 'other side of the moon' had difficulty hearing the voices of the great losers [in development] and their friends… the first appearance of the word 'Post-Development' [made it necessary to] take into account the practices and thoughts that were actually shaping the period following the demise of the development ideology" (Rahnema, 1997: x-xi)

From this post-development perspective, Rahnema goes on to say: "there is no point in mobilizing spectacular relief operations for the passengers on the development train. That can only postpone the day of reckoning. If the train continues on the same old tracks, it will result in a disaster that would be beyond the help of such relief operations" (Rahnema, 1997: 383).

I notice my ambivalence toward this statement. At once, I feel pleased that the work I am doing is not basic relief work (this is not up my street) and I am appalled at the thought of wealthy counties turning away from offering basic assistance. I am also sceptical of the efficacy of "non-basic" interventions, such as my own ILO work, which can feel like tinkering or interference.

I see three key practical themes (related to post-colonialism as *critique* and post-development deriving from Mohan's and Rahnema's overviews) that have a direct bearing on my understanding of my development work:

- First, post-development and post-colonialism are concerned with issues relating to concepts of **power** as the ability of one party to dominate or enable the flourishing of another;
- Second, from a development perspective, post-development and post-colonialism are concerned with **questioning the origination, assumptions and nature of interventions** from the dominant West and of what is understood to be good, desirable and "true";
- Third, post-development and post-colonialism are concerned with **seeking alternatives to this pattern of domination and subordination** through different (participative) processes, behaviours and systemic thinking.

[166] The "oppressor" acting as, er, the "oppressor"?
[167] Although the extent to which "development" was ever structure to "liberate" the "masses" is somewhat debatable.

Post-development and concepts of power

"The myth of power is, of course, a very powerful myth and probably most people in the world more or less believe in it. It is a myth which, if everyone believes in it, becomes to that extent self-validating. But it is still epistemological lunacy and leads inevitably to various sorts of disaster."
Gregory Bateson (2000: 494)

I wish to pay particular attention to the issues of power as a post-colonial and post-developmental concern. Power is clearly meaningful here, along with the nature and legitimacy of interventions (by rich "uppers" in the systems of poor "lowers" (Chambers 1997) to influence, change systems and evaluate that influence or impact. To help deepen my background understanding of the theories behind power, I offered workshop sessions exploring the literature on two occasions with MSc groups at the University of Bath (particularly: Lukes 1974, 2005, Hardy 1994, Hardy and Clegg 1996, Hillman 1995, Warren 1994 and Starhawk 1982). Looking at power in the working contexts of my ILO projects raises two key questions for me:

1. How do I (and what gives me the mandate to) work in these contexts to influence and change systems (when I as a Westerner are implicated in and informed by the very systems I seek to change)?
2. How are powers used, by myself and others, in the service of influencing systems, either to keep them the same or influence them towards a different, and more appropriate postcolonial future (and whose vision of a future might that be)?

I want to supplement these questions with those arising from a CARPP PhD supervision session in May 2002. Here, I worked with my PhD colleagues to identify inquiry questions prior to my first trip to India. I was still recovering from my Achilles break at that time, and the following day I injured my foot again just before catching my flight to Dubai, then Delhi, rendering the trip radically different from my expectations (I was grounded to my hotel room most of the time, leg up on a cushion, with my only exploratory activity being finding clinics for slightly frightening treatment[168]). This fresh wound panicked me as I packed my bags thoughtlessly and left my CARPP notes and questions behind in England. In arrival in India, my inquiry rapidly reduced down to merely keeping infection at bay and keeping myself as separate as possible[169].

[168] Highly skilled Sikh doctor to me: "this will hurt. You're in the tropics now, this is how we do things here. I think you've damaged the tendon on the top of your foot." Me to highly skilled Sikh doctor: "Yes. I know all about tendon damage." Highly skilled Sikh doctor pushes hydrogen peroxide-soaked cotton wool ball exquisitely into my open wound. I gaze at his shiny chrome medical instruments. This must be doing me good.
[169] Aptly, on that visit to India, I was reading Ursula Le Guin's "The Left Hand of Darkness" which chronicles the experiences of *Genly Ai*, an alien observer representing an alliance of planets, the *Ekumen*, visiting a conservative, tradition-bound alien planet which is not yet part of that alliance. *Ai* attempts to explain the reasons for his presence and invitation to join the alliance (for *Ekumen*, think *ILO*)... "Trade, however, is worthwhile. In ideas and techniques, communicated by [long distance radio]; in goods and artefacts, sent by manned or unmanned ships. Ambassadors, scholars, and merchants, some of them might come here; some of yours might go offworld. The

These questions were left unattended on that trip, but they are still relevant now, to show how for years I have orbited the same questions, worded in different forms at different times.

To learn which questions are unanswerable,
and *not to answer them*:
this skill is most needful in times of stress and darkness

Ursula LeGuin (1969: 132)

1. How can I be (in strange contexts) in a way that nurtures me and the wider world?
2. How do I extend my relationship in community more?
3. What are the values these people hold around this industry?
4. Who might be my key interpreters and allies and how might I identify them?
5. What was the most powerful part of my trip?

Power-over

Conventional concepts of power relate to the power of domination, subordination, control and agenda setting. This is the *power-over* that:

- "Serves to maintain, perpetuate, and justify domination and subordination by the coercive use or threat of force, imposition of harms and sanctions, expression of disapproval or displeasure, or restriction of liberties of the Downs by the Ups" (Warren 1994);
- Is conceptualized in rhetorical theory as the rhetor's ability to dominate – to have the rhetor's beliefs prevail and to secure the adherence of audience members to the rhetor's point of view (Starhawk, *date unknown*);
- Is held in the first and second dimensions of power: the *one-dimensional view* that focuses on "behaviour in the making of decisions on issues over which there is an observable conflict of (subjective) interests, seen as express policy preferences, revealed by political participation," and the *two-dimensional view* that additionally "allows for consideration of the ways in which decisions are prevented from being taken on potential issues over which there is an observable conflict of (subjective) interests, seen as embodied in express policy preferences and sub-political grievances" - the key concept here being controlling the agenda, so that contentious issues are not discussed (Lukes 1974, Hardy and Clegg 1996).
- From the perspective of my work, it is the power that comes with ILO funding, evaluation and decisions about what projects are going to be resourced and how they

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Ekumen is not a kingdom, but a co-ordinator, a clearing-house for trade and knowledge; without it communication between the worlds of men would be haphazard, and trade very risky, as you can see" (LeGuin 1969: 36).

are going to be directed, and it is **the unearned privilege that accompanies me as a white, educated, relatively wealthy, articulate-in-English European/Westerner**.

Mohan also writes in terms of "problematic power relationships at the local level" (Mohan 2001: 153). I have witnessed this in the traditional, hierarchical closed system of Moradabad where **local wealth and decision-making power is highly concentrated in the hands of a small élite of workshop owners and exporters,** whilst household artisans work for subsistence level wages. I sought to design the social marketing intervention in such as way that it provides opportunities for the artisans at the bottom of this centuries' old hierarchy to take some decision making power for themselves (in choosing to invest in their own safety and health equipment) and thereby stand a chance of disturbing the system by their actions. As such, I was seeking "to alter the power relationships in favour of the marginalised level" (Mohan 2001: 158) within a very traditional and closed system that left household artisan workers doubly marginalised – both by the global system and by their own local hierarchy.

Rahnema says that: "[development] projects have also served to subject them to a new breed of bureaucrats and people alien to the community" (Rahnema, 1997: 384).

That's me. Alien to the community. Genly Ai in Ursula LeGuin's The Left Hand of Darkness. Moradabad. An outside observer. A border crosser. Giroux says "Becoming a border crosser engaged in a productive dialogue with others means producing a space in which those dominant social relations, ideologies, and practices that erase the specificity of voice of the other must be challenged and overcome" (Giroux, 1992). Border crossers are communicators. In Antonio Gumucio-Dagron's ILO publication[170] *"The New Communicator" (Gumucio-Dagron, 2001), he says: "a new communicator is usually someone who owes at least 50% of his or her qualification to a wide range of experiences that have little to do with his or her own academic background. What actually makes the 'new communicator' is this mixture of experience in development, a special sensibility to work with communities, and the knowledge of communication tools and technologies. A new communicator has to balance a very practical approach to social reality, with the capacity to elaborate and conceptualize strategies… [it] is in the process of communication and participation that social change starts to happen."*

In Ghana, India and Sri Lanka I have been faced with "questions about the **[power] relationship between the 'expert' and 'non-expert'"** on a daily basis (Mohan 2001: 158). This was particularly pertinent to my working relationships with the local ILO manager in Moradabad, who simultaneously sought and refused my marketing advocacy, claiming his own ignorance on the subject on the one hand ("You tell me,

[170] That this is an ILO publication affirms my suspicion that there are unconnected and hidden islands of interesting ideas, behaviour and activity dotted around that organisation.

Chris, you're the expert") and then dismissing my suggestions ("That would never work here"). In the end, I tried to open up an inquiring conversation on any subject with this manager, in the hope that, once we had entered an inquiring space, I could bring the subject back round again to the campaign whilst keeping an inquiring stance. He was interested in how relationships and, particularly, divorce, are conducted in the United Kingdom. He seemed genuinely interested, but the tactic didn't work and I was soon back in the expert category as we shifted back to conversations about the task at hand.

I experienced similar issues in Ghana, working with market researchers. In the time I had available, I could not quickly discern which, if any, of the three researchers I was working with really knew their stuff and had substantial experience with both conventional (qualitative and quantitative) and less conventional (inquiring) forms of research. I went in on the assumption that they all knew their stuff and later found that only one of the three was really engaged with his work. This left me uncomfortably holding both legitimate (more experienced in the techniques we were working with) and unearned (privileged white, European "expert") authority. I wanted to slip into invisibility, as if I had nothing to offer, for fear of abusing the power I had in this context. Mohan says "'we' behave as if we do not have anything to offer. [This] populist line treats all knowledge from 'the West' as tainted" and I have felt my self collapsing into this state to avoid its more overtly tyrannical opposite, "the familiar character of the Westerner as the enlightened and omnipotent saviour" (Mohan 2001: 162). What I hadn't done in the early stages of this work was find "a place for [my] own guilt-free analysis" (Mohan 2001: 164).

When writing about Michel Foucault on power, Lukes reminds us that "…'power is ubiquitous and there can be no personalities that are formed independently of its effects'. If Foucault is right, then we must abandon 'the emancipatory ideal of a society in which individuals are free from the negative effects of power'" (Lukes, 2005: 92). This and Mohan's "guilt-free analysis" together suggest the need for **thoughtful action with the full awareness that unintended negative consequences will inevitably emerge from that action.** On a gentler note, Lukes also points out that: "There is really no reason for supposing that the powerful always threaten, rather then sometimes advance, the interests of others; sometimes, indeed, the use of power can benefit all, albeit unequally." (Lukes, 2005: 83),

Power-with

This point relates to the potentially liberating powers of working "the hyphen between dualisms because it is within these intersubjective [liminal] worlds that meaning, knowledge and political action emerge" (Fine, in Lukes, 2005: 164). These are the powers and sites of Freire's pedagogies of the oppressed and of freedom, "the

restorers of the humanity of both [the oppressed and the oppressors]" (Freire 1970; Freire 2001: 26), of hooks' "locations of radical openness and possibility" (hooks, 1990) - the *power-with* that:

- "shares or maintains coalitionary, solidarity, or other relatively equalizing power relations with others; it is the sort of "coalition building' power or 'solidarity' power people share with others" (Warren 1994);
- is an interpersonal power rooted in creative ideas that others find valuable (Starhawk, 199X, *exact date unknown*);
- works against "the many ways on which potential issues are kept out of politics, whether through the operation of social forces and institutional practices or through individual's decisions" (Lukes 1974).

Here, with the intention of creating a more participatory, democratic relationship between the West and postcolonial countries, Mohan advocates practices that are "consensual and harmonious", that "improvise in a spirit of play", include "dance, song and story-telling", include the "interaction of the 'western' and the 'indigenous'" and centre "upon the valorization of local, non-western knowledge". He suggests that "the researcher him/herself must become an object of research" and "work the hyphen" between "intersubjective worlds" (the overlap points where the individual subjectivity of different systemic players meet).

At best, I have felt the spirit of these injunctions threading through my work, particularly in Ghana and Sri Lanka, alongside my darker experiences of loneliness and depletion. This is the power that allows me to believe that I am an embodied intervention, that my presence alone has a value as information in the system. This is the power that legitimises the respect I felt for the traditions of brass making as I designed interventions that did not require artisans to change their physical working practices in Moradabad. The is the concept of power that encourages me to place value on my role as a relationship builder and trust broker and sees the importance of my attempts to socialise, go dancing, take my drivers for lunch and ask after colleagues' families.

It is this idea of *power-with* that has led me to design increasingly participative and uncontrollable interventions for my social marketing work, inviting "recipients of the ILO message" to transform into "participants in the ongoing discussion"…. And elsewhere, with my clients, working harder to manage the expectations and risk that such an invitation might be refused.

Taking the particular ideas of power-over and power-with on board, I will now offer a more detailed discussion and reflection on the implications of how power plays out in this work, with particular, but not exclusive to reference my work in India and to Steven Lukes' "Power: A Radical View" (Lukes 1974, 2005).

The major cognitive revolution of our time is about power

Joanna Macy (5 May 2005, Hawkwood College, Stroud)

**In daily life, and in scholarly works,
we discuss [power's] location and its extent,
who has more and who has less, how to gain, resist,
seize, harness, secure, tame, share, spread, distribute,
equalize or maximize it, how to render it more effective
and how to limit or avoid its effects**

Steven Lukes (2005: 61)

Lukes links power with responsibility. He says: "an excuse for failing to prevent lamentable events sometimes (but not always) consists in showing that you could not have prevented them… The powerful are those whom we judge or can hold to be responsible for significant outcomes…" (Lukes, 2005: 66). This fits with Rahman's description of the creative imperative in development where the "ability-to-respond" through collective and individual creativity is considered to empower people.

Rahman (2001) describes the distinction between "capability-based development" (increasing "the set of life-styles one has a choice of, greater capability meaning greater freedom to choose between different life-styles"). and "creativist development" (the "liberation of people's creative energy"). Similarly, Lukes writes about a "context-bound" ability: "you are powerful if you can produce the appropriate outcomes only if the present circumstances enable you to do so" and a "context-transcending" ability where "you can do it in a range of circumstances" (Lukes, 2005: 75). I believe that fostering-nurturing-nourishing this ability to transcend contexts links together and lies at the heart of my work with the ILO, with the global élite and in my own explorations of the clown archetype as a contingent response to the state of the world[171].

The health and safety work in Ghana intended to offer greater *context-bound* abilities – more careful consideration of safety and health issues in a relatively free spirited,

[171] Now there's a grand statement.

not-too-corrupt entrepreneurial domestic business context. The ILO client team, including me, deliberately chose Ghana as an "easy" receiving context for this experimental work. By contrast, the work in Moradabad, I believe, implicitly sought to transcend the feudal, injust, global brasswork sector, which divided the haves from the have-nots at every level of working relationship – from homeworkers to workshop owners to exporters to international buyers. In Moradabad, safety and health interventions such as making the chimney hood available, sought not only to improve matters in a *context-bound* way (carry on with business as usual and improve your capability to be slightly healthier while you do it) but to stimulate *context-transcending*[172], creative and slightly subversive activities (through acquiring the chimney hood for yourself, from a local supplier, you are taking a step outside of the highly controlled piecework world of the back streets of Moradabad where you are at the bottom of the pile and towards greater self-responsibility without reference to those who have such control over your life).

Thinking some more about Moradabad in particular, I see the huge need for structural changes towards, perhaps, workers cooperatives, and a structure that works towards a less gross disparities between the haves and the have-nots in the supply chain. While I was there, the head of the regional ILO office in New Delhi and I speculated over lunch about what a "fair-trade" version of Moradabad's brassware industry might look like. It felt idealistic and in any case I did not feel in a position to change the specification of my work ("social marketing for safety and health issues"). This raises several issues:

- **What stopped me from widening the dialogue more extensively around the Moradabad work from single issue (*context-bound*) to multi-issue (*context transcending*)?**
  Fear of raising, and then not being able to meet expectations, fear of overwhelming myself with too much work, fear of not delivering on what was expected of me in the time I had available, reluctance to spread myself too thinly (doing "extra" on this project would have sapped my resources for other work)… Fear that opening the multi-issue conversational space would lead to overwhelming (and maybe self-imposed) requirements for action… Fear of the obligations and implications that might accompany with raising such issues.

- **Was the work we were doing a basic foundational component of better working practices (improving job quality, as ILO put it)?**
  In which case, was I let off the context-transcending hook?

- **How do I know if I am (just) imposing Western industrial norms (neo-colonialism) or whether the issues I had been contracted to prioritise were**

[172] In Moradabad, was I looking to transcend the feudal context towards a neo-colonial agenda, or seeking to transcend both towards something else?

context transcending (ie: safety and health issues transcend neo-colonial concerns)?

- **Was I then failing to take responsibility?**
  Was I using a kind of power of omission, having thoughts and not expressing them? Was I stifling or limiting my own ability to respond because it was easier not to? Or was I sensibly responding in a way that acknowledged the resources available to me at the time (was I context-bound by my resources)? Was I right in assuming that ILO wanted me to work in a context-bound way? Was I anticipating unintended consequences from opening up the discussion widely (such as dissatisfaction or unmeetable expectations) and choosing not to act (wisely or in a cowardly way)?

  Lukes says that "most of our actions bring in their wake innumerable chains of unintended consequences" (Lukes, 2005: 76). Was my failure to act, or lack of resources to act, my "negative act" (Lukes, 2005: 77) an inaction with paradoxically enabled generative change?

  Or perhaps the way(s) in which I did act (for example the lunchtime discussion with the head of the regional ILO office) have their intended consequence, and how might I ever find out?

  I can very easily see what's happening in Moradabad now – especially now [the Danish woman] has moved to new Delhi, but tracing any influence back to me would seem false, especially given that, as far as I am aware, the social marketing plans I'd been sent to formulate were never acted on.

  So I have the memories of conversations that might have contributed to the sum of influence around structural change and empowerment / emancipation in Moradabad. Remember that Anusha said to me that just my presence there was an influence, just that someone came and listened counts for something…

- **Do I pay enough attention to my intentions to widen the conversational space within the ILO?** And if I did, would I see signs of my influence, especially with regards to the potential work in Sri Lanka, where, after 4 years' of work with the ILO, I am now noticing that wider, deeper issues (maybe intractable issues) such as cultural packages, neo-colonialism and inquiry are now becoming conversational currency? *Can the changing conversation be an action in itself?*

- **I could build up and tell any story I liked here… and perhaps they're all true.** On a day-to-day basis, I tell myself the story that leaves me feeling best (how selfish is that?). My story goes like this:

  I was sensorially, physically and mentally overwhelmed in Moradabad.

I didn't like trying to explain to the people I met just how little I could do ("Yes, going to a trade show in Birmingham would be a great idea. But I don't have access to funding for that. I'm sorry").

I was really heartened by Arurit having got rid of the skin infection on this chest. That made the work feel worthwhile.

I was confused to see Arurit's open, unfurrowed face and brow, and how different that looked from my own frowning anxiety in the mirror. What did Arurit see when he saw me?

I was frustrated that I couldn't pin any specific thing down that we could resist or mobilise against…

I did my best to produce a plan for the social marketing that was as participatory as possible, including getting brassworkers to film, photograph and interview each other for posters and a cinema presentation. All of this needed an active enthusiastic lead to make it work after I'd left from my two one-week sessions there.

I was annoyed at the local ILO manager in Moradabad, who seemed to me to be lazy or unwilling to make this happen. He didn't implement the plan we put together ourselves. He kept looking at his share movements on the internet.

I was annoyed at the ILO for spending all that money on my airfares and day rates (each airfare was a years' wages in Moradabad) and then not following through on the work. Some years later, I found out that some of the plan had been implemented, after all, but nobody had thought to tell me.

Where I could sense the wider global supply chain (from Habitat and IKEA to the back streets of Moradabad) I became confused and, again, annoyed at the injustice of the whole set-up. I was annoyed at reports that buyers from these Western consumerist businesses did not visit Moradabad to see the working conditions for themselves.

I was confused about the child-labour in Moradabad. I'd been advised not to mention it as this could have reduced the ILO's mandate to act for change in the town at all. When I saw young children helping their dads at work, it reminded me of being in the garage with offcuts of wood and my own Dad. Only the wood in my Dad's garage didn't give off poisonous vapours like recycled molten brass did.

I was dismayed that the centuries-old craft tradition of brassworking in Moradabad had been reduced to producing tat for cheap consumer markets.

Given the internal and external resources available to me, I acted in what I thought were the best interests of the people I met in Moradabad, although I have no evidence that my actions were any more then superficial.

Finally, Lukes links human interests with the pursuit of well-being – of "leading a worthwhile life" (Lukes, 2005: 82). My thought here is that a more Westernized, industrialised life may superficially appear to contribute towards greater well-being, but this (as Norberg-Hodge (1992) points out in her book "Ancient Futures: Learning from Ladakh") comes with a bundle of the more hidden "mental bonds" (Lukes, 2005: 86) of anxieties, rushes, stresses, controlling behaviours, insecurities and hyperindividualism which, in my opinion manifestly fail to contribute towards well-being. Following on from this, I'd suggest that western industrialised neo-colonial domination works, at least in part against the interests of "the dominated" (including me – hence my feeling of yearning for something else) and, conversely as Lukes points out "such power and dependency (which is the state of being subject to it) may sometimes favour, or at least not disfavour, the interests of those who are subject to it" (Lukes, 2005: 84). So, my western life enables me to travel and learn in diverse ways whilst also ensuring that I remain dependent on cycles of consumerism and dissatisfaction which ultimately stand to destroy the very ecological and social diversity I enjoy.

This collection of points offers an indication of the mental torture I can put myself through with this work, which inevitably loops back round again to a simpler view:

- **Perhaps we were all just doing our best in an unjust and rigidly (self-) controlling, self-limiting and self-regulating industry…**
- **And all of this in the name of a tatty brass cherub candlestick for Christmas…**
- **And all of this in the name of supporting a town of 50000 people who have very limited life choices…**
- **And all this in the name of me earning a few thousand pounds…**
- **And all this in the name of me being able to build an experiential bridge between the abstractions of the global élite and the living experiences of the global have-nots…**

It occurs to me that this writing may look like an elaborate post-hoc intellectualisation following previous projects which, in themselves were not as inquiring as they could be. I'd like to stake a claim here for a kind of meso-level of inquiry which is mutating over years from project to project, where my initial questions emerged around visibility and invisibility, opening myself and caring for myself, then questions about

the transcendence of human safety and health practices and are now evolving into larger questions where I might have gained enough project experiences to start to examine my emergent beliefs, values, intentions and purposes about the patterns of "development work" at a wider scale.

In Moradabad, I was not in a position to have built sufficiently strong relationships to find out about the ways in which the structure is resisted from the inside out (and maybe gender, culture, religion and language would never allow this). What I saw (or was shown, or was allowed to see by those in power) was a superficial picture of passive, hard-working compliance, resignation more than consent.

What I suspect I couldn't see was the complexity of response to the powerlessness and dependence characterising the brassware industry in India at every level – just as individual brassworkers were subject to the tight control of workshop owners and exporters, the exporters were subject, in competition with China, to the whims of Western buyer/retailers.

Lukes offers an Ethiopian proverb relevant to this: "When the great lord passes, the wise peasant bows deeply and silently farts" (Lukes, 2005: 125). I don't know what the "silent farts of Moradabad", the micro-practices of resistance (gossip, rumours, jokes etc), are. Quoting James Scott (in Lukes, 2005: 127), Lukes writes: "subordinates have a vested interest in avoiding any explicit display of insubordination. They also, of course, always have a practical interest in resistance – in minimising the exactions, labour and humiliations to which they are subject. The reconciliation of these two objectives that seem at cross-purposes is typically achieved by pursuing precisely those forms of resistance that avoid any open confrontation with the structures of authority being resisted. Thus the peasantry, in the interests of safety and success, has historically preferred to disguise its resistance".

"There is a possibility of upward mobility[173] or escape from low status" (Lukes, 2005: 129) in Moradabad, moving from being a homeworker to a workshop owner. Suhail was one example – he was making his way within the context, moving one rung up the ladder to control others as well as be controlled himself (he subcontracted piece work as well as casting brassware with his own hands). But this worked as a piece of good fortune within the existing structure, not transcending it. His move, and that of others like him arguably do contribute very little to shaping a wider field of possibility, of finding new forms.

Lukes suggests that: "domination can induce and sustain internal constraints on self-determination – ways on undermining and distorting people's confidence in and sense of self and of misleading and subverting their judgement as to how best to advance their interests" (Lukes, 2005: 122). It seemed to me that the people I met in

[173] This seems to me to be conceptualised from within a Western construct.

Moradabad knew very well how best to advance their interests in a context-bound way. Put me in that situation and, with all my fancy western education, I wouldn't last five minutes before I was plotting and planning my way out of the "system", rather than optimising my performance within the "system."

These reflections feel like they are going round in tangled circles[174] with no obvious or clear point for intervention (perhaps this is why I like to think of dissolving, rather than poking or dismantling… it is more subtle). This is an accurate mirror of how this ILO work actually feels to do. Lukes says "that the plausible answers to the question of how to interpret domination do not boil down to a single answer" (Lukes, 2005: 123), and that these plausible answers circle around two issues – external coercions (which I relate to context-bound ability-building interventions, structurally disabling such coercive action) and internal constraints (which I relate to context-transcending ability-building interventions, a creativity approach to development, which carries with it the possibility of widening self-perception and allowing internal constraints to fall away).

School windows, Moradabad, May 2002

[174] "At some fundamental level, we are all prisoners in [power's] web" (Hardy, 1994: 232)

Questioning the origination, assumptions and nature of interventions from the dominant West

In considering this issue, Mohan (2001) indicates bottom up meets top down as "'externally' imposed knowledge and policies" that are "seen only through Western eyes" and conceived through "Eurocentric thought" in "pre-determined interventions set by the development agency" meet with the imperative to be "building on what exists within the community". This has certainly been true of my interventions, where funding is offered in the expectation of pre-determined outcomes (the processes for this determination being opaque to me), and evaluation back to funders becomes the mediating element between the top down and bottom up approaches.

Rahnema calls for change: "that would leave [people] free to *change the rules and the contents of change*, according to their own culturally defined ethics and aspirations" (Rahnema 1997: 384).

This means financially poor people in financially poor countries being trusted to do as they see fit with the money by the wealthy people donating that money on behalf of governments and organisations. Yet, stories abound of project funds being corruptly diverted, or microentrepreneurs who gain credit only to blow it on a TV set. I have never met the ultimate donors for the ILO projects I have worked on. I believe they are somewhere in the Dutch and Swedish Governments. I have no real idea about the relationship between what they, the ILO, me and the local communities that we are all serving really want.

Rahnema says: "the development discourse on the inability of the 'underdeveloped' countries to govern themselves is an aberration. Many modern societies still have much to learn from them. This is not to say that they were 'better', or that we should go back to a 'state of nature' – a prospect that would be neither desirable nor feasible. Nevertheless, a deeper and unbiased knowledge of how different cultures have solved their problems and of what they learned to cherish or dislike through the ages would be instructive for all those in search of alternatives to our own dilemma" (Rahnema, 1997: 381).

Mohan says that "global material forces" increasingly control the lives of people around the world, and in order to resist and change this situation, there is an "urgent and pressing" need for "collaborative alternatives" to top-down Eurocentric interventions, advocating the need for "transformative dialogues".

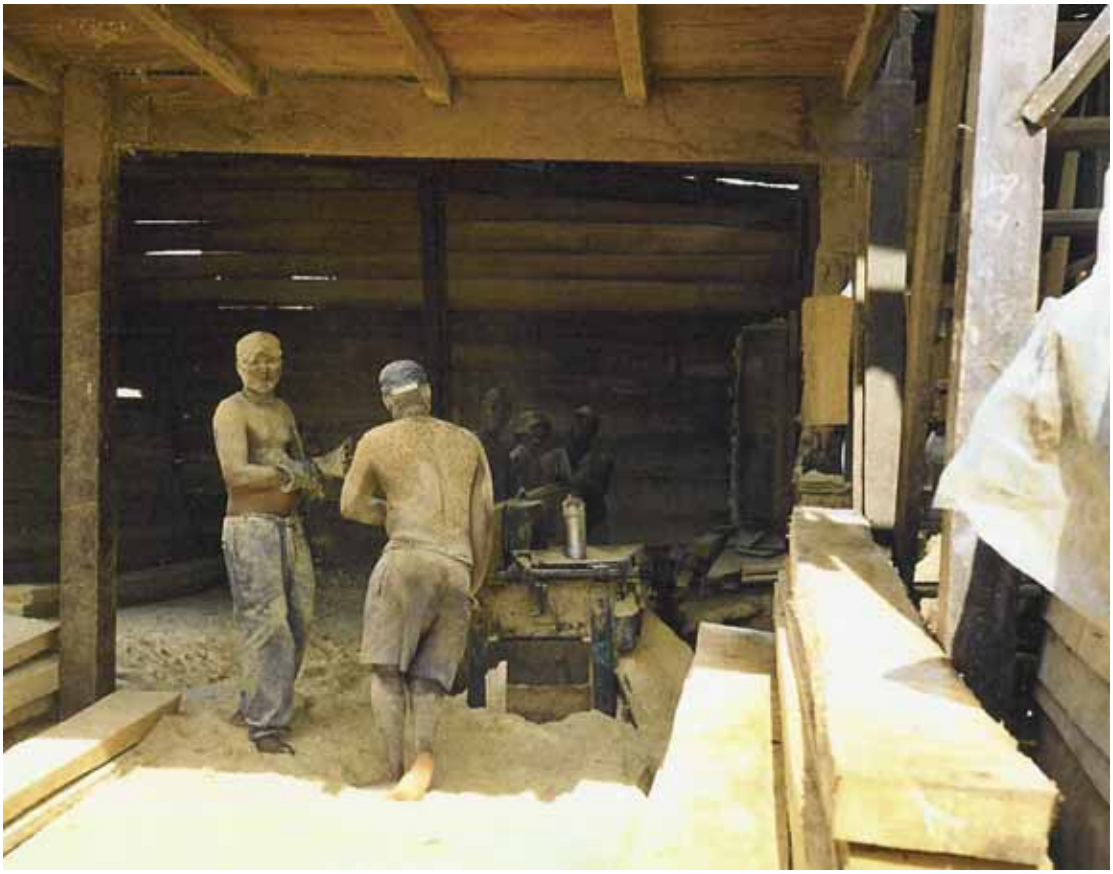
Yet, Martha Nussbaum implies that people in oppressed situations can have a skewed idea of what is best for them. She says that what is needed is: "a critical scrutiny of preference and desire that would reveal the many ways in which habit, fear, low

expectations, and unjust background conditions deform people's choices and even their wishes for their own lives" (Nussbaum, 2000: 114).

What right, then, does the ILO have to set the agenda, intervene and invite people to consider issues like their personal health and safety? In the face of wood- and metal workers removing splinters from their eyes in both Accra and Moradabad, flip-flopped feet in amongst swarf, bare feet standing on scrap metal, welding with no eye protection, loud metal bashing with no ear protection and dust and fumes that made me cough in seconds but are everyday working conditions for many, I feel ambivalent about asking the questions, "is health and safety transcendent?", "are the ILO labour standards inherently Eurolimited?" and "whose problem is it anyway?".

Is anything transcendent? What about when it comes to health and safety? What about when it comes to ideas of what human flourishing means? Can I ever speak from being a human creature, and not just as a Western mind? Can there be a Universal Declaration of Human Rights? **Can my way of knowing about something ever be legitimately "better" than yours?** Gregory Bateson has something to say around this issue which triggered a line of thought for me. Bateson questions: "Is there then such a subject of inquiry as Epistemology, with a capital *E*? Or is it all a matter of local or even personal epistemologies, any one of which is as good, as *right*, as any other?" (Bateson, 1988: 22). This is how my line of thought developed:

If epistemological error is possible… as Bateson suggests…
…then, "my epistemology's better than yours" also becomes possible.
But uncomfortable.
"My epistemology's better than yours (maybe for me and my context, but not necessarily for you and your context)".
Neutralises the statement, but erodes the possibility for agency (and induces paralysis).
My epistemology's better than yours (just for the health and safety of your eyes).
Feels better, and brings the possibility for agency and choice back in.
But my epistemology may not be better than yours for a whole range of other issues in ways which I cannot predict. So I'd better be careful, and exercise restraint.
Can parts of my epistemology join with your epistemology in your recipe for growth, for your morphology, your blossoming (whatever that means to you)?
Can I offer you a wider range of epistemological ingredients to be able to pick and choose from?
And, while I'm doing that, please can you, by your very presence, reciprocally offer me a wider range of epistemological ingredients (possibilities) for my blossoming as well?
Can we invite each other in true invitation where any response to that invitation is received with humility (and ok-ness)?



Workers ankle-deep in sawdust at the Timber Market, Accra, Ghana

Is it good enough that I am effectively accepting a working assumption (and possible epistemological error) that health and safety is transcendent (enough) and that the norms of the Westernized mindset are more desirable than many others in this particular respect (which, incidentally also leads to undesirable consequences such as maximum security playgrounds, warnings that cups of coffee will be hot and a litigious society)?[175].

I've discussed this on many occasions with my main ILO client. We agree that without taking some stance, it is all too easy to paralyse our own potential for action

[175] I remember going on a barefoot rainforest trek on holiday in Grenada, which included jumping down six waterfalls. Americans on the same trip were amazed: "this just wouldn't be allowed at home". I also notice how common it is for Swiss people of all ages to wear helmets for skiing – currently a rarity amongst English, French and Italian adult skiers. I couldn't imagine intervening in Grenada to make this activity more safe – the hubris! Equally I couldn't imagine how a band of Swiss helmet-wearing skiers might put a project together to educate me and change my attitudes… and yet, here am I trying to do just that with Ghanaians and Indians and Vietnamese and Nepalese.

and change[176]. As a result, I choose to do this work in the (ever provisional) belief that:

- At some level, everyone is concerned about their own health and well-being;
- Levels of awareness, knowledge and safer practice vary from sector to sector and country to country;
- And that increasing levels of awareness for easy to implement changes (such as tidying up and keeping workspaces clean) has minimal degenerative unintended consequences in a system (even though best practice in the area of health and safety at work derives from Eurocentric experience and research).

Rahnema says: "The issue is, therefore, not that development strategies or projects could or should have been better planned or implemented. It is that development, as it imposed itself on its 'target populations', was basically the wrong answer to their true needs and aspirations. It was an ideology that was born in the North, mainly to meet the needs of the dominant powers in search of a more 'appropriate' tool for their economic and geopolitical expansion" (Rahnema 1997: 379).

Lukes also explores the ideal of working to people's best interests. He says that you can identify interests with preferences which may be overt (behaviours that reveal themselves in "actual choice situations" such as voting, or preferences may be covert (taking "the form of half-articulated or unarticulated grievances or aspirations which, because of the bias of the dominant political agenda or the prevailing culture, are not heard and may not even be voiced" (Lukes, 2005: 81) – for example, in Moradabad, the desire for an uninterrupted supply of electricity was not heard as part of my work there in a way that could be acted on.

Lukes goes on to cite "human welfare" as another way of conceiving interests: "what individuals generally need in order to live lives that are satisfactory". Here, he cites Sen and Nussbaum's philosophies about a capabilities approach (as well as mentioning that there are various accounts of what constitutes basic human needs, presumably including the work of Chilean economist Manfred Max-Neef (Max-Neef, 1991) and writes that "these are all various ways of specifying conditions that enable people to pursue their various purposes and conceptions of what makes life valuable" (Lukes, 2005: 81). He questions "Which of these welfare interests can be treated as universal human interests and neutral between ways of life, and which are internal to particular regions of culture?" (Lukes, 2005: 82, also see Nussbaum, 2000).

In a triple regress of quotations, Lukes: quoting Benton in Scott, (Lukes, 2005: 147) problematises the issue further when he says: "the judgement as to which class of

[176] Although I maintain that doing nothing (non-action, not interfering) *is* a viable choice. "Can we be sure that we help anyone, including ourselves? Is there such a phenomenon as the helping process?... Is this relief help or hindrance?" (Brandon, 1976: 25, 35).

judgements, preferences, choices, etc. do constitute the interests of an actor who is subject to an exercise of power has to be made by an external observer, or analyst on behalf of the actor. The judgement that has to be made is how the actor would feel or behave under conditions which do not now hold, and maybe never have, or ever will hold. No matter how well-intentioned the observer, this is still other-ascription of interests, and not self-ascription". Which seems to go back to say that *anything* I recommend, suggest or invite others to do is an imposition.

I would again add to that with the question regarding safety and health specifically – how context sensitive is, for example, protecting your eyes? Is this objective? Intersubjective? Lukes says that the "status [of such universal human interests] does not derive from their being desired by them; conditions that damage your health are against your interests, in this sense, whatever your preferences, even if you actively seem to promote them". (Lukes, 2005: 82).

I have a glimmer of a thought here about the people my work is serving taking a multigenerational perspective here that might go something like this "if I work hard, albeit in these awful, unhealthy conditions, then I might be able to pay for my children to get a better education and get more choices that I have had in my life". The kinds of changes the ILO wants (and is contributing to) are slow, multigenerational, and yet its evaluation requirements to ensure more funding are short term. I don't think this is a problem if all concerned recognise that evaluation then becomes a bit of a game… but it certainly is a problem when the short term funding-and-evaluation agenda starts to take precedence (as it does) and is considered to be, in some way, "real".

In 2001-2002, I was involved in a piece of evaluation work for a series of chat show radio programmes (called *M'Adwumayi*, which translates from the Ghanaian language Twi as: "my business", "my livelihood") for entrepreneurs in central Ghana. The evaluation work, which was for the ILO, "officially" asked questions about the effectiveness of this form of intervention for change. In the final report (Seeley, Appiah and Murphy, 2002: 1), I dared to write:

"The terms of reference (TOR) identified two key objectives:

- *Develop a fuller understanding of the ways in which the radio programme may be leading to changes in business performance.*
- *Evaluate the extent of the various types of impact on small business performance which the radio programmes may be taking.*

One of the underlying research questions identified in discussions with ILO-SEED was: What type of evidence is acceptable as valid to decision-makers and investors

that M'Adwumayi brings any benefits to individuals in terms of improved business performance?"

The last paragraph stayed in the report (good) but was ignored (not so good). Did the programme receive more funding? Well, according to the Kapital 97.1 FM Kumasi website, it is still running now in 2006 (very good), but I do not know if that is on a funded basis (which would be OK), or is self-funding (which would be better).

Mohan writes about the "imposition of evaluation and monitoring criteria", where "'soft' information has to be made acceptable through pseudo-scientism to hardened decision makers" (Mohan, 2001).

This "hardening-off" of information has characterised the evaluation work I have designed and implemented for my ILO work. On the one hand, I am working "the system" in order to maximise the chances of gaining more funding for projects to continue and on the other, I am colluding with positivist research and information paradigms that demand "proof". I happily dress the participatory paradigm up in words that make it look like the logical extension of conventional research methodologies and adopt funders' terminologies where necessary.

Also, I question myself about the value of trying for more funding for health and safety in Moradabad when artisans there clearly tell me that their number one problem is the unpredictable electricity supply in the town. Mohan says that all too often "structural constraints" are left "relatively untouched", and I find myself wondering how I might combine the necessary diplomacy of ILO's tripartite status (which means I spend up to a third of my time on these projects with employers' associations, local government and trades unions making sure that everyone if happy) with voicing "a more critical view of the State and central-local relations" (Mohan, 1991).

Similarly, I wonder about the places at which I enter the "systems" and conversations of such projects. This may be limited by my perceived status and power in "the system", but it is also self-constrained by the tension I experience between just getting the job done and wanting to question the entire "system" when I have no mandate to do so. Mohan says that "more transformative approaches would also study the global economy", yet, in Moradabad it is clearly not within the remit of my project to question Western retailers such as Ikea and Habitat who take 70% of the financial value of the final sale of the product whilst artisans work for about $1.50 a day.

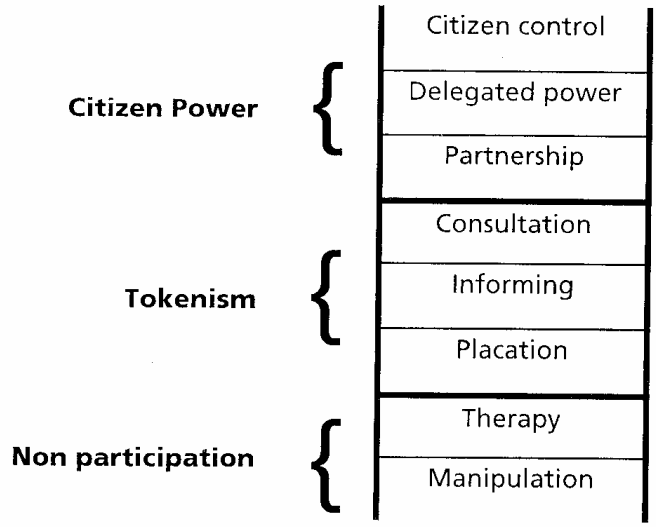
Seeking alternatives to this pattern of domination and subordination

In 2000, I presented a paper at the UK's Market Research Society's Annual Conference on the growing need for participation in market research techniques

(Seeley, 2000). One model I used as the basis of that paper has stayed with me as my ILO work has unfolded over the last five or six years – Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation". I first came across it in the preface of a publication from the New Economics Foundation – "Participation Works!" (1998):

What is participation?

Participation is a buzz-word that means different things to different people. One way of looking at participation is using the 'ladder of participation' first developed by Sherry Arnstein. This is now 20 years old, but is still relevant. It shows the different ways in which the organisation responsible for an activity - for example a local authority - can involve participants - in this case their citizens.

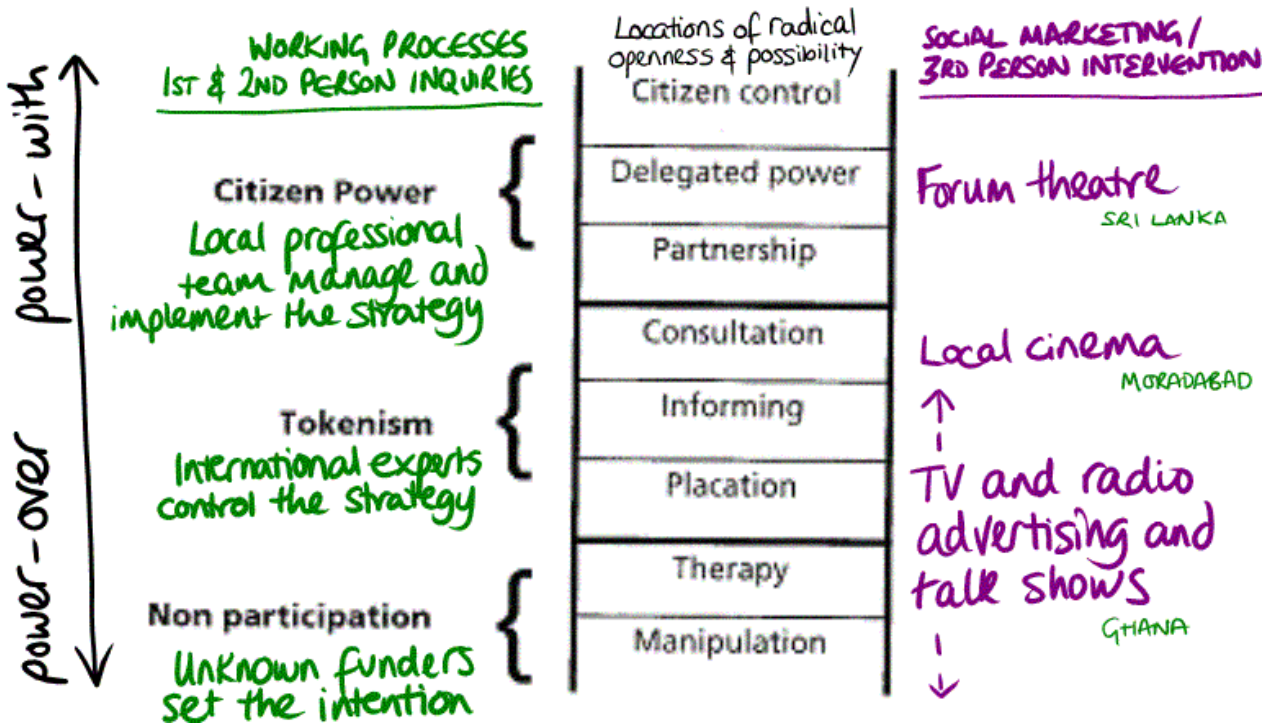


The ladder helps us understand what people mean when they talk about 'participation' or 'involvement'. We hope you will rule out the bottom four rungs! Always ask the question: is it possible to move one step higher on the ladder?

Look at the final question above – is it possible to move one step higher on the ladder? How have I done this with the ILO work I have outlined here? From mass media TV ads through to cinema and forum theatre … the process has been slow, it has meant my ILO clients simultaneously building trust with me whilst loosening their grip on the amount of control they (think they) have over the outcomes of the projects we work on together. For the current work in Sri Lanka, we can not yet tell what the outcomes will be, all we know is that, through these invitational and presentational forms, we are likely to open up *conversational space* (Kemmis, 2001) about being enterprising.

When I look at the ladder more closely, a split emerges between a) the processes and strategies I recommend for the social marketing engagement itself (and this is what I commented on above – there is a clear movement up the ladder from TV advertising through to forum theatre) and b) the ways and behaviours with which I go about my part of the work, which has shifted more slowly up – and down – the rungs (more like that game of snakes and ladders I played with my Public Service Leaders Scheme group, previously mentioned in *Uncharted Territory*). As such, I am working at multiple rungs of the ladder at once in any given project.

What, then, is the role of taking my "proper authority" whilst simultaneously attempting to edge up the rungs of the ladder of participation? If I am framed as an expert, then how do I use that expertise to serve and not dominate? And how can I also recognise that the idea of serving others may well be self-serving in any case. If, as a reader, you're feeling that we are spiralling down a deep hole, then that evokes the darker side of this work. How does an appropriate agency look at the "non-participation", "tokenism" and "citizen power levels"? *Power-over* lives on the bottom rungs of the ladder (and for this development work becomes stronger as it gets closer to money), and *power-with* emerges later on the higher rungs. But am I right to associate power-with with appropriate agency? Is this the same as participation, fairness, equality, radical openness and possibility? Is there more trust at the top than the bottom? Can rural Sri Lankans, or Ghanaian entrepreneurs trust that financially wealthy European governments are making the right decisions about where to invest their money? Can ILO international experts like me trust that local professionals will spend the money wisely (in ways that suits… whose agenda?). Let's look at the diagram again taking all that on board:



In Sri Lanka, I notice that I have used *power-over* in the project design process (me to local video production company: "you will *not* use any 'voice of God' voiceovers – it will be local villagers' own words and voices in this film") in pursuit of a greater sense of *power-with* the villagers that the social marketing campaign ultimately serves (me, hypothetically, to villagers: "please value and hear each others' knowledge from your experience and don't be told what to do or how to act by some official or outsider. What you already know counts for something").

On other occasions, I have failed to raise the right issues, leaving local suppliers getting on with work which has eventually disgruntled others. For example, when Ghanaian health and safety character Kofi Brokeman's TV wife (below) gets angry that he has lost his job because of a health and safety accident[177]. One of the steering committee team became (not quite as) angry at the way the campaign – directed by two Ghanaian women – had depicted women in this forthright and "nagging" way.

How to create something memorable and funny without unintended negative consequences? Is it negative to show an angry woman, anyway? According to whose epistemology and by whose standards? Does a truly participatory process for such a campaign iron out everything creative that could conceivably cause offence, leaving a sanitized, designed-by-committee, dull lowest common denominator of acceptability?

[177] Campaign slogan: "Health and safety at work: good for you, good for your pocket". This campaign was broadcast in three languages, Ga, Twe and Pidgin.

To try and address issues like this, for the Sri Lanka campaign two social anthropologists (one Austrian, the other Sri Lankan) were contracted by the ILO team to differentiate more finely between rural Sri Lankan's ethnicities, religions, age, gender expectations and attitudes.

How much difference does the notional consultation that we have make? And where is it such consultation positioned? I see a kind of dual system whereby participation is built in through developing the team of local professionals (typically from the local elite or aspiring elite and, as in the social anthropologist's work, consultation of the end beneficiaries of the project is sought, and, presumably has some influence over the end result.

With the social anthropology work, the level of detail in the research results was of a much higher grain and resolution than we had resources to address in the campaign. Given that ILO (rightly) has a remit to be inclusive, I found that the project kept drifting into generalizations purely to make the campaign manageable within its budget. We would have been able to target much more finely, strangely, if we had been a commercial organization, as then we would be more able to leave some groups out and target only others with more precision[178]… there's a tension (which we did talk about) between being unmanageably specific and unusefully general in our approach.

My pragmatic working belief is that we, as members of the project team, immerse ourselves in the specific, real stories, then the whole that emerges will ring true, so I try to enter the work without preconceptions, which just might be one advantage of me being a (helpfully) ignorant outsider.

This was very clear in the Ghana campaign, where a Ghanaian social marketing company worked with a British advertising agency in Ghana. One of the British team remembered William Blake's words about the *wisdom of experience* and the *wisdom of innocence* coming together. There was no doubt that the British team had the most sophisticated understanding of managing and guiding the creative process, and equally no doubt that the Ghanaian team had the most sophisticated understanding of the Ghanaian market. We framed the interaction clearly in this way and the work proceeded on that basis. The problem then was that when the British "process" team went home, things started to fall apart at the seams in project management terms, pointing towards too much control vested in the international consultants.

[178] For example, the attitudes towards enterprising activity were significantly more positive, for ingrained cultural reasons, amongst the minority Moslem population (who are well known for having great entrepreneurial skills), as opposed to the majority Buddhist population, for many of whom enterprising activity is a sign of striving and greed. This project needed to serve them both… as well as the other differences that made a difference in all combinations of: men, women, young people, older people, women with children, women whose children have left home, Christians, Moslems, Buddhists, Sinhalese, Tamils and so on. Not to mention the myriad of possible localised industries: flower growing, sea fishing, tropical fish breeding, weaving, and so on, and so on…

Bringing more participation to this work

The Bolivian international development consultant, poet and filmmaker, Alfonso Gumucio-Dagron critiques social marketing as a "new wave" in development. In his article *The Overmarketing of Social Marketing*, he says that social marketing "represents the opposite of a communication approach that places the strength in the community and aims to transform the passive receptors of messages into active communicators… Development communicators in the Third World identify with education, not with marketing. We think that development communication and social marketing can merge no better than water and oil can mix. Social marketing strategies aim to persuade, while development communication – whose central concept is participation - aims to educate and organize. Social marketing is vertical, while development communication is horizontal. Social marketing attempts to "catch" a passive audience, while development communication aims to activate community participation… Social marketing promotes donor-driven evaluations, with pre-designed formats and parachuted consultants[179] who do not take into consideration the dynamics of the communication process at the community level." (Gumucio-Dagron, *date unknown*).

Gumucio-Dagron's words ring uncomfortably true with my own experience and reflect my moves towards greater participation in this work. My own critique comes most strongly in the form of social marketing seeming to operate "successfully" without the need for consent or invitation of the people and communities it is intending to serve. Social marketing campaigns seem to be done *to* or *at* people (the Ghana project exemplifies this essentially "social advertising" approach).

Notwithstanding the (accurate) label of "parachuted consultant," my social marketing work has taken steps up the ladder of participation, away from mass media social advertising towards development communication. With forum theatre in Sri Lanka, I see the possibility for a far more participatory, invitational, interesting and fun experience for rural communities than merely piping TV and radio advertising into their lives. With this vision for a more participatory approach comes much less control over the process and a much less predictable outcome from the funding. I have felt the push and pull of the tension of holding this vision of what could be against my ILO clients need to be seen to be responsible with funders' monies.

My own work in clowning (and forum – I have done one workshop with Boal), gives me the courage and conviction to stand behind these community based, participative, presentational and embodied ways of learning and changing. I realise that I work with the assumption that what has (gradually) been working for me might also (gradually) work for others in enlarging their behavioural choices and sense of what it is to be fully human.

[179] Ouch. That's me.

Third world
Second world
First world
Gold, silver and bronze
Who gets to say they're first
We're first and you're third
We're first and you came last
Putting the last first
Southern countries
What? Australia?
No.
Poor countries?
What, the ones with minerals?
What, the ones with sweatshops?
What, the ones with communities functioning and intact?
Financially poor countries:
What? Nigeria, Brazil?
Countries where the financially poorest people live?
Where people can't get clean water
Contextually under-privileged
Contextually over-privileged
Education, MSc, PhD, clean water, immunization, food that's too rich, books on tap, intellectual indigestion, clean bed, access to information, people, places, heart disease, rush, cancer, email, see the world, get more experiences, privileged experiences, miss out on slower rhythms, yearning, belonging, connections, pace, history. Live on the surface layer. Variety not depth. More
More
More
Unearned privilege
Hyper-consumerism
Ikea.

16 August 2005

An experimental aside: what might the ILO work look like if connaître knowing were admitted, as in Goethean science?

Notebook entry from Goethean Science week, 27 April 2006

Systems *– are presented to me as static with my ILO work, with an underlying assumption that without "intervention", things will get worse. A kind of anti-appreciative inquiry. Are things getting better or are things getting worse? Basic trends analysis would be the minimum that would be useful.*

Morphology *– what would it be to look at the movement of, processes of, continual reinvention of systems over time. Changing shape over time. Assumptions in this Goethean science that beings (systems) move towards fulfilling their potential (like a heliotrophic move, a yearning for "the sun"). That a bud fulfils itself through producing leaves does not mean that it is striving, progress oriented.*

Wholes and parts *– the ILO work at present consists of a series of snapshots of parts, from which I traverse great gaps to infer a whole. Reading the gesture of the whole with any thoroughness and rigour*[180] *seems outside of the resources of the task at hand.*

Questions *- How does my ILO sense making alter if I think of morphology instead of a system? What if I come at it through a Goethean science lens in order to have a fuller understanding?*

Responses *– Well, the first thing I notice is that there's an almost complete lack of any exact sense perception allowed for in the set up of the ILO work – how I notice what's going on (for example, through going walking) doesn't feature in my visible report writing. Although this kind of noticing is happening all the time, tacitly, and may appear later, in another context (for example through freefall writing).*

The metaphors, the gestures which tend to get noticed by the ILO are (assumed) to be negative, gestures of deficiency – people don't do this, they can't do that.

Next, there's no time for exact sensorial imagination – to reflect on and express anything of the morphology of the situation / system that we're looking at. Situations are assumed to be static or somehow worsening all round.

As such, presentational knowing is almost completely absent… maybe a few photos appear (they're quick to produce), but no drawings, collages, diagrams, shared or

[180] *Thoroughness and rigour* in this context implies to me that "the whole" could be interpreted and expressed by a variety of people from different parts of the "system" or issue at hand. In this instance, I can see a huge benefit of including national and international "outsiders'" voices as well as those of people more intimately connected with the issue. This may, or may not be with a view to reaching some intersubjective consensus.

individual sense making about the "system" and how it morphs over time – with or without ILO interventions.

There's no time for any thoroughness, quick visits, no sitting, watching, letting come… but/and, there's an intellectual intensity, lots of information.

The promise of a Goethean approach to development/consultancy work… might suggest not doing the work at all…

A Goethean approach suggests a reciprocal conversation.

A Goethean approach says something about time, thoroughness and imagining into the future.

A Goethean approach says something about in-dwelling, sensory perception, seeing what's happening and imagination.

A Goethean approach begs the question of whether a healthy metamorphosis is possible if the teleology is pathological? Or is poverty an inevitable consequence of patterns of greed and over-consumption beyond the planet's carrying capacity?

A Goethean approach says something about taking time to express.

A Goethean approach says something about taking longer to listen and receive before acting.

Quite by chance, in July 2006, I came across a piece of writing that described just an intervention which experimented with using a Goethean approach in social development work (Kaplan, 2005). Its author, Allan Kaplan (himself a social development practitioner), satisfyingly turned out to be a South African friend of Shelley Sacks, (who in turn had - like Anselm Kiefer - been a student of Joseph Beuys). Here is some of what Kaplan has to say on the interlacing of these two fields (with page numbers in brackets). All excerpts are taken from the same article, which explores his learning from an experimental collaborative inquiry of "twenty-something development practitioners from Southern, West and East Africa" (convened and facilitated by Kaplan) who together used a Goethean approach to investigate the phenomenon of instrumental versus developmental approaches to social change.

- Goethe worked with nature. Social phenomena are even more complex than natural ones. Particularly because they entail the element of self-consciousness. We are so immediately involved, so undeniably a part of what we are trying to understand (314).

- The question though is whether we can apply this method to the study of social phenomena. In my work with social organisms I try to do this, and facilitate others to do it. With varying degrees of success. The more instrumental, quantitative approach to the social – reducing complexity in the attempt to manipulate fragmented pieces – does not appeal; neither can it assist development, if the social is a living whole (315).
- Indeed, procedures get ever tighter, the focus on measurable goals and outcomes gets ever more intransigent, and the human project remains shackled to the chains of attempted manipulation and control. And the social development project remains… how else can I put it… anti-social (318).
- There are some underlying principles which inform the process. There are, really, no frameworks or other determinants outside of experience and understanding (319).
- Keep conversation focused on *what people actually observe*, do not allow it to veer off into abstraction, into theoretical conjecture. Through such focused observation, we may be able to build our imaginative faculties, enhance our seeing in ways which allow us to… *understand* rather than explain (319-320).
- Are we then left in despair? The feeling amongst the group is neither of despair nor hope, but of alive engagement, a renewal of conscious intent (330).
- I wondered whether the idea of social development is "cynical comment or genuine challenge." I remarked then, and I think now, that it is both. It depends what we mean by social development and how we practice it. I have no doubt, that if it is to be genuine challenge, that we have to broaden our concept of poverty to include the way we think and act in our world (331).

Wisdom under threat
Wakefulness is quest and key
Love and will are one

Allan Kaplan

To enjoy power and not take advantage of it,
that is the beginning of wisdom.
Of civilisation.

The political philosophy of restraint,
the only thinkable equality henceforth presupposes poverty,
not as a lack of riches,
but as a positive value.

Michel Serres
Le Tiers Instruit, Editions Francois Bourin, France, (1991: 193, trans. M. Rahnema)

Wherever you go, there you are

I will now look at how I am coming to recognise and understand the legitimacy of my own being in development work situations, whilst growing my awareness of the limitations of my presence, too.

In reviewing my notes and writing from early "missions", I can see that in my desire to be open to new situations, I have given my self away very easily, resulting in my ready acceptance and collusion in creating back-to-back schedules with very little rest, "suspension" and reflection time. My first trip to India – 5 working days in two locations three and a half hours drive away from one another – was made up of 25 meetings and two visits to a clinic. Here, I can see a recurring pattern of *saying yes first and sorting out the details later*. At a simple physical level, I often became too hot, dehydrated, and on two occasions I sustained injuries which then forced me to slow down (and, in the case of the Achilles break, virtually come to a standstill for six months)[181].

Almost from the start, though, I held concerns about my well being (particularly in India) and yet seemed unable to put my self in the picture first in order to address the issue. On the evening of 17 September 2002, I was in Moradabad and wrote with a mixture of a little hope and a lot of despair:

I'm looking forward to getting the detail of this [social marketing] plan written up, and I know that in order to do it I'll have to sit in that oppressive smelly hotel room that doesn't even have a window. Here, at the ILO office, I'm wondering what I can do to make it less unpleasant when I get to the hotel. I feel like a prisoner here with nowhere to go to. I don't even feel comfortable with the thought of going for a walk there… if I could go back to Delhi tonight I would, even though it'd mean another three and a half hour journey. So, what can I do, how can I be to make it more bearable? Hopefully, I can get into the work – I need to be inside my head. This work seems like it is all about reassembling my energy to suit whatever comes next. Now – I have a job to do, and I just need to get on with it.

I'm not enjoying the discussion with [my local ILO colleague] much. He doesn't seem interested in or sparked by the campaign itself and appears to be more concerned about organising his own work schedule. I feel he is constantly trying to put me on the back foot – one minute he says I'm supposed to be the expert and the next, he's disagreeing with any "expert" advice I have. I feel intellectually and physically isolated. This is a godforsaken place.

In June 2003, I was back in Ghana again, for the fifth and last "mission" there as the project came to a close with a final round of evaluation work. During this eight day

[181] Interesting mirroring of self and project, given I was working on health and safety at work…

visit, and with the encouragement of my CARPP PhD group, I took opportunities to ask the people I have worked with what it has been like working on the project, and, working with me. I asked three contacts how it had been for them, offering "how was it?" questions from both a general (white European visitor) perspective as well as a more personal (me) perspective, where I assured my Ghanaian colleagues that I did not mind what they said in response in an attempt to elicit a meaningful response.

First, I asked Samuel, my driver, what he thought about Europeans coming in to Ghana to do this work. English is Samuel's second or third language. He said that, "like it was when Ghana was first colonised, we'll kick you out when we've had enough". His response was robust and direct, recalling this passage from Alexander McCall Smith's novel *Tears of a Giraffe*:

They had thought it a very good idea that young people should be asked to spend time working for others and helping to build their country; but what was so exceptional about that? Did young people not work in rich countries? Perhaps they did not, and that is why these people, who came from such countries, should have found the whole idea so exciting. There was nothing wrong with these people – they were kind people usually, and treated the Batswana with respect. Yet somehow it could be trying to be given advice. There was always some eager foreign organisation ready to say to Africans: this is what you do; this is how you should do things. The advice may be good, and it might work elsewhere, but Africa needed its own solutions

(McCall Smith, 2000: 91).

Next, I spoke on 9 June 2003 with Yao, Color Consult's production manager, with whom I had worked for two years now. He commented on working with me and working with the St Helen's team. About working with me, he said "the pace here is very laid back and you came along and pushed the pace… You put some fire into the work, like a hot coal, putting some heat under the project. It was fun. I liked being challenged". So, just as I was trying to turn down the volume on my self, it turns out that I was still pushing the pace. This causes me some confusion as, on the one hand, I needed to satisfy the stringent and precise requirements of my individual ILO contracts and time schedules and on the other, I did not want to exert a kind of neo-colonial power-over in order to achieve this.

On working with St Helen's advertising agency, Yao commented that "it was very beneficial getting someone else's perspective. We have one way of doing things and they came along and did it differently. I took something from each of them. I liked it when we introduced each other, it was a real icebreaker, finding out about each other".

Finally, on 12 June 2003, I spoke at some length with Robert, the General Manager at a business development services organisation delivering training consultancy and micro-credit to small businesses. Robert's organisation had been appointed to be overall managers of the social marketing campaign in Ghana. First, I asked Robert what he makes of Europeans coming into Ghana to do work generally? Second, I asked him if he'd had any impressions of me, in particular. Most of his responses addressed the first question and I have shown these first. I have shown Robert's responses to the second question in italics at the end of the list.

- I was an ex-pat working away from Ghana for 16 or 17 years and your question strikes a chord. If you get exposed to that kind of working environment, it doesn't take you long to appreciate that differences between cultures exist, and to see them without being judgmental about which is better.

- I'm looking for someone who comes with an open mind, for example, if what I am saying is nonsense, I want someone to tell me so and not think it is nonsense just because I'm a Ghanaian!

- It's also true that, even where some research has been done, there's still nuances about a particular environment that you can never put your finger on if you are flitting in and out of a country. You must appreciate that, and then others can provide the missing pieces for you… You have to learn quickly that you have to tread carefully.

- It is useful to have an outside perspective, it is a strength as long as the people that come from outside appreciate that we are all still learning. It's useful to have someone come in who is not carrying any of the local cultural baggage, it means you can see opportunities that people in the culture can't.

- Something that goes into being an expat is that you get someone to clue you in, or you learn from your experience.

- If you're used to an academic environment, then you're also used to hearing other viewpoints as well… even if you disagree with them.

- *I've not felt at any stage that you've felt you have all the answers, we've discussed things together at every stage, dispassionately.*

- *You as a person… you have the right attitude as someone that's working in the role of an expat.*

Nearly three years later, I asked for similar feedback from one of my Sri Lankan colleagues I'd worked closely with over a total of 15-20 days. He sent two pieces of feedback, one solicited and the other unexpected. First, on 17 March 2006, he wrote:

Dear Chris
I am sure that you have now settled down with your work and not inundated with e-mails from a tiny dot in the Indian Ocean regarding a logo.
I must say I enjoyed working with you and the team and for the first time in 18 years I did not hear a single word of swearing during the meetings and there were no F's B's flying all over the place. (This is the usual case in advertising- I guess people compensate their lack of brains with adjectives limited to a certain four letter word)
So it was educative, pleasant and very simulative...

Then, on 1 April 2006, he sent another email which revealed something of the "behind the scenes" perspective of Sri Lankans on development organisations like the ILO. This email was sent during the recruitment process for the Campaign Director, for which we had allocated a yearly salary of approximately $20k USD:[182]

I guess those in development business have spoilt the people of Sri Lanka. Some were happy to do this job for USD 2500.

At worst, then, my interventions, and others like them, are tolerated, and perhaps benignly interesting for a while. At best, what I do suffuses the work with new energy and ideas, offering stimulation and a useful outside perspective (perhaps like any consultancy project might).

Putting myself into the picture

During that last trip to Ghana in June 2003, I felt I had nothing to lose by experimenting with putting my self in the picture and considering my own needs first, to an extent that was unprecedented in my other "missions". I kept detailed accounts of what I did differently, effectively paying much more detailed attention to my own embodied state of well-being and equanimity during this visit. This fine grained inquiry did have an effect on the design and approach I took for subsequent work, for example, in Viet Nam, I sat with my local client and redesigned my work plan on day one to ensure that I had half a day "off" for writing, and insisting that I only have meetings scheduled at a pace where I can keep up with the sense making of those

[182] Some of the Sri Lankan local uppers had been interested in the work, but my main ILO contact had been uninterested, saying (on 27 March 2006) with reference to one candidate (for example): "[he is] clearly a very smart guy with good ideas. Two things: the real advertising type and very Westernized, the "Colombo élite" sort of person; secondly (and related I guess) a bit too assertive and aggressive to fit into our team of .... mostly "nice" people (me excepted of course). I don't think it would work, neither did A. (still working hard!) and G. Too bad once more."

meetings. Here are my experiments from during that last Ghanaian trip. They seem so obvious, mundane and simple and felt like self-indulgence and weakness within the somewhat heroic frame of this "expert" role[183]:

- I effectively kept one foot in the camp at home through sending daily text messages, allowing more time to keep up with my emails and telephoning my friend G. half way through the trip. This was in response to travelling with an ILO colleague in November 2002 and noticing just how often he used mobile phone during the day to contact friends and family at home. I'd never really done this on my trips and so I thought I'd give it a go. During the June 2003 "mission" I told my ILO client about this part of my experiment and he said that he phoned home for an hour a day when he was away "on mission". Perhaps I have a long way to go on this one.

- I took more control about setting my own agenda and ended up with around seven meetings scheduled in 8 days, rather than the five-a-day that were commonplace at the start of this work.

- I cast my environmental concerns to one side (to my shame) and had the air conditioning on in my room when I was working in there writing all day. I had not done this on previous trips, felt bad each time I switched it on but suffered far less from the effects of the heat.

- Drank more water in advance of getting a raging thirst.

- I took my own Earl Grey teabags and long life milk with me for a predictable and familiar cup of tea in my room.

- I ate less generally (although still became unwell, as I have, in one way or another on all of my "missions"… most notably Kathmandu… but that's another story).

- I drank far less alcohol (but noticed myself succumbing to peer pressure and my desire to be "one of the boys" as ILO colleagues arrived).

- I exercised more, both swimming 1000 metres a day and stretching during my writing with t'ai chi shibashi.

- I listened to the birdsong in the mornings[184].

- I did not go out in the evenings socialising (although, I must say that this felt like an end-game withdrawal and my visits to Ghana as a whole would have been greatly

[183] "Self-discovery within helpers becomes viewed as an indulgence taking valuable time away from the manipulation of change in others…" (Brandon 1976: 81).
[184] This is one of the constants wherever I am. Cuckoos in Kathmandu, crows in Colombo, little coral-chested pigeons in Ghana, and collared doves and fledgling sparrows on my own bird table as I have been writing this.

impoverished without the friendship and generosity of local people like Emanuel).

- I did not hide any of these activities from my colleagues in an attempt not to feel guilty putting my self first (and I still got the job done).

Now I had experienced both giving myself away in order to be porous and open to the culture and context I was working in for the first time (during the early stages of the project) and, in my terms, really keeping myself to myself (during this final trip). These insights, along with the comments I received back from others (particularly Yao and Robert) and the process of writing the final evaluation report for the project during this mission, led me to put together some tentative thoughts on this work as a whole, which I summarise below.

Tentative, gentle advocacy on contributing to the success of development interventions – a Eurocentric perspective

- The role changes over time – get a good grip of the reins and then gradually let go again as you proceed. Live with not knowing what happens after your involvement has come to an end.

- In early stages of a project, when you need to ingest information rapidly – try and get some reflection time in there as well – otherwise it is hard to pay good quality attention to what is going on. Look after yourself at this stage; get time alone to turn down the volume of input.

- If you can, go out walking with no plan for where to go. Wander round in a bit of a daze and allow yourself to soak up what you see and experience.

- Use the convening power you have from the organisation you are working for – this will bring together groups who otherwise may never meet. This could be the greatest benefit your work brings.

- Remember that during the project, your job is to keep the project alive and energised…

- In later stages your job is to serve the project and pay detailed attention to what is going on. One way of serving the project is to act as an intermediary or translator between the project participants and the project funders.

- Listen carefully to what local colleagues want next… and support them in making it happen.

- Remember that it may be that participation is only just being rediscovered in Western business, but may never have been lost amongst some of the communities you may work with. Work to re-legitimise participatory approaches before they are lost in the headlong rush for materialist, consumer industrialism…

Critical humility and the whole effervescent flavour in living

In a long term piece of first- and second person inquiry, the *European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness* (Action Research Volume 3(3): 245–261, 2005) sought to challenge their notions of whiteness. In their sense making from this inquiry work, the group identified ways of being that they felt were helpful in undoing inherited power differences. One of these ways of bring – *critical humility* – describes a quality which would have been useful for me to have named earlier in my development work.

They say: "we have noticed a quality of being that seems essential to our inquiry about white supremacist consciousness. With a hunch that this habit of being may be relevant to other inquiries that put self-concept at risk, we tentatively suggest the importance of cultivating a meaning perspective that we call 'critical humility'. We define critical humility as the practice of remaining open to discovering that our knowledge is partial and evolving while at the same time being committed and confident about our knowledge and action in the world… Applied to our inquiry, critical humility means that we strive on a daily basis to take confident actions that challenge racism and white hegemony. We also strive to remember that even as we challenge white supremacist consciousness, we are not immune to it. Remaining open to discovering the insidiousness of our *un*consciousness is an ongoing challenge… ongoing skillful practice gradually transforms critical humility from fleeting insight into a habit of being" (European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness, 2005: 250).

They relate this quality of critical humility to a capacity to hold paradox (European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness, 2005: 258), and offer an example (based on interactions between Victoria, a white American and an unnamed black American woman) which has resonance for my ILO work[185].

"[Victoria] approaches a state of critical humility. She is committed to helping others and to interacting with people of color from a store of wisdom, but recognizes she doesn't know what help looks like to the woman of color she wants to help.

[185] Where so much of the time I know that I don't know how to act, or what's best, for whom, and that by trying too hard I can unintentionally exclude others, and myself, and that through wanting to dismantle my unearned privilege, I can lose my more proper earned privilege and self-esteem, too.

By acknowledging and naming her misstep, Victoria is able to re-enter the perspective of critical humility, which requires compassionate acceptance of self as not knowing. She then can move forward with renewed commitment and confidence in what she does know – that she is an able and supportive dissertation chair for people of color." (European-American Collaborative Challenging Whiteness, 2005: 258).

Social scientist David Brandon explores something of this quality or habit of being of critical humility in his book "Zen in the Art of Helping" (Brandon 1976), which has accompanied me on several of my "missions", helping me to try less hard, be less earnest and more self-forgiving. Brandon combines critical humility-type traits of not knowing and holding paradox with a "whole effervescent flavour in living" (Brandon, 1976: 2). This combination reminds me of the playful, alive, mistake-making, accident-prone world of the clown archetype.

Brandon calls this Zen-like quality "the sheer art of living" (Brandon, 1976: 9) and contrasts this with the twin traps of being the oppressor and being the oppressed: "Certain people's lifestyles, characterized by greed and over-consumption, become dependent on the deprivation of the many. The oppressors and the oppressed fall into the same trap of continued craving" (Brandon, 1976: 10-11).

My ILO work calls for a stance to me taken that says "developing your own enterprise is a good thing to do. It offers a way to get the good bits of globalisation and avoid the bad. Being enterprising will improve your life chances". Some days, I can see this stance offering context-transcending, generative possibilities. It is the path I have chosen for my livelihood. But there's no certainty to be had here and the oppressor lurks just round the corner as Brandon, quoting Frayn, links the very act of having such a stance to the potential danger of a kind of "emotional imperialism":

No longer possessing the means to sustain any convincing social snobbery, we have branched out into moral snobbery instead. Novelists, critics, and popularising psychologists have joined forces to help the laity towards more 'meaningful' relationships and more valuable insights into themselves, towards 'realising their full potential as human beings'. We shake our heads sadly at people's spiritual poverty, and smiling kindly, hold out our hands to help them into better ways. We outdo the most sanctimonious of Victorian clergymen.

(Frayn, in Brandon 1976: 36-37)

Reading this quotation, I feel that sensation of paralysis creeping back. Is there nowhere to turn for purpose, action-with-critical-humility, to make a contribution, to

do or be something worthwhile? Are we trapped in inevitable Western-mindset imposition?[186]

Brandon soothes that thought when he says: “Fieldworkers can only do what they can do. They feel this sense of frustration and impotence often very keenly... If the helper is honest, she experiences a thousand situations in which she can do nothing or very little… By trying to be all things to all the people we can fail catastrophically. We are simply human beings… we have to live honestly and daily with the sheer crushing immensity of human suffering both national and international. We realize that our whole way of life, like that of every other ‘major civilization’ is based on sophisticated and organized theft of the world’s resources from ‘underdeveloped countries’. Pain and suffering begin inside ourselves. We too are lost, alienated and exploited” (Brandon 1976: 28-29, 96).

Stop devaluing those whom you help while you profit from their troubles...

Edgar Cahn, founder of Time Banks

[186] Just as we as a species might be trapped in the inevitability of anthropomorphic projection onto the more-than-human world?