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Networking resources, owning productivity: a post-development alternative in Mindanao

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[Authors Accepted Manuscript]

Abstract:

This paper explores the practices of one small NGO in Mindanao working innovatively to challenge power and interests by linking resources to local communities who control their productivity. While this may seem like social capital, I suggest that the agency over production, and the deeply political and ideological nature of the recipient communities, calls for a different reading. The regard for the contextual and contestational politics suggests that a radical alternative is emerging. I use postdevelopment theory to frame the analysis of this example, posing the question: is this practice a radical alternative to the internationally framed global development discourses, or are we witnessing the reproduction of these discourses in new forms?

Key words:

Postdevelopment, social capital, networking, the state, Mindanao, livelihoods.

Introduction

1. Introduction

After fifty years of concerted effort we seem no nearer to creating a better world than when we started. It could be argued that the ‘development project’, based on a hegemonic idea of progress and informed by European Enlightenment thinking and underpinned by capitalist expansion, has failed. However, its resilience seems untroubled, as it continues to reinvent itself through the reproblematisation of poverty, its most recent self-transformation and renewal coming through the merging of development and security discourses (Duffield 2001, Novelli 2010).

With little evidence that the development industry is weakening, a postdevelopment perspective provides a critique which resists merely rejecting development in favour of self-reliance, but seeks to reconstruct a development discourse grounded in a theoretical and critical perspective. This paper starts by providing a thumbnail overview of postdevelopment thinking before turning to the example of the Philippine based Christian NGO Malikha Bridge (pseudonym) to explore how their practice of networking in Muslim Mindanao might be conceived as an example of a postdevelopment alternative. This case-study is taken from my recent doctoral work where I conducted ethnographic research in Mindanao in 2009.

To do this I draw on some of the important debates from postdevelopment literature before introducing the NGO Malikha Bridge, including a brief discussion of their Christian nature. I then introduce their practice of networking and some examples of how this has worked with Muslim communities in Mindanao. Having set the scene this paper then asks does the type of networking practiced by Malikha Bridge offers a post-development alternative? By exploring how networking rethinks notions of social capital, capitalist economic expansion and the state as the vehicle for development I suggest that Malikha Bridge's practice of networking might arguably disturb the predominant development principles underpinning them such as individualism, anti-politics and capitalist markets.

2. Postdevelopment

In his seminal book *Encountering Development* Escobar (1995) traces the post-war discursive creation of non-developed countries and growth of an authoritative industry informed by historical and cultural values implicit with power. Trends within development discourse have changed over time, however, it remains that an internationally framed ideological project with technocratic solutions to “the ignorant, the residual, the inferior, the local and the non-productive” (Santos 2004: 239) still achieves hegemonic status.

The evident failure of the development project has generated increasing criticism. For its critics not only has it failed, with worsening income inequality and the population of many countries now poorer, but it is directly implicated with these outcomes, where “development creates and perpetuates uneven distribution of power, legitimacy, knowledge and capacity” (McKinnon 2004: 773).

Critical approaches to development question its requisition of understandings of progress and the normative scripts that it creates. For example, Santos argues that a ‘sociology of absences’, produced through the promotion of Western interests through scientific knowledge and its associated exclusive canon of truth, actively discredits and trivialises alternative knowledges through the criteria of objective truth and efficiency. The technocratic solution to the problem of poverty found in the development industry promotes progress through “scientific, advanced, superior, global, or productive realities” (Santos 2004: 239). Weber (2010), drawing on the work of Nanday (2002), critiques how poverty has been conflated with destitution. “By collating or collapsing these two terms, apologists of development have redefined all low-consuming, environment friendly lifestyles as poor and, thus degrading and unfit for survival in the contemporary world” (Nandy 2002: 115, cited in Weber 2010: 108). Using the example of micro-credit schemes Weber argues that destitution is socially and politically produced through globally embedded development discourses underpinned by neoliberal values. Gibson-Graham (2005) argue for recognition of “diverse ecologies of productivity” (Gibson-Graham 2005: 6), challenging market-based definitions of ‘needy’. For example, in their recent work they explore an asset based approach to development which recognised non-market, unpaid, and non-capitalist forms of transaction, labour and enterprise, such as gift giving, volunteerism, and collective endeavours.

While not a comprehensive list, the above scholars highlight a growing rejection of the development project and its underlying premises. The failure of the idea of development and its arguable complicity in worsening the situation of ‘the poor’ has led to Sachs’ illuminating conclusion that “*it is not the failure of development which has to be feared, but its success*” (Sachs 1992: 3).

However, while a postdevelopment approach would maintain these criticisms, it would be erroneous to assume, therefore, that it is anti-development:

“The challenge of postdevelopment is not to give up on development... as though there were something necessarily problematic and destructive about deliberate attempts to increase social wellbeing through economic intervention; as though there were a space of purity beyond or outside development that we could access through renunciation. The challenge is to imagine and practice development differently” (Gibson-Graham 2005: 6).

As suggested by the prefix ‘post’, a postdevelopment approach is tinged with the deconstructive. Rather than disregard the idea of development altogether, it instead works to undermine the certainty in essentialising discourses around progress. While this threatening of certainty may appear menacing to development technocrats looking for scalable and formulaic solutions, the deconstructive tendency opens up opportunities for reconstruction, so that “*at the same time that it starts something new, it also continues something, is true to the memory of its past, to a heritage*” (Derrida, in Derrida and Caputo 1997: 6). McKinnon identifies this heritage as hope, proclaiming: “development is a project of hope” (McKinnon 2007: 772). A postdevelopment approach, therefore, is not about abandoning development, but imagining a different type of development which goes beyond the limitations of current understandings and practices.

Postdevelopment perspectives, however, are not without their critics. Amongst the critiques is that the (important) problematising of Western normative scripts about development can sometimes result in a predilection towards grassroots movements resulting in a romantic framing which gives way to ethnocentrism and cultural relativism, where the critical rigour applied to development and the West is not afforded to the South. Also, there is frustration that “reflections are general and no cases are discussed” (Pieterse 2000). However, I do not see these significant problems as necessarily inherent to a postdevelopment perspective, and I hope, in what follows, to address some of these issues through the discussion of a potential alternative where practice is discussed.

3. Malikha Bridge

Malikha Bridge is a Christian NGO which at the time of my PhD field research (2009) worked in multiple sites in Muslim Mindanao. It works with Muslim communities with an objective to build on interactions of “peace, mercy, grace, love and forgiveness to make relationships mutually accessible between two or more localities where there is no previous connection” (Malikha Bridge website 2008). This very broad aim to build authentic and reciprocal relationships has become manifest in a number of understandings of what this

means, including a commitment to the welfare of their Muslim friends, mutual respect of their culture, and listening to their perspective and experiences. The outcome has been the continual development of a variety of practices from development projects, to cultural affirmation, to advocacy, often combined and overlapping in a series of community based ventures. All of their praxis is premised on the relational ethic forefronted in the above objective.

The aim to build relationships, and what this might mean, is shaped by their engagement with their context. Malikha Bridge practice relationship building in the situation of a protracted low-level armed conflict between the majority Christian Government of the Philippines and a number of Autonomous Armed Groups (AAGs) claiming to represent the views of the 'Filipino' Muslim communities (at the time of my research this conflict was on-going, at the time of writing a peace pact has been signed which is hoped will mark the beginning of the end of this conflict). The deep rooted suspicion between Muslims and Christians that has arisen from decades of religious conflict make the building of relationships between the two groups both difficult and necessary. A recent tide of aggressive Protestant evangelism originating from the US and incorporating Filipino Christians has further entrenched unhelpful attitudes between the groups. Evangelical Christians tended to view Muslims as in need of their 'salvation', reinforcing a mainstream view of many ethnic Christians that characterised Muslims as untrustworthy, back-stabbing, unscrupulous in their business dealings, dangerous, and at best lazy. Wary Muslims were in turn defensive of the neo-colonising Christians who wish to impose their culture onto them. This is reminiscent of the three century long 'Moro wars' between Mindanao and Luzon-based Filipino Christian converts fighting on behalf of their Spanish converters/colonisers.

The objective to build relationships makes Malikha Bridge a beautifully difficult NGO to categorise. Their commitment to 'peace' and 'forgiveness' affiliates them with the peace-building NGOs of Mindanao, while their Christian nature and the inter-faith dialogue their work facilitates positions them as missionaries. Furthermore, their understanding of peace and 'Godly transformation' informs a holistic perspective where both 'Godly' and 'peace' have something to do with the dignity and welfare of the person, including their right to a livelihood, resulting in development orientated practices and making them look like a development NGO. While, for the purpose of this paper, I will focus my discussion on their development praxis, I do not wish to erase or ignore these other facets, which would be impossible anyway, as they inform and connect with each other.

4. Networking

The particular practice this paper will address is the practice of networking or 'Insider Movements'. I prefer networking as a description because Insider Movements already exists as a missionary model, and Malikha Bridge have reworked and interpreted it in such a way that it differs in both practice and underlying principle, making the term misleading and unhelpful to outside readers.

The reference to a bridge in the name Malikha Bridge should be put into Filipino context. In the partnered community in South West Mindanao, like many elsewhere in the Philippines, many of the houses are built over the tidal zone or over the sea, requiring narrow bamboo bridges to link them to the mainland and other houses. It requires real practice and skill to balance across these beams, and I soon discovered the consequences of not being able to traverse these small bamboo bridges, as I became excluded from the network of bridges that connected the community. Malikha Bridge make small bridges between the ethnic Muslim communities they work with and the relatively wealthy network of Christians they can access, and their much needed resources. Like balancing on bamboo poles, this requires skill and ability. Not being able to traverse these connections leaves you excluded.



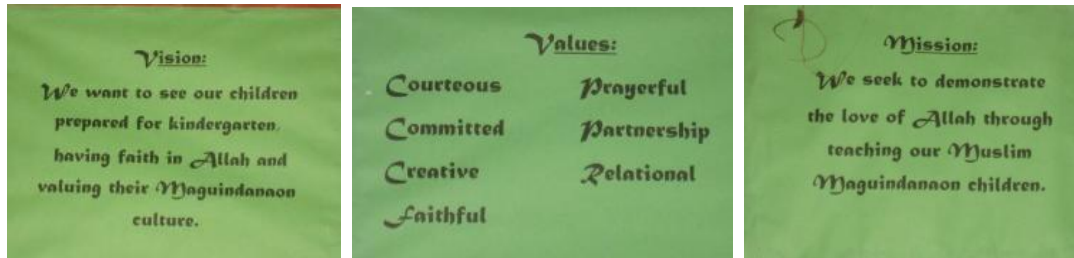
Malikha Bridge use Insider Movement Communities (IMC) to facilitate community organising and networking. Partnering with volunteers from within ethnic Muslim communities, Malikha Bridge aid cultural and development projects. The volunteers, called Insiders (or collectively Insider Movement Communities), are provided with resources from linked Christian donors, who trust the productivity of those resources into the hands of the Muslim volunteers, including the values that underpin their uses. Malikha Bridge help their partners in an advisory role and in their access to Christian resources, to facilitate projects requested by the community and run by Insiders. Malikha Bridge do not run the projects themselves, and while they are largely resourced through their contacts and training is provided through them, emphasis is put on what Insiders and their community can provide and capacity building. How they worked is best illustrated through the following examples:

4.1. e.g. pre-school

The pre-school is a project run by Insiders from one Muslim community that is valued and used by the local Muslim community. Experience from the Muslim community was that if a child attended school with no pre-school education then their poor performance in relation to other children would relegate them to the back of the class from the start and they would be largely ignored for the rest of their schooling. During a 'felt needs survey' education was identified as an area of need, and Malikha Bridge was approached to help in this area. In

addition to assisting with the building project Malikha Bridge were also able to help IMC think about the organizing values of the pre-school, a training approach strongly permeated with a sense of Conscientization (Friere 1972). They provided some basic teacher training, which they continue to provide as volunteers progress in their confidence.

Pre-school vision, values and mission from Insider Movement training:



4.2. e.g. Medical mission

In a different community in South West Mindanao Malikha Bridge facilitated a community-run medical project. Access to Filipino Christian doctors for three days were offered to the community, who were happy to accept the offer of help from a team of Christian doctors, but with the Muslim community running the mission, from managing the sites, the systems for patients to queue, be assessed and treated, and the dispensing of medicine in the pharmacy. There were also conditions on the doctors – no evangelism and respectful, modest dress appropriate to Islamic culture. The community were given access to the resources (medical personnel and drugs), but were in control of the productivity of these resources. As the mission was organised by the community their culture permeated its organisation in many subtle ways, from Islamic prayer over the mission, the importance of hospitality which emphasised the generous feeding of the Christian doctors, and the use of local mosques as the physical sites for the surgeries. Even the medical assistance required was shaped by the community, with circumcision being a popular procedure for many Muslims who had not previously had the opportunity to undertake this Islamic practice.

4.3. e.g. Water project

In a community in central Mindanao potable water was in short supply and this was raised with Malikha Bridge, who connected the community to a Masters student in hydro-engineering from Germany, who visited the community for several months and was able to design a water system and cost it as part of his course work. On one of my field visits the community was attempting to find the financial resources to implement the building of the water system through the network of donors accessed via Malikha Bridge (including the Masters student’s own church community). The costing of the project was only for the raw materials, the plan was that once they have the resources that the student would return and teach them how to install and maintain the system themselves. Not only did this save money, as the community provided all of the labour needed, but the production of the resources (materials and know-how) into something of value by the community (clean water) has an

educational and capacity building function. On a subsequent visit I met the student and witnessed the beginnings of the build.

5. A postdevelopment alternative?

Through placing the productivity of the resources in the hands of the community this practice appears to be foregrounding the context and local values. The role of Insiders in identifying their own projects, and shaping how the resources are to be used from their cultural and religious perspective, not only challenges donors to release conditions from any resource gifted, but the role of volunteerism in appropriating the resource's value advances communal and non-capitalist enterprise. Also, the network of donors (a network of Christian global and regional assemblages formed by transnational missionary movements that as missionaries themselves Malikha Bridge can access), span the Philippines, Europe, Australia, and North America and connect directly to the IMC, challenging the primacy of the state as the vehicle of development and creatively interacting with and cross-cutting political arrangements and emergent assemblages.

These characteristics suggest to me that this could be interpreted as a postdevelopment practice, and necessitates further analysis. Using a postdevelopment approach the remainder of this paper will explore how these practices could be understood as an innovative alternative to hegemonic development discourses, in particular around three dominant development themes: social capital, economic (capitalist) expansion, and the role of the state. While I explore these themes separately they are all related. For example Putman understands social capital as an individual advantage and consequently civil society is valued as a means of individual economic advantage, while the World Bank understands development as the complementary relationship between social capital and the state. I have chosen these three themes to structure my analysis because they are relevant to the case study and because they are representative of how current development trends continue to frame development as technocratic solutions underpinned by Western values such as individualism and capitalist growth.

5.1. Social Capital v Community Organising

On the surface the networking practices of Malikha Bridge look deceptively similar to social capital. Social capital is a neutral term, but, similar to globalisation, has been claimed by a variety of causes, each imposing their own understanding on the term. All-encompassing participation can be interpreted as socialism, while an emphasis on 'big society' highlights the reduced role of the state and associated neo-liberal values. However, the term has been quite successfully claimed, for the most part, by the World Bank.

Taking the hegemonic World Bank understanding of social capital as my starting point, social capital has successfully achieved a 'magic bullet' status within the World Bank and associated global development institutions, and has consequently gained much prominence in development theory, policy and practice. Under the World Bank, social capital has been hailed as the 'missing link' in development. Often described as "the glue that holds society together" it has been promoted strongly through research agendas and literature on a World

Bank dedicated website. The wealth of literature and research on social capital focuses on describing the contribution of social capital to economic development and efforts to quantify and measure it. This research focus exemplifies a view of social capital “as a means both to understand the response to market imperfections and to correct them” (Fine 2001: 123), and in “deploying social capital to complement, not fundamentally to reassess, existing economic prognoses” (ibid: 156).

The metaphor of a ‘missing link’ reveals a technocratic solution to the problem of ‘underdevelopment’ which presents an apolitical account of development contexts, while the economic framing of the social is for individual financial gain. It is these two characteristics of social capital that are challenged through a type of community organising: the depoliticising of development and capitalist economic expansion. As I will be discussing an alternative aim to capitalist economic expansion in the next section I will focus this section on the depoliticising effect of social capital and an alternative response.

Social capital is theoretically weak in its understanding of power and conflict. The underlying perspective of economics generally fails to engage in considerations of structural or cultural violence. For example, the World Bank Social Capital Webpage claims that “conflict is the struggle over scarce resources arising over competing goals between two or more parties” (World Bank, cited in Fine 2001: 156). While examples of more nuanced understandings of a contextualised social capital which consider conflict and other relevant social characteristics such as class survive, such as the work of Bebbington (e.g. 1997), for the World Bank generally a reductionist understand of the social prevails and capital is neutral.

A technocratic solution is unable to address complex contextual conflicts and interests, and “if a community is riven by conflicting interests, the nature and meaning of social capital becomes more complicated” (Evans 1996: 1127, cited in Fine 2001: 123). Fine concludes from this deduction that “if conflict undermines the notion of social capital, then why not take conflict and its theoretical underpinnings as a starting point rather than a social capital that has been rendered both ambiguous and redundant?” (Fine 2001: 123). By positioning social capital as the organising concept in understanding development, group membership and (sanctioned) civic engagement becomes the upmost requirement, in effect submerging the requirement for political action, thus depoliticising development.

The appeal to the World Bank is not difficult to locate, as a distinct lack of consideration of context and power relations provides an easy, non-messy solution to ‘poverty’ which does little to challenge economic interests:

“On the one hand it is self-help and co-operation raised from the individual to the communal level at some tier or other. On the other hand, it is the rich and powerful speculating on how to improve the lot of the poor through promoting their self-help and organisation without questioning the sources of their economic disadvantage”(Fine ibid: 199) .

Social capital has many and growing forms as it seeks to expand its scope by introducing new variables, e.g. vertical, horizontal, bridging, bonding, and infers a just add and mix approach: insert where it is deemed lacking, and watch economic development and good governance flourish. Linking capital has become the newest form of social capital:

“Latterly, a third type of variant capital has been added: ‘linking capital’, which connects poor or subordinated people and, it is suggested, individuals in positions of power and influence... Can one be ‘against’ participation and empowerment? But these ideas are deceptive because they are used to veil the nature and the effects of power... They hold out the prospects of democracy (in ‘civil society’) without the inconveniences of contestational politics and ideas and interests that are an essential part of democracy” (Harriss 2002:116/8).

In this quote Harris not only identifies linking capital as the newest form of social capital, but goes on to critique it and social capital in general as working to depoliticise development. And this is where Malikha Bridge’s practice of community organising offers an alternative to a decontextualised social capital. Malikha Bridge, through focusing on the relational, far from decontextualising practice, engages politically and challenges structural violence apparent in Mindanao through a network of agents at different levels across numerous locations, including actors from local and political organizations. Central to this engagement is Malikha Bridge’s emphasis on the recipient communities’ charge over the productivity of the donations (including the production of values around identity and belonging) which contributes to increased agency and seeks to address structural and cultural inequalities.

In their role as small bridges Malikha Bridge acts like a vetting agency. They do not simply connect IMC with Christian donors, they manage the interaction of the churches and Christian organisations, selecting resources that come without conditions attached. In this sense the ethnic Muslims trust Malikha Bridge to make good links, they are willing to work with these Christians because Malikha Bridge have recommended them. Conversely, Christian organisations feel that they can trust their resources to the communities because Malikha Bridge can vouch for them. This fascinating position in-between allows Malikha Bridge to address some of the power issues at play, the wealth and power possessed by the Christian majority is released with a little of their power (conditions) removed, while the control of their own productivity is put in the hands of the IMC, a little bit of power redressed: where they were once excluded from this capital flow, they are now, in some small way, included.

Considering the immensely political space that Malikha Bridge is operating within, any relinquishing/redressing of power is remarkable. Malikha Bridge work in the context of a religious conflict, and the IMCs they partner with come from and assist wider ethnic Muslim communities which include among them individuals who have previously fought against the Government of the Philippines (either in the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) before the 1996 peace accord or with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) who’s armed struggle against the government continued at the time of my research and has only recently (7.10.2012) been the subject of a peace pact). It is not possible to ignore the contestational

politics which permeate the context where Malikha Bridge work. The agency of the recipient communities over the productivity of donated resources is inherently political, not only in increasing their agency, but also in its role in affirming their culture, and addresses a long-standing mistrust and condescension towards Muslim communities by many of the majority ethnic Christian population.

In addition to challenging and redressing some of the structural and cultural violence against many ethnic Muslims in Mindanao through connecting partners with resources and facilitating production, Malikha Bridge also actively advocate on their behalf. For example while I was there Eduardo (Malikha Bridge's director) invited one of the IMC leaders to visit and talk to his class on a Masters Degree unit on Peace in Mindanao in a Catholic University where he taught. Here the IMC leader shared his vision of 'Bangsa Moro', the term given to the Islamic political solution to the conflict, interpreted as Muslim Nation.

In this exploration we find a practice that, similar to social capital, encourages community organising which addresses felt needs. However, the networking described here provides an alternative to a decontextualised and de-politicised social capital of the World Bank, challenging structural violence and the cultural violence which underpins it, while engaging in the inherently political context where it operates.

5.2. Capitalist Economic Expansion V Community Productivity

Economic development has always been the mainstay of the development industry. While trends in economics, from the demise of Keynesian economics to the rise of neo-liberalism, are mirrored in development economics, realizing economic growth has always been the means of achieving 'progress':

“The discourse of development economics gave us successive promises of affluence for the Third World through active intervention in the economy in the 1950s and 1960s, planning throughout the development era, stabilization and adjustment policies in the 1980s, and anti-interventionist “market friendly development” for the 1990s” (Escobar 1995: 58).

Mindanao is known within the Philippines as 'The Land of Promise'. Its promise lies in the rich natural resources such as produce, minerals, timber, and, most recently discovered potentially lucrative oil fields. Rich resources are combined with the faithful adoption of received development wisdom, for example “market friendly development” was pursued while simultaneously investing in education to produce human capital. Having spent up to a quarter of their national budgets on education in the 1980s (Fägerlind and Saha 1989: 3) the Philippines enjoys a current literacy rate of 92.6% (CIA 2008). However, privately owned logging and mining companies have done little in real terms to help the local economy, providing little employment opportunities beyond a limited amount of manual labour. The environmental devastation caused by their activities impacts entire communities, so that not only do they not benefit from their activity, but they also bear the cost. The only local money to be made from international logging and mining companies seems to come from the rent

sought by officials. The failure of neo-liberal development in Mindanao hasn't just been its inability to create the elusive trickle-down effect, but to contribute to an economy that actually "trickles up" (Carrol 1986, cited in Holden 2009:187).

The communities that Malikha Bridge partner with range from the urban poor to the landless rural poor, and for these communities the 'wisdom' of development economics has done little to help them, and arguably may have worsened their situation, where they were poor, they are now made destitute:

"Large parts of Africa, Latin America and Asia were poor by contemporary standards of income and consumption before colonial administrators and development planners began to identify them as poor. That does not mean they had massive destitution or that the quality of life there was abysmally poor. Destitution, or at least large-scale destitution, is a more recent phenomenon. It has been increasing among many traditionally poor communities over the last hundred years, partly as a direct result of urbanisation and development. The most glaring instances of destitution are found not in traditional isolated tribal communities, but among the poor communities that are uprooted and fragmented and move into cities as individuals or nuclear families. It is also found among landless agricultural labourers who for some reason lose their jobs in a situation where agriculture is industrialised or becomes unprofitable. They are the ones who find themselves unable to cope with the demand of an impersonal market or the culture of a modern political economy" (Nandy 2002: 115-6, cited in Weber 2010: 108).

One consequence of a capitalist model of economic expansion, the private ownership of land, has had a devastating impact on the welfare of many ethnic Muslims in Mindanao. The Muslim populations of Mindanao considered land that they occupied as theirs to use, however, a land-titling system imposed on them in the late 1960s introduced a different and foreign understanding of land ownership which was not fully understood. As a growing number of Filipino Christians settled in Mindanao they claimed land occupied by the indigenous peoples of Mindanao as 'untitled', and therefore theirs. While ethnic Muslims were eligible to apply for untitled land they did not understand that they had to ask the government for their own land. Land ownership and control over resources remains a contentious issue and at the time of my research continued to fuel the armed conflict between the MILF and Government of the Philippines. Many of the communities who partner with Malikha Bridge consist of landless agricultural labourers where seasonal work is limited and poorly paid (the other communities represent the urban poor). Their modest aspirations of substance farming are often further frustrated when they see the land unplanted.

In this context Malikha Bridge provide an alternative to development economics tied up in capitalist expansion. Their version of networking provides an alternative to capitalist economic/market expansion by broadening an understanding of productivity beyond the production of commodities for the market. In changing capitalist productive forces the social relations of production are also transformed so that the lived experiences of everyday life and the material wellbeing of the community are enhanced.

All of the projects operated through community organising, and within the recipient communities there was a strong ethos of volunteerism. This is characterised by one pre-school teacher, Minah, who as an unemployed qualified teacher volunteered and worked at a community led pre-school for several years, however she had since left the community and lived over an hour's journey from the pre-school, yet still took it upon herself to make the trip Monday to Friday to volunteer, even to the point of taking on the cost of the transportation herself. This was while studying for a Masters degree in the evenings. This was not an isolated example, in every community I visited members volunteered at a high level of commitment, on top of etching out a living for themselves. In South West Mindanao one community even formalised the volunteer movement into the 'Piyagdayaw Team' with 'core' volunteers sporting blue bibs, and it wasn't just educated community members, everyone was valued. While Minah was a qualified teacher, another volunteer, Tanisha, was not, yet she volunteered not only her time but her house, to run a pre-school for the children in her community, taking on the role as both teacher in the pre-school and as student in her own non-formal training to learn the role of a learning supporter.

Community was an important aspect of volunteerism, both in terms of consolidating ties to your community by investing in it, but also in how communities of volunteers were established. The role of community and the sense of belonging was very apparent, where individuals belonged to a community, and a strong sense of identity and kinship, as a Muslim, as a Maguindanaon, as a Tasug, as a member of this barangay, was added to: as a pre-school teacher, a farmer, a builder (of water a water tower, pre-school building, etc.), a volunteer. Identity and belonging revealed in the act of production, especially apparent in unwaged work, was not just confined to the act of production either, but also manifest in what was produced.

A commitment to communal enterprise and volunteerism suggests that their idea of development doesn't exactly map onto the hegemonic discourses of development economics. There are areas of overlap and similarities, however there are subtle nuances too. By searching for an alternative to capitalist understandings of productivity the economics of labour exchange and resource management are displaced and issues around equality, community, agency and relationships are advanced.

There is no doubting the economic benefit of both resources and production, and the economic gains it brings to the community should not be under-estimated. There was an important and recognised economic value in productivity which was not taken lightly, the majority population of the recipient communities lived at a level of poverty which kept this a very real and present concern. However, the direct economic gains should not be emphasized to the extent that they shadow out other benefits to livelihood, such as the production of moral and cultural values and identity.

In this example of a postdevelopment reading of Malikha Bridge's work I am drawn to the conclusion that what I have explored above could best be described as relating to livelihoods. For the recipient communities, rather than a concern about capitalist economic expansion, they are concerned about their livelihoods:

“Livelihood is never just a matter of finding or making shelter, transacting money, and preparing food to put on the table or exchange in the market place. It is equally a matter of the ownership and circulation of information, the management of relationships, the affirmation of personal significance and group identity, and the interrelation of each of those tasks to the other.” (Wallam. S. 1984: 22-23)

5.3. The Nation State V Strategic Complexes

Development discourse has, from its inception, considered it the task of the national government to develop a country. The nation-state has been seen both as the vehicle for development and the measurement for success, and consequently state-building has been viewed as an important element of the development processes, to the effect that it has, arguably, become impossible to distinguish between development and state-building:

“The “development” apparatus in Lesotho is not a machine for eliminating poverty that is incidentally involved with the state bureaucracy; it is the machine for reinforcing and expanding the exercise of bureaucratic state power, which incidentally takes “poverty” as its point of entry”... The “instrument effect,” then, is two-fold: alongside the institutional effect of expanding bureaucratic state power is the ideological effect of depoliticising both poverty and the state... If the “instrument-effects” of a “development” project end up forming any kind of strategically coherent or intelligible whole, that is it: the anti-politics machine” (Ferguson 1994: 255-256).

A commitment to the political utility of the nation state continues to captivate development theorists and policy makers, even in the contemporary context of increasing roles for regional and global actors that inform an emerging concept of transnational governmentality.

Policy makers and most international political theorists and analysts see little or no contradiction between an effort to consolidate neoliberal development strategies at the global level and the continued framing, and measuring, of development in terms of the nation state. (Berger and Weber 2009: 3).

The persistence of the importance of the nation-state and the associated commitment to nation building, far from declining in light of emerging assemblages of networked governmentality, have strengthened their grip, as the mergence of development and security discourses promote a liberal peace agenda with state-building at its core, with the solutions to ‘failing states’ found in the consolidating of nation-building and state-building approaches.

However, in Muslim Mindanao, the armed conflict is seen by many as a liberation struggle from the Philippine state, which is considered to have no legitimate claim over Mindanao and therefore is a colonial occupier. Instead of becoming the vehicle for development the state

can be perceived by Muslim populations in Mindanao as an obstacle to their freedom and progress. Furthermore, the agreement of “red lines” which create quasi no-go-areas for military personnel creates areas of Mindanao where the state has little reach. In contemporary development discourses this ethnic cleavage is seen as a threat to the nationstate and therefore a problem to development, with the persistence of traditional customs and attitudes a symptom of development’s failure, whose task is the “fundamental transformation of society, including a change in “preferences” and attitudes, an acceptance of change and an abandonment of many traditional ways of thinking” (Stiglitz 1998: 49). The emphasis on nation-building and a ‘modernisation’ agenda which creates the abandonment of traditional knowledge fails to take into account the complex context of Mindanao. For many in Muslim Mindanao the Philippine nation is inseparable from a Spanish and then American colonial ambition intrinsically linked to Christianisation. Many of the educated Christian Filipino populations of Luzon and the Visayas have assimilated to Western tastes in music and fashion, reproduced a legal system and constitution based on their American colonisers and embraced European Enlightenment thinking, including perceived development wisdom (adapted and modified somewhat to make it feel more Filipino). This has resulted in many Muslims in Mindanao seeing a call for the “abandonment of traditional ways of thinking” as a threat to Islamic knowledge and culture, while the “change in “preference” and attitudes” is heard as the adoption of Christian culture. In this context nation-building is interpreted as Christianisation, and the eradication of ethnic diversity.

Through networking Malikha Bridge work around the state and link up donors and recipient communities independently, who interact with each other directly. Through a myriad of different networks and enabled by the internet and social networking sites Malikha Bridge connect local communities in Mindanao with regional and global flows of resources and information. The ‘grass-roots’ character of the IMCs then navigate and negotiate these national, regional and global linkages and flows, accessing resources from Germany (knowledge and capital to build a water tower), to Canada (capital to build a public toilet), to Manila, the Philippines (Human resources and medicines to run a medical mission).

The networking approach goes beyond a simplistic understanding of the global, national and local characterised in notions of verticality and encompassment, challenging traditional conceptions of state spatialization. As Ferguson and Gupta explore in their ethnography of neo-liberal governmentality, many grassroots organisations “trump the national ace with appeals to “world opinion” and e-mail links to the international headquarters of such formidably encompassing agents of surveillance as Amnesty International... the state has no automatic right to success in claiming the vertical heights of sovereignty” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002: 989). Furthermore, the encompassment of localities within the state, and, in turn, the state within a series of increasing circles, is challenged by the acknowledgement that the ‘local’ overlap and intersect with a range of transnational domains, as Ferguson points out “local voluntary organisations in Africa, so beloved by civil society theorists, very often, on inspection, turn out to be integrally linked with national and transnational level entities” (ibid : 993).

Mindanao is no exception to the changing nature of state and global governance. The so called grassroots and local communities so often characterised as ‘civil society’ in much contemporary development literature exist in emergent global and regional assemblages that are messy and cut across each other with multiple and simultaneous connections characteristic of a rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Within Mindanao the protracted armed conflict shares the characteristics of what Duffield would call a *network war* (Duffield 2001) with regional and global dimensions. The Muslim AAGs are not isolated in their struggle, but are ideologically linked to the idea of the Islamic Nation. In the early days of their formation senior MNLF recruits were trained in Libya, Syria, Egypt or Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) camps, and Qadhafi, the then leader of Libya, was a strong supporter of the Muslim struggle in Mindanao, providing military and financial aid and advocating on their behalf at international Muslim conferences (Yegar 2002). The threat of an oil embargo on the Philippines resulted in the creation of the Tripoli agreement, signed on 23rd Dec 1976, which would become the foundation of subsequent peace talks and memorandums, and which many Muslims still feel has not been honoured fully to this day (ibid). Today the Muslim AAGs continue their tradition of nurturing international links, although to a lesser extent, with loose affiliation with Indonesian-based Jamaah Islamiyah and tenuous reported Al-Qaida links to the Abu Sayyaf group. While the Muslim AAGs of Mindanao call for self determination in the political solution of Bangsa Moro, the simplistic notion that this is organised from below, and is somehow a grassroots movement, fails to acknowledge the complexities and nuances involved, which include appeals to the international community to end discrimination and assistance from Islamic governments worldwide and transnational organisations such as the Islamic Summit and Conference of Muslim Foreign Ministers. The international characteristic of the conflict is, similarly, mirrored by the Philippine Government, which enjoys the support of US military aid. On the back of 9/11, Gloria Macapagal-Arroya, the then President of the Philippines, secured US\$92.2 million in military aid and loans (Cotton 2003) and went on to launch a full scale military offensive to pursue ‘criminal elements’ in MILF controlled territories.

Non-military movements also share these characteristics, with much development assistance to grassroot communities provided by international organisations such as the Catholic Overseas Development Agency (CAFOD), ChristianAid, UNICEF, OXFAM, USAID, etc., and many more small scale development projects sponsoring their own interventions dominated by US church groups and their Filipino heirs.

Instead of simplistic understandings of vertical encompassment between localities, states, and the global, a much messier and nuanced picture appears of emergent assemblages which cut across political arrangements, engaging and interrupting a series of intersects, to create strategic complexes (Duffield 2001).

The recognition and appropriation of global networks to their advantage has increased the agency of the recipient communities partnered with Malikha Bridge. The messy, multiple, uncontained, and unbound nature of a network represents an instable formation of power,

enabling social transformation as different actors traverse and occupy the new assemblages. The recipient communities that partner with Malikha Bridge are becoming more confident at traversing and playing the different flows from within these networks to their advantage. The outcome has been that they have the confidence to refuse assistance tied to conditions, repelling cultural imposition and advancing their own culture and knowledge. The communities are no longer 'needy' and in a position of relative helplessness that necessitates they accept all assistance regardless of the impact, but now chooses who they allow to work in their communities, and what the outcomes are. For example I witnessed one IMC leader confidently and firmly instruct a conservative Christian missionary that his small development project must either drop its condition of Christian discipleship classes or leave the community. The same leader told me how he was approached by USAID to partner with the community's pre-school project, however they wanted him to match the money they donated and as half of their money had to go on signage promoting USAID he graciously declined the offer. On another occasion he wrote to a donor church in Europe accusing them of trying to colonise him with their ideas.

6. Or Old determinants taking root?

Witnessing the work of Malikha Bridge left me both excited and concerned. The juxtaposition of these emotions came from both simultaneously seeing the potential for a radical alternative to development, and seeing the pitfalls of their approach.

The similarities between social capital and the reinterpretation of a missionary model can equally serve to consolidate them as to unsettle them. It is very difficult in the moment to know if you are witnessing the emergence of something new or the reproduction of old discourses in a new form.

The networking approach used by Malikha Bridge does have some significant drawbacks. While it does challenge power relations to a degree, it still relies on the altruistic whims of others (donor communities), and currently has not permanently or comprehensively changed the power structures at play. It may improve the lot of the communities it works in, but the effect it has to produce change more widely is untested. Furthermore, the reliance on volunteer communities only works because of widespread unemployment and inequality. One has to question the wisdom of championing a model that works precisely because of the destitution it is supposed to oppose. The IMCs are able to work for their communities precisely because they are out of work. Minah is a qualified teacher working towards her master's degree, but who cannot find employment and so is working for free. Is this a noble solution or gross injustice? The non-financial rewards of communal enterprise are important, and at present are undervalued, however my case is not to address this by underestimating the need for financial security as well, instead I would advocate a mixed economy. It may be very well to extol the non-financial virtues of livelihood, however it does help if at least one member of your household has a job in the formal economy. This was understood by my participants, who for many the only opportunity for this was to send the women of the house to the Middle East as an overseas worker. One IMC only survives because of the income

provided by the wife of the IMC leader who works as a domestic help in Lebanon to support her husband to work fulltime for the IMC (and also enables him to provide financial assistance to individuals in need within the community in the form of small gifts, as is culturally expected from a community leader).

However, while these are important questions, postdevelopment approaches are about hope, not certainty. The manifest 'post' of postdevelopment bears witness to an approach framed by uncertainty and contingency. Just as "in poststructuralism all knowledge is inseparable from the uncertain shifting language through which we come to know and express that knowing... postdevelopment work deals directly with the fundamental uncertainty that must pervade scholarly work as well as the practice of development" (McKinnin 2007: 773). In this, while situated in the hard realities of destitute and poor communities, a postdevelopment approach accepts the impossibility of an unproblematic idea of development, precisely because the indeterminate and provisional contain the potential for the emergence of something radical. While it is impossible to know if in Malikha Bridge's practice of networking we are witnessing the emergence of something new or merely old determinants taking root, a postdevelopment approach orientates itself around the hope which it creates and the potential of the emergence of an alternative.

Hope should not be mistaken as something abstract or nebulous, but as Rima Dali, a Syrian activist reminds us: "Hope is not something abstract for us. When we help each other there's hope, when we try to open dialogue, bridges with other people who have different views, we look for hope – day in, day out" (Newsnight 14th April 2012). Hope, therefore is something created, and the role of creating is evident in Malikha Bridge's name. According to the Malikha Bridge website the creation of connections is likened to the Tagalog word create:

'Malikha' is from the Tagalog root word 'likha' meaning 'create'. The prefix 'ma' denotes an ability to create. What makes the Tagalog term different from its English translation is the dynamic process of an ability to create in the present. In short, it assumes 'doing' and to retain the identity the 'doing' is ongoing (Malikha Bridge website 2008).

The image invoked of the making, remaking and on-going making of small bridges conjured here speaks to the uncertain hope found in a postdevelopment approach. The hope of new and peaceful relationships, in dignity, is not a distant dream but made in the here and now. And yet the ongoing nature of the creation suggests indeterminacy, allowing for improved creations to occur, revealing the unfixed nature of the creation. There is a strong sense of utopia in this description, that we can will-fully imagine and create a different future in the present. For Bloch (1986) the future consists of real possibilities and the utopian function is to affect the future so as to realise those possibilities. The link between the 'likha' and the 'ma', suggests this participation, while the ongoing nature points to the Not Yet and its open-endedness. The marriage of the present and the ongoing, and their seemingly paradoxical synchronicity, found in Malikha Bridge's description of the word malikha, seems consistent with Bloch's idea of an opened-ended utopia orientated around the Not Yet. For further reading on the utopian element of Malikha Bridge's work see Horner 2013.

7. Conclusion

I feel that I have to draw a conclusion on my question: [is this] a postdevelopment alternative in Mindanao? Although I maintain that it is impossible to know at the time if one is witnessing the emergence of something radical or merely innovative reproductions of old discourses, I will conclude that I *want* to believe that this is a postdevelopment alternative.

The networking praxis facilitated by Malikha Bridge addresses many of the critiques on the development project sketched in the opening paragraphs of this paper:

It replaces the hierarchical technocratic development experts with a horizontal network of nodes and connections, and with its emphasis on partnership instead of intervention seeks to disturb ideas of empowerment understanding that “the will to empower others hinges upon positioning oneself as expert with the power to diagnose and correct a deficit of power in someone else... Empowerment is still, in short, a relationship of power” (Murray Li 2007: 275). Through removing donor (and Christian) conditions from the resources and by responding to the requests of communities rather than imposing their own development agendas onto them Malikha Bridge seem to be facilitating genuine community agency. Spend time with Malikha Bridge and the IMCs and it becomes hard to sketch a picture of the Muslim communities of Mindanao as inferior, residual, non-productive and ignorant localities.

It does not de-politicise the development process, but tackles questions of interests and power straight on. Through vetting resources and donors Malikha Bridge directly address issues around conditionality and place the productivity of the resources directly into the hands of the Muslim communities. Furthermore the training Malikha Bridge facilitates permeates with the understanding of Conscientization, encouraging a critical consciousness. They also use their connections to advocate on behalf of Muslim communities, and share their stories to increase awareness of their situations, but also where possible sharing the opportunities so that ethnic Muslims can themselves share their experiences directly, for example facilitating an IMC leader sharing his idea of a political solution to the conflict at a Catholic college.

It reduces dependency through capacity building. There are short falls that need to be acknowledged. I am not sure if the networking would succeed without Malikha Bridge, and my concern is that when Malikha Bridge leave the communities will be left once again isolated from these new found connections. In this sense the networking practice may also increase dependency (on Malikha Bridge), and be found to be unsustainable. However, these issues do not seem to be lost on Malikha Bridge, who have a long term goal that once a connection has been made the communities will have the confidence to approach that connection directly for future requests, thus removing Malikha Bridge from the equation. I am also interested in the potential for the communities to start to forge their own links outside of Malikha Bridge’s network. While the capacity building focuses on, for example, the maintenance of the water system, the IMC are also developing their skills in traversing and

negotiating different international networks. The wife of the IMC leader who worked as a domestic help in Lebanon and sent money home to support the IMC poses an interesting question: When she was in Lebanon was she part of the international network? This may be an example of how the IMCs could start to use other global networks. The Philippines already has well established and active overseas workers associations, some of which are involved in community development projects, and now an IMC leader's wife has a completely new network of contacts in the Lebanon. To my knowledge this potential has not been developed yet, and my fear is that the communities may be relying too heavily on Malikha Bridge. Some may also feel an unnecessarily and unsolicited gratitude towards Malikha Bridge which may hold them back from pursuing other avenues. However, Bloch would argue that possibilities exist as part of reality even if they are not realized, and the possibility to reduce dependency through multiple networks is contained within this praxis.

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