Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

OPEN ACCESS

Civil society activists and vulnerability in South India: the relational politics of life history methods and development research

Matt Baillie Smith and Katy Jenkins

Department of Social Sciences, Northumbria University, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

ABSTRACT

Life history methods are gaining popularity in Development research, linked to attempts to capture narratives marginalised by dominant accounts of Development. In this paper, we reflect on using life history methods with NGO activists in India. We explore how this approach led us to develop particular understandings of the participants as 'vulnerable', and the implications of this for the research process and the knowledges it produced. We explore how activists' individual biographies were interwoven with institutional narratives, complicating but also enriching our understanding of activists' experiences of Development. Secondly, we analyse the relationality of our subjects' vulnerability and our own positionality as global North Development scholars. We reflect on how our engagement with Development actors we consider as vulnerable takes place through and against the relational histories and presents that brought us together. We explore the implications of this for the ways the research created both discursive and physical spaces for meeting and talking, and what this means for our approach to vulnerability. This requires an uncomfortable acknowledgement that Development research may reproduce vulnerabilities, even as it seeks to challenge them. The paper contributes to broader theorising of vulnerability, recognising vulnerability as embedded in the relationalities of the research moment.

Activistes de la société civile et vulnérabilité en Inde du Sud: politiques relationnelles des méthodes d'histoire de vie et de la recherche du développement

RÉSUMÉ

Les méthodes d'histoire de vie sont en train de gagner en popularité dans la recherche du Développement, liée aux tentatives de saisir des discours marginalisés avec les comptes rendus dominants du Développement. Dans cet article, nous examinons l'utilité des méthodes d'histoire de vie avec les activistes d'ONG en Inde. Nous explorons comment cette approche nous a menés à développer des vues particulières de participants comme « vulnérables », les implications de cela pour le processus de recherche et les connaissances qui en ont découlé. Nous explorons comment les

CONTACT Katy Jenkins ✉ katy.jenkins@northumbria.ac.uk

biographies individuelles des activistes étaient entrelacées avec les discours institutionnels, compliquant mais aussi enrichissant notre compréhension des expériences de Développement des activistes. Deuxièmement, nous analysons la relationnalité de la vulnérabilité de nos sujets et de notre propre positionnement en tant que chercheurs mondiaux du Développement du Nord. Nous réfléchissons sur la façon dont notre engagement avec les acteurs du Développement, que nous considérons comme vulnérables, se passe à travers et contre les histoires relationnelles et les présents qui nous ont réunis. Nous explorons les implications de cela sur les manières dont la recherche a créé des espaces à la fois discursifs et physiques pour se rencontrer et parler et ce que cela signifie pour notre approche de la vulnérabilité. Cela implique de reconnaître avec une certaine gêne que la recherche du Développement risque de reproduire les vulnérabilités, alors même qu'elle tente de les défier. Cet article contribue à une théorisation plus large de la vulnérabilité, en reconnaissant la vulnérabilité comme incorporée dans les relationnalités du moment de la recherche.

Los activistas de la sociedad civil y la vulnerabilidad en el sur de India: la política relacional de los métodos de historia de vida y de la investigación para el desarrollo

RESUMEN

Los métodos de historia de vida se están haciendo cada vez más populares en la investigación para el desarrollo, vinculados a intentos de capturar narrativas marginadas por informes de desarrollo dominantes. En este trabajo, se reflexiona sobre el uso de métodos de historia de vida con activistas de ONGs en la India. Se explora cómo este enfoque ha llevado a desarrollar una comprensión particular de los participantes como 'vulnerables', y las implicaciones de esto para el proceso de investigación y los conocimientos que produjo. Se explora cómo las biografías individuales de los activistas se entrelazan con las narrativas institucionales, lo que complica y también enriquece el entendimiento de las experiencias de desarrollo de los activistas. En segundo lugar, se analiza la relacionalidad de la vulnerabilidad de nuestros sujetos y nuestra propia posicionalidad como académicos globales de desarrollo del norte. Se reflexiona sobre cómo se lleva a cabo el compromiso con los agentes de desarrollo que se consideran vulnerables a través y en contra de las historias relacionales y los presentes que nos han unido. Se exploran las implicaciones de esto para las formas en que la investigación creó espacios tanto discursivos como físicos para reunirse y hablar, y lo que esto significa para nuestro enfoque de la vulnerabilidad. Esto requiere que se reconozca de manera incómoda que la investigación para el desarrollo puede reproducir vulnerabilidades, incluso cuando busca desafiarlas. El documento contribuye a una teorización más amplia de la vulnerabilidad que reconoce a la vulnerabilidad como incrustada en las relacionalidades del momento de investigación.

Introduction: vulnerability and development

Vulnerability is a central organising concept in the complex web of transnational practices, knowledges and representations that make up the global Development industry. The Development sector has been largely predicated on the idea of the existence of the vulnerable 'other' – the poor, marginalised, displaced resident of the global south to whom Development is 'delivered' in order to address their vulnerability and perceived 'lack'.[1] Bankoff

(2001) articulates this in terms of the way in which Development discourses, particularly around natural disasters, serve to render the non-Western world precarious and 'unsafe'. Ideas and scales of vulnerability are key features of Development strategies, evidenced in, for example, the targeting of extreme poverty, a focus on communities most exposed to climate change or projects supporting groups whose gender, identity or ethnicity produce particular exposure to structural violence. In this context, significant bodies of scholarship and policy analysis have addressed the multiple vulnerabilities produced through global inequality and targeted by the development industry (e.g. Naudé, Santos-Paulino, & McGillivray, 2009; UNDP, 2014), even if the word vulnerability has not always been the dominant frame. A key concern within these debates and wider critiques of capitalist development and Development interventions has been a vulnerability defined, in Liamputtong's (2007) terms, by people's relative invisibility and their 'marginality [and] lack of opportunity to voice their concerns' (p. 7) (e.g. see debates on participation (e.g. Cooke & Kothari, 2001) and feminist scholarship (e.g. Gluck & Patai, 1991)).

Representations of individuals and communities easily recognisable as vulnerable are also central in strategies to mobilise public and political support and raise funds for development. Through events such as Comic Relief and wider charitable appeals and campaigns, notions of vulnerability, particularly allied to the iconography of the child (Manzo, 2008) sit at the centre of popular cultural and emotional framings of global inequality and action to alleviate it. Such narrations of vulnerabilities in the global South do not necessarily challenge power or provide meaningful or productive accounts of marginality, and may even achieve the opposite, portraying poor people's lives as 'a permanent emergency' (Bankoff, 2001, p. 25).

A focus on the 'vulnerable' as a key subject of Development interventions is critically important, particularly in the context of the structural violence of neoliberalism and the growing gulf between rich and poor at local and global scales. But there is also a need to destabilise how vulnerability is constructed only as an 'object' for, and hence separate in some ways from, Development, since this risks reproducing popular and policy mainstreamed accounts of Development as an uncontentious form of rescue for the poor. As a professionalised and neoliberalised Development industry works transnationally to mobilise and legitimate particular knowledges, actors and authorities (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2012), we argue that attention is needed both to the vulnerabilities this can produce, and the challenges of researching them. In this paper, instead of focusing on the ways the Development industry addresses (or not) the needs of vulnerable 'beneficiaries', we consider the vulnerabilities the industry can itself produce. Our research uses biographical methods to explore the less visible and clear-cut vulnerabilities faced by civil society activists in South India – vulnerabilities which relate to NGO activists' structural location within the Development industry, and, as part of this, their exclusion or temporary access to the global civic spaces in which development professionals and their knowledges are legitimated. The research aims to foreground the ways in which Development impacts on individuals over time, and in ways that are outside an accustomed focus on 'beneficiaries', seeking to move outside the focus on Development's programmed effects, and to understand how Development as a complex of activities and relationalities produces vulnerabilities amongst those whose actions, relationships, trajectories and knowledges make up the industry. Our use of the term 'Development' reflects Hart's (2001) definition of 'big D' Development as a set of intentional processes – 'a post-second world war project of intervention in the "third world" that emerged in the context of decolonization and the cold war' (p. 650).

We begin by exploring biographical methods and their relationship to Development scholarship, before introducing ourselves and our research. We then go on to critically analyse our understandings of the activists as vulnerable, reflecting on the interviewees' blurring of the personal and the institutional in their accounts. In discussing the challenges these narratives posed to our initial assumptions, we analyse the questions this raises about our construction of the research 'subject', and how their vulnerability can be understood. We go on to link this to ideas of relationality and a consideration of the discursive and physical spaces constructed during the research, reflecting on the degree to which we risked reproducing as much as contesting the relations that produced the activists' vulnerability.

Biographical methods: unsettling dominant narratives of development?

Life history or oral history approaches focus on eliciting the narratives of individuals as they reflect on their life, usually in the form of an extended interview(s) in which the interviewee is given the space to speak freely, foregrounding events and experiences that are most salient to them. The biographical accounts produced are not 'factual' representations but capture the particular subjectivities of the interviewee at a particular time, providing an inevitably partial account that reflects the narrator's present circumstances as much as their past (Harding, 2006; Miles & Crush, 1993). As part of this, they are also relational in that they are produced through an interaction between the researcher and the researched.

Oral histories have been extensively used by historians and anthropologists as a method of recording ordinary people's accounts of the past, particularly in reclaiming community histories of struggle in the North. However, their emphasis has been on documenting individual accounts 'as supplementary sources of data or fact' (Miles & Crush, 1993, p. 92) In contrast, feminist researchers have adopted life history techniques not simply as a means of recording the lives of ordinary people but as part of a broader political project to give voice to marginalised women in the global North and South (Gluck & Patai, 1991). This notion of biographical research as emancipatory for vulnerable participants has been taken up across the social sciences in recent years (Harding, 2006). Harding (2006), citing Rustin (2000), suggests that this growing emphasis on individuals needs to be located in relation to the 'late modern focus on the individual and reflexivity' and the emphasis on the 'subjective and the cultural'. This focus on the self is also part of a move in Development scholarship to pay 'closer attention to development's routines, practices, and subjectivities' (Lewis & Mosse, 2006, p. 6), underlining the extent to which uncovering private stories and personal networks is central to developing more nuanced understandings of macro-level processes of social and economic change (Larner & Laurie, 2010).

Our research on activists in Peru and South India has explored how activists' professional and personal biographies reveal the operation of power in global civil society and the aid industry, and the ways this may be both constraining and enabling (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2011, 2012). We have shown elsewhere (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2012) how the Development knowledges and practices of the activists we discuss in this paper are produced through their negotiation of personal and career aspirations, commitments to their 'home community', strategic openness to donor organisations, exclusion from global civic spaces and changing regional policy. Through this, we can begin to see how subjectivities are a critical part of making sense of how Development is done in particular moments and places, and can understand how Development can work to marginalise and produce vulnerabilities over time.

Our use of biographical methods started with a commitment to promoting more just forms of development by foregrounding marginalised voices and knowledges. But such aims are not straightforward, resonating with much critiqued 'participation' in Development (Cooke & Kothari, 2001), and other attempts to 'give voice' in situations of continuing unequal power relationships where particular subjectivities may be being produced as much as liberated or empowered. For example, Lind (2003) argues that although the publication of Domitila de Chungara's life history as an activist in a Bolivian tin mining community gave her international prominence for several years, her life has changed little in material terms and she 'continues to live in deep economic poverty' (p. 233). Nevertheless, such activist biographies have been widely used in documenting everyday narratives of struggle in the lives of activists (particularly women) and marginalised communities in the global South, especially in Latin America (see, amongst many others, Burgos, 1994; Viezzer, 1977), and are perceived to provide scope for the reader to make sense of macro-level processes of social change through the lens of individual experiences. However, as Miles and Crush (1993) and Harding (2006) recognise in relation to biographies more broadly, such activist testimonials inevitably provide a partial and subjective account of the events narrated, and are not objective historical truths, but dependent on the cultural, social and historical context in which they are constructed, their perceived purpose and intended audience (Smith, 1999). Shank and Nagar (2013) reflect on the complexities of this in relation to Nagar's work with the Sangtin writers, shedding light on the ways in which processes of autobiographical storytelling involve 'a constant negotiation of vulnerabilities' (p. 98), as particular elements of individuals' lives are brought to the fore, or are kept hidden, depending on the socio-political context, the audience and the purpose that the narrative is to be put to.

Biographical approaches have not been widely used in critical development research, beyond a few notable exceptions (Lewis, 2008; McKinnon, 2007; Miles & Crush, 1993; Slim & Thompson, 1993; Yarrow, 2008). However, as McKinnon (2008) observes:

> … processes of subject formation are also processes in and through which dominant discourses may be reconfigured, shifted or combated. By examining the daily struggles of development professionals, it becomes possible to see clearly the productive possibilities that may emerge. (p. 290)

Our research began from the premise that life history research could provide an opportunity for less prominent Development actors to foreground their knowledge and expertise as they make sense of their past and present experiences. We hoped that it might also provide a space for them to reflect on how they position themselves both within and against dominant narratives of Development, challenging the assumption that development expertise is only provided by Northern professionalised Development workers.

Situating ourselves and our research

In 2009, we conducted 15 life history interviews with NGO activists in and around Madurai and Pondicherry, South India. The research aimed to capture the diverse trajectories of Development activists in local South Indian NGOs and the multiple ways they engage with, or sometimes are excluded from, the global Development industry, and how these processes and practices shape their cosmopolitan dispositions over time and space (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2012). We were particularly concerned with understanding the subjectivity of actors largely neglected within most accounts of Development and often marginalised from

decision-making processes, despite rhetorics to the contrary (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2012) – global South NGO activists whom we characterise as 'intermediate', in that they fall between the grassroots, on the one hand, and the professionalised and globally networked on the other. This intermediate status is, as we will go on to argue, of central importance in shaping their vulnerabilities within the Development sector, as well as how they negotiate these vulnerabilities.

Recent years have seen a growing interrogation of the relationships between cosmopolitanism and Development (see, amongst many others, Baillie Smith, Laurie, Hopkins, & Olson, 2013; Berry & Gabay, 2009; Held, 2006; Kothari, 2008). Most relevant here are analyses of subaltern cosmopolitanisms (e.g. Datta, 2009; Gidwani, 2006; Kothari, 2008), emphasising how cosmopolitanism can be strategic, practical and political and rooted in the everyday. In this light, our work interrogates how a strategic openness to difference influences the negotiation of global civic spaces by actors who are neither 'subalterns' nor the elite mobile citizens of International NGOs (INGOs) (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2012). We argue that being cosmopolitan can be understood as forming part of the repertoires of people negotiating vulnerability, resonating with Wiles (2011) assertion that whilst '[v]ulnerability may be conceptualised as fragility and (or) weakness, […] it could also be conceptualised as openness, susceptibility, and receptiveness' (p. 579).

Working with a local Development NGO with whom one of the authors had a long-standing connection as both an academic and, previously, a development practitioner, access was obtained to activists from a range of NGOs, all of whom had been involved in Development and what might broadly be described as 'activism' in various guises for at least 20 years. We are therefore specifically focusing on older activists, individuals in their 40s and 50s. Whilst we acknowledge that the notion of an 'activist' tends to be rather slippery (Maxey, 1999), it is somewhat less so in the Indian context where the term is more readily used to describe those individuals who actively and consciously engage in, and are embedded within, networks and processes aimed at fomenting social and political change, including but not limited to grassroots organising, social movements, NGOs, community volunteering and faith-based organising. Our research participants were therefore individuals identified by the partner NGO as prominent local 'activists', all of whom also self-identified as activists in the narratives they related. For many, their NGO work was only one element of their activism, which was characterised by a multiplicity of everyday practices (Jenkins, 2014; Maxey, 1999). We included activists working in organisations with a range of development interests, from women's activism and child labour, to disaster relief and Dalit activism, aiming to capture the different ways cosmopolitan subjectivities might be shaped through particular areas of expertise and knowledge and how these were constrained or opened up by the Development industry.

Interviewees were not selected as representatives of a particular NGO but for their individual trajectories – we aimed to capture their experiences of activism through, beyond and across particular organisations. For example, the activist biography of Simon recounts his early participation in anti-China street protests at the age of 8 or 9, his heavy involvement in student politics at college, how he later combined his activism with a job as an academic, and most recently his role in helping run a small NGO. Nevertheless, despite our initial focus on individual trajectories, the blurring of individual and institutional histories subsequently became a key factor in our analysis, as we explore below. Interviewees were not selected due to a perception that they were 'vulnerable' but rather the notion of vulnerability emerged

later as a way of making sense of their precarious position within the Development industry.

Interviews were conducted by both authors at various locations; in some cases we visited activists' organisations, at other times they came to where we were staying, something that for one activist was explicitly related to concerns about being made vulnerable through being publically associated with international visitors (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2012). We were alert to this concern throughout the fieldwork (and beyond), and this made us particularly sensitive to issues around securing anonymity of both organisations and individuals.[2] Like McKinnon (2007) in her work with Development professionals in Thailand, we were specifically concerned with individuals' activist biographies rather than entire life histories; all interviews started with the question 'Can you tell us about how you became an activist and how your experiences have changed during your time as an activist?' Interviews were tape recorded and mostly conducted in English, with transcription (and some translation from Tamil)[3] undertaken by our partner NGO.

Understanding intermediate NGO activists' vulnerabilities

Our focus was on the position of actors whose intermediate status within Development produced particular subjectivities. We conceptualise this intermediate status in terms of their positioning in-between key foci of Development policy, research and practice, simultaneously negotiating local, national and transnational discourses and spaces of development and acting as 'brokers and translators' (Lewis & Mosse, 2006). This intermediate position produces vulnerabilities and exclusions which have not been readily identified in the literature (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2011, 2012); their position at the intersection of multiple development arenas means that they are much less researched than those situated firmly at the grassroots or within the global sphere. Their intermediate status produces a less immediately apparent vulnerability that does not easily 'fit' established work on Development or on vulnerability. Further, these activists' positions within NGOS often automatically frame them, in the Indian context, as privileged, resonating with Chatterjee's (2008) identification of Indian civil society as the preserve of the middle class.

The vulnerability of this group particularly stems from the insecurity they face as workers in the rapidly changing context of the Development industry in India, where priorities and foci shift frequently, most recently in relation to the reduction of aid to India:

> In the past ten years the government would mark an area as a developed area but actually lack continues. The government data would point out that education has been achieved, infrastructure is available. The government announced like that. International donors would think that Tamil Nadu is a fully developed state. They would move to another area. In this situation, funding is reduced for Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry. No funding is given for this area. (Rajesh)

This insecurity was articulated by several participants, who particularly highlighted the rapid influx of resources for disaster relief immediately following the 2004 tsunami, but also its equally rapid disappearance and the consequences of this for small-medium NGOs and their workforce. The anxieties this generated are highlighted by two activists from Pondicherry, whose organisations grew massively following the tsunami:

> One of the things I always find a threat, irrespective of donor or which NGOs is they all have a very time bound approach. (…) And all of sudden at the end of three years you are told that thanks for your hard work and all. And that man they don't get a job. Here, for the last three months, I've been seeing, almost every 30th of month, some long faces. When I ask them, they say that

> we don't know what will happen today or in the evening. And what happens is a minimum of
> 10 or 15 people are losing their job every month. No project and no funding is coming. So what
> is going to happen? (John)

> The flight called 'Pondicherry Action' is flying in a very high level and it is slowly coming [down].
> Still it has not landed. It would take another three or four months. After tsunami, we had around
> 250 staff. Now we have 40. Slowly we are coming down, completing the projects, handing them
> over to the community, reporting to the donors … (Paul)

Understanding the position of these intermediate activists is important because they embody wider structural vulnerabilities inherent in an increasingly neoliberalised aid model. At one level, their vulnerability is a function of professional engagement in Development work with vulnerable and marginalised groups, at a scale that is of diminishing interest to donors and the aid industry. But their vulnerability actually comes less with a particular status, and is as much to do with their intermediate and in-between position – their movement between a professional and personal vulnerability, and the ways these intersect, overlap and flow into and out of each other. The situation of John, who had previously worked for a large INGO and who had now returned to work for a smaller organisation in Pondicherry illustrates the challenge of defining vulnerability. He spoke in strong terms about his lack of pension and support for old age as a result of poor conditions linked to working for an INGO, conveying a strong sense of vulnerability and concern. He is at once a 'Big Man' (Yarrow, 2008, p. 338) of the NGO world, and apparently relatively comfortably off, but he is simultaneously vulnerable as the aid industry moves on and employment opportunities disappear. His commitment to the INGO is now having impacts on his family as he reaches retirement age:

> And now I am 56. What is next? Now the next three or four years' time I have to retire and what's
> going to be after my retirement? Of course there are people who continue to work as consultants.
> But I am tired. It's nearly 35 years now. I have been travelling travelling and doing all sorts of
> jobs. I don't think that my health is that good enough to manage me going as a consultant. (…)
> Retirement means really a retirement. The time I have denied for my family all these years. (John)

This may not then be the 'normal' vulnerability of aid and Development, and John's status and apparent wealth place him in a far less vulnerable position – as far as we could tell – to the majority of the Indian population. But if we were to frame this in the context of current labour relations debates in the UK and elsewhere, around issues such as casualisation, temporary and zero hours contracts, and the decline of workplace pension schemes, we would understand him as vulnerable.

The difficulty of finding the individual and the blurring of the personal with the professional and institutional, reveals the activists as simultaneously embodying multiple vulnerabilities and privileges. This situation provides a useful lens on the interplay of the professional and the personal in understanding vulnerability, but also presented a 'challenge' given our interest in exploring a less institutionalised account of civil society and Development: a seeming reluctance on the part of the interviewee, or failure on our parts as interviewers, to elucidate activists' individual narratives. Despite different prompts and sub-questions, when asked about their particular story of activism, the majority of interviewees narrated the stories of the organisations they were working for or had worked for. Personal and organisational histories were blurred and difficult to disentangle (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2012); the 'I' we had thought we were interested in was consequently often consigned to a background role, with attempts to probe further often recast in terms of an organisational identity and history. On some occasions, interviewees mapped their history and that of their organisation onto

well-established genealogies of development practice, referencing key approaches such as 'basic needs', resonating with Yarrow's (2008) highlighting of the performative aspects of narration. However, in doing so, the interviewees also provided an established – if contestable – narrative of development which then displaced the details of their subjectivity within that narrative (see also McKinnon, 2008). This can be seen in the response of one interviewee to the question of how the experience of being an activist had changed over the past 20 years, which he recounts as a series of shifting development priorities and initiatives:

> It took me those [first] three years to build some kind of a platform to stand upon with [the NGO]'s ideology. (…)I slowly started the community mobilisation and promoting awareness. (…)Then we identified the real problem of the community in our operational area. Then we formulated the projects for these people. (…) Within two years we stopped the activities. (…) and then the government asked us to take up the women development programmes for the first time. It was a good opportunity as I got recognition from the government. So I got this opportunity for collaboration with them. Our task was to converge all the resources of the women groups like Micro-credit and Self-Help Groups towards the under-privileged community of women. (…) In the beginning we started social empowerment. Now we have shifted to economic development. (Paul)

We initially felt that what was missing was the 'particular' of the stories of the individuals with whom we were talking. This can be seen in interviewees' discussions of their overseas experiences. Participation in international meetings or visits to Western Europe or the USA was defined by most interviewees as key moments in their careers and personal development. Whilst interviewees did reflect on what opportunities these international engagements opened up for them and their organisations, when we asked about personal experiences of such opportunities, we were unable to elicit further detail. This is illustrated below in the separate responses of two activists to our question about whether they had faced challenges interacting in the transnational spaces of which they spoke (coincidentally both in Brazil), the World Social Forum (WSF) in the case of Matthew and an NGO training programme in the case of Jagdish:

> There are different types of learning. Mostly positive learning. The situation is totally different. Land holding is totally different there. In India, we are talking about small and marginal farmers. Here in India, marginal farmers means below 2.5 acres. Up to 5 acres, small farmers. But in Brazil, even a single farmer has around two thousand acres or five thousand hectares of land. Totally different situation. So we could not take whatever information we could collect there to India. We learnt and just modified them to fit the local conditions. (Jagdish)

> With the World Social Forum, the important thing is to bring all the activists from different corners of the world. That itself is something meaningful. But how far, we can articulate to become a force, becomes difficult as such. But this time Belem, Belem is very far from here. Brazil at another end, it was not a place for global meeting [the World Social Forum]; it was in the Amazon forest. So, from India there were only a few participants because the travel itself is very costly. But the important thing I saw is, Amazon forest is kind of the lungs of the world. Lungs are the oxygen producing place. So that forest has to be protected. The meaning for conducting this programme there is for that purpose. The forest there is protected and also the indigenous people. (Matthew)

Rather than reflecting on any personal challenges, both responses are instead more generic and focused on the knowledge they gained for their organisations from the event. Jagdish's discussion is framed by the challenges for his NGO in applying the knowledge offered by such transnational experiences, whilst Matthew reflects on the choice of location for the WSF and how that framed the ideas he took away from the event back to his organisation. Questions asking 'what it was like' or 'how it felt' to be at such an event in terms of day-to-day

issues tended to be met with confusion; personal experiences were thus obscured or down-played. We felt as if individual biographies remained concealed, prompting us to reflect on whether we were asking impertinent questions, including ones which were perceived to question the authority, expertise or skill of the interviewee, rather than opening up spaces for their expertise to be recognised.

Reflecting on the challenges of disentangling the personal and institutional, highlights issues of trust, openness and vulnerability and the need to interrogate the implicit assump-tion of researchers that interviewees are willing and able to reflect openly on themselves and their experiences (Lewis, 2008). As Yarrow (2008) observes, 'it is a mistake to assume that people everywhere regard biographical information as interesting or revealing in the way that many in the West imagine' (p. 336). Identifying the activists' responses as problematic because we felt their individual narrative was missing is to effectively construct a subjectivity into which we expected the activists to fit, itself potentially invoking or producing a further sense of vulnerability or exposure:

> … biographical research (in both social science and oral history) tends assume a biographical 'I' who is typically self reflexive and prepared to speak publicly about his/her experiences. This biographical 'I' is one who is expected to demonstrate a specific form of rationality: drawing les-sons from the past and using these to inform future plans. This subject, especially in oral history, is positioned as potentially empowered through the narration of his/her past experience as it becomes visible to and acknowledged by self and others. The questions that follow are: how do interviewees take up, rework or refuse the positions created for them in advance by researchers? To what extent does the interviewee become the 'I' the researcher expects and wants him/her to be? And, if biographical subjects are assumed to have agency, do they demonstrate the sort of agency and rationality expected by the researcher? Or, do they do it differently? (Harding, 2006)

The intermediate status of the activists we interviewed, and their organisations, is again important to consider here. Their position working at the interface of local, national and global processes and institutions may accentuate their actual or perceived vulnerability and thus their desire and ability to reflect openly on their position within macro-level processes. This is particularly pertinent given that researchers conducting biographical research with civil society actors who occupy less precarious positions have not encountered such reticence to recount personal narratives (Lewis, 2008; Mawdsley, Townsend, Porter, & Oakley, 2002). Additionally, it is important to situate our interviewees' responses in the broader context of diminished international donor engagement in South India, particularly shaped by the gov-ernment prioritisation of poverty reduction in other states, and the challenges this presents for small NGOs and their continued survival. Consequently, and linked to the ways we were introduced to each other (discussed below), activists' approaches may also have been strongly shaped by the particular challenges faced by their institutions, and a familiarity with presenting narratives that might serve to generate much needed income. Here, again we see the blurring of individual and institutional narratives, and indeed vulnerabilities, with the fortunes and livelihoods of individual activists closely intertwined with those of their organisations (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2012):

> For me, starting the organisation was very difficult. Moreover finance is an important component. (…) I struggled for three years. I travelled to many places on a bicycle and I didn't even take food for one or two days together. (Paul)

> So this is the time that I started feeling that my friends … they all now are in very good positions. Some of them are now even become chief engineers and some of them are professors in Ana University. And whenever I look at them or I meet them I feel regret that I have chosen the field of NGO sector. And ultimately landing up in the problem of insecure feeling. (John)

Unpicking this blurring of personal, professional and organisational narratives requires us to re-frame our initial concern at the apparent absence of personal reflections, and instead recognise the particular ways in which we were constructing the participants' vulnerabilities in the first place. Life histories are relational – they develop between researched and researcher – pointing to the need to understand how the research itself and we, as researchers, fit into the complex ways in which vulnerabilities are shaped through engagement in the Development industry. Grappling with these challenges led us to explore the ways multiple relationalities shaped the discursive and physical research spaces of the research, working through and against Development and creating instability and contestation around the doing of the research.

Vulnerability, relationalities and life history research

If we are to argue that activists' cosmopolitan subjectivities are negotiated through and against Development and the transnational encounters it produces (Baillie Smith & Jenkins, 2012), then we need to acknowledge and interrogate how such encounters also take place in our research, and how we are also involved in that process of negotiation. Pillow's notion of pursuing an 'uncomfortable reflexivity', 'a reflexivity that seeks to know while at the same time situat[ing] this knowing as tenuous' (Pillow 2003 in Nairn, Munro, & Smith, 2005, p. 222) is useful here in conceptualising the interview as a productive relational space. In this section, we consider the multiple and overlapping relationalities through which our engagement with the activists took place. We particularly reflect on ambiguities and contestation in the construction of the discursive and physical spaces of the research, and reflect on how our research became part of the relations and structures that produced the activists' vulnerabilities even as it sought to challenge them. In this way, we explore how, in Harding's (2006) terms, the 'I' of the activists was constructed.

Conceptualising the interview process as relational acknowledges power relations, but also demands we bring our 'Northern' selves into the process, contra the 'othering' histories and traditions of much Development scholarship. As well as drawing on the extensive feminist theorising of positionalities within the interview space itself (Alcoff, 1991–1992; England, 1994), this involves recognising that the 'stories' that we are told will never be 'identical to that which the same narrator would give to another person' (Devereux cited in Behar, 1996). This underlines a need to write the 'self' in (Cotterill & Letherby, 1993) as part of recognising that critical Development researchers – like the Development industry – work 'in' and 'against' (Kothari, 2005, p. 62) Development's histories and dominant narratives. It also reminds us that we cannot escape the relations we may want to problematise, but should reflect critically on how and where our approach actually reinforces such relations, where it may open up spaces to unsettle them, and when it may do both.

The critical capacity of our biographical methodology may thus arise as much in exploring and understanding the layers of intersubjectivity in the interview process as in the 'formal' data it generated. As Alcoff (1991–1992) reminds us: 'Who is speaking, who is spoken of, and who listens is a result, as well as an act, of political struggle. Simply put, the discursive context is a political arena' (p. 15). An emphasis on understanding life history approaches in terms of intersubjectivity would seem to fit our desire to pay attention to voice, positionality, and understanding subjects' vulnerabilities. However, we should also recognise the ways in which the positionalities of the 'researcher' as well as the 'subject' and the 'individual' are themselves multiple and fluid and co-constituted and negotiated in the research moment (Chacko, 2004).

Intersubjectivity focuses attention on the relationality of subjectivity. Whilst there are multiple definitions of intersubjectivity, rooted in diverse disciplines and traditions, we follow Gillespie and Cornish's (2009) inclusive definition of intersubjectivity as:

> the variety of relations between perspectives. Those perspectives can belong to individuals, groups, or traditions and discourses, and they can manifest as both implicit (or taken for granted) and explicit (or reflected upon) (p. 19)

At both the level of North–South encounters and the lived experience of being an NGO activist in South India working between different Development spaces, we can see the significance of intersubjectivity to development thinking and practice. Intersubjectivity is also critical to our conception of cosmopolitanism in terms of an openness to difference as this is practiced in the encounters fostered by Development and global civic spaces. How we were introduced to each other then becomes increasingly significant for defining the space in which our subjectivities interact, as individuals' histories, presents, engagements with, and resistances to, Development surface in the research moment. As Cotterill and Letherby (1993) recognise, 'All research contains elements of autobiography and biography, both intellectual *and* personal. Autobiographies and biographies not only record the life of one individual, they are in a very real sense documents of many lives' (p. 68).

Reflecting on the relationalities of the interview space, we now realise that it was significant that one of the authors' own and family history of engaging with India and with South Indian NGOs, particularly as a former 'practitioner', was used by our partner organisation as both an introduction and legitimation when we first met interviewees.[4] This then necessitated stepping outside the comfort and formality of a professional identity, and talking openly about the potentially contentious topics of his father's volunteering history in the 1960s and grandfather's colonial era presence, their legacies, and how these came together with a changing professional engagement with India and Development. This at one level problematised any presumed encounter between academics and practitioners that our interviewees may have anticipated. On the other hand, that the other (younger, female) researcher (who did not have this practitioner experience) did not receive this introduction but rather was introduced as an academic who researched activism, may also have complicated and confused the setting and understandings of our subjectivities; were we coming at this as academics or in solidarity as activists? Alternatively, did that activist history locate us within the elite and Northern-dominated global civil society we were seeking to interrogate? We could argue that the NGO history of one of us created an encounter framed by the very issues and discourses we were seeking the activists' perspectives on. So in establishing some 'common ground' and seeking to demonstrate our solidarity with the activists through the previous experience of one of us, we were also creating a research imaginary in which we were immediately located, placing the interviewee in a difficult position in terms of constructing a critical account in which they might feel we were ourselves implicated – as one interviewee commented, 'I do not know how to say this to you as an international person' (Joseph). As we sought to engage with the activists' subjectivities over time and across the spaces of Development, the construction of one of us as a *former* practitioner complicated the temporal situating of the research. As Chacko (2004) recognises, 'the manner in which [the researcher] engages differences and commonalities and represents them through field research practices has contextual and temporal underpinnings' (p. 54). We effectively blurred and destabilised the 'when' and the 'who' of one of our positionalities just as we sought to investigate the activists through these concepts. In doing so, we were ourselves reflecting

the importance but also complexity of changing relations to Development over time, but also confirming that these are not discrete moments, but flow in and out of each other. This then illustrates the complexity of defining the activist 'I' of the research as it emerged through relationships within and beyond the research moment and over time.

Issues of language and meaning are particularly key in situating ourselves and our research participants, and in structuring the discursive space of the research encounter. Most interviewees chose to speak English during the interview, whilst a few spoke Tamil with the interview conducted using a translator. Whilst qualitative research always involves a degree of interpretation of meaning, even when using a single common language (Smith, 1996), issues of understanding are particularly pertinent when working across and between several languages. Liamputtong (2010) notes that 'concepts can move problematically across cultures' (p. 146), and this is particularly relevant when participants are speaking a language that is not their first language, as was the case with this research.[5] One of our participants, Kumar, who chose to speak Tamil during the interview, explicitly reflected on this dynamic in his interview, underlining that his aim was to share his thoughts as clearly as possible, and that he could do this better in Tamil:

> I want to add something. English is one language. I feel problematic to convey in English to you. So I need a translator. This is only, I mean, professional. I don't need to take risk by conversing in English. My aim is to convey the message to you. (Kumar)

Such issues around language and meaning are important to consider in thinking through the power relations embedded within languages, particularly in the context of aiming to create open research encounters, where participants are able to voice concerns and vulnerabilities. Of relevance here is the status of English as the lingua franca of the Development industry – the language of professional interactions in which NGO activists need to be competent in order to navigate the development sphere and interact with donors and Northern Development professionals (Batliwala, 2002). This is not plain English, but rather a language of buzzwords and 'donor speak' (Mawdsley et al., 2002). The extent to which interviewees situated us as part of these discourses is important; on some occasions, despite having explained the nature of our research, participants did ask if we could help provide project funding, firmly locating us within the very processes we wished to critique. Here, we can also perhaps see how a past location within the Development industry as a global North professional, runs into and creates further layers of meaning in the current research moment and our positioning in relation to Development. Perhaps then, we should not be surprised that conducting interviews in English led interviewees to use such 'donor speak' to provide the linguistic resources for articulating their experiences and structuring their narratives. This also contributes to the obscuring of individual trajectories, experiences and subjectivities, through generating a professionalised rendition of their activism, wrought in the language of 'capacity building', 'evaluation' and 'projects', and produced through, rather than contesting, dominant Development discourses. On reflection, we recognise the same vulnerabilities that activists experience in their dealings with Northern NGOs and development workers, are simultaneously reproduced in the interview context by the use of English language. This might be understood as reinscribing historical and contemporary Development relations (Temple's (2002) 'linguistic imperialism', cited in Liamputtong, 2010), unintentionally creating a space circumscribed by the hegemonic Development relations we sought to critique.

This discursive space of the research encounter was also shaped by the physical spaces in which the interviews were conducted, usually the offices and fieldsites of our participants. Despite aiming to put participants at ease by interviewing them in a familiar setting, these spaces again perhaps limited the activists' abilities to openly express critique of the Development industry, or to reflect on how they negotiated their precarious position within it. Conversely, one participant specifically requested that he come to our hotel to be interviewed, creating a space in which he felt able to articulate the vulnerabilities he experienced as an activist involved in raising awareness about child labour in the matchstick industry:

> It is definitely good to have a relationship that is built [on international] links that is the positive side, but the negative side is that the individual who works [in this way] comes under the scanner of the international bureau, enforcement agencies and they may try to give kind of a pressure, watching them every moment, so the pressures are high and that's the negative side. (Vinesh)

This participant's request to meet at our hotel was in order that he not be observed meeting us, which he felt would expose him to greater scrutiny, underlining the potential that as Northern researchers our actions may reinforce vulnerabilities and dominant power relations. As Geiger (1986) notes, 'informants run risks that may not be immediately recognizable or even preventable' (p. 350). The powers and vulnerabilities of researched and researchers do not sit outside of these spaces, but rather are integral to them. The activists' subjectivities and vulnerabilities thus themselves shape, and were evidenced in, their engagement in, and openness to, our research. At the same time, as we worked to reconfigure our ideas of the individual we were pushed to reflect on our own subjectivities, both in the research moment and in the subsequent analysis. In particular, our commitment to understanding and highlighting hidden and alternative voices in development, and our own positioning within a mobile global elite and use of this mobility for our research ends, were all challenged.

As well as considering the construction and negotiation of intersubjectivity in the interview context, locating researchers and researched in their social, cultural and historical contexts may provide additional ways of thinking through the relationalities constructed in the research moment and beyond. Perhaps most significant is the very notion of subjectivity and the ways this concept is interpreted and defined. In this research, we can partly situate the challenge of identifying the personal by recognising interviewees' responses as grounded in a less individualised and commodified society than our own. As Arnold and Blackburn (2004) observe, 'Life histories in India do not necessarily conform to Western conventions and modes of expression (some do, many don't), nor should one expect to find the peculiar forms of individualism that emerged in the West replicated in India' (p. 3). So the intersubjectivity of our interviews is then produced through the interactions of our (ambivalent) rooting in an increasingly neoliberalised context which celebrates and promotes individual autonomy and rationality, and the location of the interviewees in a context where ties of community and ideas of collective action are seen as more significant. As two interviewees reflect:

> We don't have that [individualism] … I just give a simple example. Ask any Indian whether he maintains his journal or diary. They may not. It is very difficult, even for me. I just tried as an experiment. Because we don't exist as individuals. So when can you write a diary? When you are conscious of yourself. When you are sure of your privacy. So the concept of privacy is not there … You can't be an individual in that sense, which is all about your experience and expression of your experience. (Simon)

> Individual is part of a bigger system. (…) In the Western context the individual is important. Whereas here it's the family, school, college, organization … (James)

Interviewees' cultural, religious or social identifications – such as being a 'dalit', 'Marxist', 'Gandhian' or 'brahmin' – also explicitly framed their narratives. Such identities shaped the ways that they and we perceived their vulnerabilities, and demonstrated a sense of identity and individuality that emphasised a 'constant interaction and negotiation' between collectivity and individuality (Arnold & Blackburn, 2004, p. 3). Activists identified particular notions of 'service' – which some of them linked to Brahminical traditions – as shaping their identification of their roles, histories and subjectivities, with these categorisations effectively displacing the focus on the individual and on individual achievement. A similar dynamic is also reflected in the work of Kagitcibasi (2005), who explores the intersections of autonomy and relatedness. In contrast to the Euro-American conceptual separation of independence and relatedness, Kagitcibasi (2005) posits that autonomy and relatedness can coexist in an 'autonomous-relational self', emphasising the interplay between collective and individual identities in the construction of a 'relational self', that particularly resonates with the Indian context and the comments of our interviewees. Our data reveal a temporal dimension to this interplay. A number of our interviewees located part of their activist identities in lamented histories of collectivist traditions and left politics in India, although such ties were recognised by interviewees as increasingly being undermined, leading some to use a temporal and generational lens to define their more collective activism in opposition to neoliberal and individualistic ideologies of younger activists:

> One problem is younger generation in India, I think more and more they are money centred (…). To make the younger generation get into social activism itself is a difficult thing. That is one thing. Secondly, social activists, now, I don't know, I can't say much because in my days, when I started it was a different ethos, there was something in the country, we wanted to get involved, so we took a lot of risks but nowadays we don't get that kind of set up. (Matthew)

> We used to go and sleep in the hut with the people, we had no problem, we ate whatever they ate, we went to struggle area. I mean we have to walk 18 kms. I had hurt my whole feet, I came back and I had to undergo treatment for nearly two months. So that is the hardship we went through. But this generation, (…) I see that they are not willing to compromise on their comforts. That is why, maybe I am not able to understand them fully but, this is what the reading is. They want the solution very fast, impatient. (Chandra)

Only in paying attention to the production of individual identities and subjectivities, as well as how the interview setting brings these into dialogue with our own subjectivities, can we begin to understand the issues around the activists' narrations of their own individual histories. This highlights a need to focus on how a set of tensions were played out, both historically through the activists' life histories, and in terms of their current experiences in negotiating their professional and personal identities and organisational trajectories, as well as in terms of the spaces which we and they were shaping in our interview interactions. As Findlay (2005) recognises, vulnerability 'is constructed in relation to the boundaries that distance "self" from "others"' (p. 433). Despite historically shaped collectivist orientations and ambitions, the activists' organisations, experiences and vulnerabilities were increasingly shaped by processes we and they were seeking to critique: the neoliberalisation of civil society and associated emphases on outputs, service delivery and particular modes of accountability that flatten out particularity in the name of certain 'universals'.

An example of this is some participants' reluctance, and often refusal, to sign the consent forms which our institution expected us to use. We can see this as suggesting a resistance to commodification and audit, as well as underlining their own feelings of vulnerability (particularly around possibilities for identification) and a broader distrust of signing formal

paperwork, common to marginalised peoples. The consent forms also served to emphasise our own contradictory position both within and against such audit-driven processes. Indeed, we could argue that our focus on the activists as individuals also unwittingly exemplified the processes of individualisation that they and we were seeking to resist. At the same time, interviewees' use of organisational histories as a proxy for more individual narratives bears testament to the activists' continued capacity to work in and against the pressures we were trying to understand. This may not then be the writing out of the individual and the particular that we initially assumed. Rather, we can see it as reflecting a sense of collectivity and solidarity, and for some, a sense that their lives are intimately entangled with the organisation and do not have a separate trajectory, particularly if they have founded it:

> I relate with my organisation because I belong to that organization, I relate to the incidents and development that has taken place. So instead of myself that has done that … I don't know. Maybe because you are involved in the organisation, and you become part of the organisation. (James)

> In our calendar, we have lost five years without even knowing that. So we had that type of busy work and running around here and there. We mostly lost on the family side in our personal lives and things like that. In the past four-five years, our main thinking was how to implement this programme in a responsible way. Because, suddenly there is so much of fund coming in and we cannot simply lose time in implementing this programme. We were putting in all our energy in carrying out this programme in a responsible manner. So there is this personal side – like we do not know how the last five years went. (Joseph)

Despite our initial emphasis on producing a less institutionally focused account of civil society, for the activists themselves, their commitments to social justice were in large part manifested through the interweaving of their personal and political biographies and a range of institutional and collective narratives. This suggests a need to understand our research as a dialogue across individual, professional and organisational histories on both sides, in ways that sometimes reflect, and sometimes work against, the processes of elite knowledge production and practices of cosmopolitanism that we were seeking to engage with. It also suggests the need to recognise that the spaces created by biographical research in Development, and the potential intersubjectivity that results, are likely to be messy and uncomfortable. However, following Kaldor's emphasis on civil society as a conversation (Kaldor, 2003, p. 160), such intersubjectivity may present the possibility of effecting change beyond simply producing elite academic knowledge. Rather than reflecting on whether our research process was flawed or failed to transcend a world order we wished to critique, a more productive approach acknowledges the ways 'nano level' encounters, which seek to generate critical knowledge, are not divorced from the unequal histories and presents which we and the interviewees are part of, but contribute to a continual process of joint negotiation. Shank and Nagar (2013) frame this in terms of the added layer of responsibility for researchers using storytelling approaches, creating a need to 'continuously renegotiate the multiple and fragmented vulnerabilities of activists' (p. 100). As Russell and Kelly (2002) also recognise:

> The concept of negotiation within the interview suggests that the process does not merely recount past events; rather, it constructs new stories out of the flow of information and interpretation of both participants. In this context, research results emerge from the interactive dialog that occurs between researcher and respondent as they position and shape the information ultimately captured in the text. (no page)

We therefore recognise the potential of life history methods in terms of their contribution to the co-creation of a space – by ourselves, our research partner and the interviewees – in which ideas, experiences and memories are shared and co-constructed (Slim & Thompson,

1993), something which distinguishes our approach from the dominant paradigms we were seeking to resist. Re-imagining the interview space as relational, cosmopolitan and co-constructed resonates with Wiles' (2011) association of vulnerability with openness and receptiveness. This reminds us of the extent to which creating these spaces also necessitates that as researchers we make ourselves vulnerable, through revealing our own life histories. This does not make the process of co-creation even or stable, and we have seen how differently constituted and understood vulnerabilities – and power – came together in and through the research process. But despite the challenges we initially encountered in making a life history approach work for our research and our participants, the spaces we created did enable us to capture the multiple vulnerabilities experienced by intermediate NGO activists, and how these often cut across individual and institutional boundaries.

Conclusion

This paper emphasises the importance of thinking about researching vulnerabilities in terms of an intertwining of the personal relationalities of the research moment, and the wider relationalities of Development in which we were both consciously and sometimes unconsciously caught up. This process is then shaped by our own particular perspectives, histories and biographies and their connections to those of our interviewees. Our life history approach captured both how activists' perspectives related to wider public discourses around Development, and also the ways in which they related to us as an audience. This is not to suggest a separation of these two elements, as we were also caught up in those same public discourses, which in turn shaped how we were understood as an audience. Our focus on intersubjectivity is therefore central to enabling a critical analysis of the knowledges produced by a biographical approach to Development research as it foregrounds the multiple relationships at play in the research process and research setting, and underlines the extent to which approaches that focus exclusively on the individual risk failing to capture the multiple relationalities through which vulnerabilities are constructed and contested. Through a focus on intersubjectivity and relationalities we can thus better understand the ways in which Development research may reinforce and become part of the structures and relations that produce particular vulnerabilities even as it seeks to critique them.

Nevertheless, we argue that despite the challenges of working across tangled individual, professional and organisational narratives, the life history approach we adopted provided an opportunity to generate a critical analysis of the multiple vulnerabilities experienced by intermediate Development activists, as well as underlining the ways in which researching vulnerabilities requires us to better reflect upon our own subjectivities and the often unanticipated ways these interact with those of our participants.

The paper therefore contributes to broader conceptualisations of vulnerability, in particular in relation to Development. We argue for the need to go beyond straightforward understandings of vulnerability as related to poverty and exclusion, and for notions of vulnerability in the global South to encompass actors whose precarious position within the structures of Development renders them vulnerable in unexpected and less visible ways. Although beyond the scope of this research, this positioning of intermediate NGO activists as vulnerable should not be understood as specific to the global South context or the Development sector. In the context of continuing austerity and insecurity, such notions of precarity and vulnerability may also map on to the life histories and experiences of third

sector workers and civil society activists in the global North. Thus, we hope that this paper opens up new avenues of enquiry and methodological possibilities for thinking about how a life history approach enables ideas of vulnerability to be explored in diverse contexts and across individual and institutional boundaries.

Notes

1. See Escobar (1995) and Crush (1995) for a detailed critique.
2. For example, we have provided few details on the specifics of organisations that activists were drawn from, and have omitted information that might serve to identify individuals. In the field, we acted discreetly in relation to conducting interviews, and participants were able to choose locations where they felt safe and at ease.
3. Issues around translation are discussed below.
4. There are obviously strong connections here with the feminist literature on positionality and insider–outsider dynamics in research.
5. We are also cognisant of the 'Indianization of English' (Kachru, 1986), meaning we cannot assume an equivalence in how we and our interviewees understand questions posed in English and responses to them. Liamputtong (2010) and Twyman, Morrison, and Sporton (1999) also discuss the complexities of cross-lingual research and the use of translators.

Acknowledgements

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

References

Alcoff, L. (1991–1992). The problem of speaking for others. *Cultural Critique* (Winter), *20*, 5–31.
Arnold, D., & Blackburn, S. (2004). *Telling lives in India: Biography, autobiography and life history*. Delhi: Permanent Black.
Baillie Smith, M., & Jenkins, K. (2011). Disconnections and exclusions: Professionalization, cosmopolitanism and (global?) civil society. *Global Networks, 11*, 160–179.
Baillie Smith, M., & Jenkins, K. (2012). Existing at the interface: Indian NGO activists as strategic cosmopolitans. *Antipode, 44*, 640–662.
Baillie Smith, M., Laurie, N., Hopkins, P., & Olson, E. (2013). International volunteering, faith and subjectivity: Negotiating cosmopolitanism, citizenship and development. *Geoforum, 45*, 126–135.
Bankoff, G. (2001). Rendering the world unsafe: 'Vulnerability' as western discourse. *Disasters, 25*, 19–35.
Batliwala, S. (2002). Grassroots movements as transnational actors: Implications for global civil society. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Non-profit Organizations, 13*, 393–409.
Behar, R. (1996). *The vulnerable observer: Anthropology that breaks your heart*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

Berry, C., & Gabay, C. (2009). Transnational political action and 'Global Civil Society' in practice: The case of Oxfam. *Global Networks, 9*, 1470–2266.

Burgos, E. (1994). *Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú y Así me Nació la Conciencia* [I, Rigoberta Menchu]. Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno.

Chacko, E. (2004). Positionality and praxis: Fieldwork experiences in rural India. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 25*, 51–63.

Chatterjee, P. (2008). Democracy and economic transformation in India. *Economic and Political Weekly, 42*, 53–62.

Cooke, B., & Kothari, U. (Eds.). (2001). *Participation: The new tyranny?* London: Zed Books.

Cotterill, P., & Letherby, G. (1993). Weaving stories: Personal auto/biographies in feminist research. *Sociology, 27*, 67–79.

Crush, J. (Ed.). (1995). *Power of development*. London: Routledge.

Datta, A. (2009). Places of everyday cosmopolitanisms: East European construction workers in London. *Environment and Planning A, 41*, 353–370.

England, K. V. L. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *The Professional Geographer, 46*, 80–89.

Escobar, A. (1995). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World*. Chichester: Princeton University Press.

Findlay, A. M. (2005). Editorial: Vulnerable spatialities. *Population, Space and Place, 11*, 429–439.

Geiger, S. (1986). Women's life histories: Method and content. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 11*, 334–351.

Gidwani, V. K. (2006). Subaltern cosmopolitanism as politics. *Antipode, 38*, 7–21.

Gillespie, A., & Cornish, F. (2009). Intersubjectivity: Towards a dialogical analysis. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 40*, 19–46.

Gluck, S. B., & Patai, D. (Eds.). (1991). *Women's words: The feminist practice of oral history*. London: Routledge.

Harding, J. (2006). Questioning the subject in biographical interviewing. *Sociological Research Online, 11*. Retrieved from http://www.socresonline.org.uk/11/3/harding.html

Hart, G. (2001). Development critiques in the 1990s: culs de sac and promising paths. *Progress in Human Geography, 25*, 649–658.

Held, D. (2006). *Models of democracy*. Cambridge: Polity.

Jenkins, K. (2014). *Making the extraordinary everyday: Women anti-mining activists' narratives of staying put and carrying on in Peru and Ecuador*. Paper presented at the Society for Latin American Studies Annual Conference 2014, London.

Kachru, B. B. (1986). The Indianization of English. *English Today, 2*, 31–33.

Kagitcibasi, C. (2005). Autonomy and relatedness in cultural context: Implications for self and family. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 36*, 403–422.

Kaldor, M. (2003). *Global civil society : An answer to war*. Cambridge: Polity.

Kothari, U. (2005). From colonial administration to development studies: A post-colonial critique of the history of development studies. In U. Kothari (Ed.), *A radical history of development studies* (pp. 47–66). London: Zed Books.

Kothari, U. (2008). Global peddlers and local networks: Migrant cosmopolitanisms. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, 26*, 500–516.

Larner, W., & Laurie, N. (2010). Travelling technocrats, embodied knowledges: Globalising privatisation in telecoms and water. *Geoforum, 41*, 218–226.

Lewis, D. (2008). Crossing the boundaries between 'Third Sector' and state: Life-work histories from the Philippines, Bangladesh and the UK. *Third World Quarterly, 29*, 125–141.

Lewis, D., & Mosse, D. (Eds.). (2006). *Development brokers and translators: The ethnography of aid and agencies*. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press.

Liamputtong, P. (2007). *Researching the vulnerable: A guide to sensitive research methods*. London: Sage.

Liamputtong, P. (2010). *Performing qualitative cross cultural research*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lind, A. (2003). Feminist post-development thought: "Women in Development" and the gendered paradoxes of survival in Bolivia. *Women's Studies Quarterly, 31*, 227–246.

Manzo, K. (2008). Imaging humanitarianism: NGO identity and the iconography of childhood. *Antipode, 40*, 632–657.

Mawdsley, E., Townsend, J. G., Porter, G., & Oakley, P. (2002). *Knowledge, power and development agendas: NGOs North and South*. Oxford: INTRAC.

Maxey, I. (1999). Beyond boundaries? Activism, academia, reflexivity and research. *Area, 31*, 199–208.

McKinnon, K. (2007). Postdevelopment, professionalism, and the politics of participation. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 97*, 772–785.

McKinnon, K. (2008). Taking post-development theory to the field: Issues in development research, Northern Thailand. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint, 49*, 281–293.

Miles, M., & Crush, J. (1993). Personal narratives as interactive texts: Collecting and interpreting migrant life-histories. *Professional Geographer, 45*, 95–129.

Nairn, K., Munro, J., & Smith, A. B. (2005). A counter-narrative of a 'failed' interview. *Qualitative Research, 5*, 221–244.

Naudé, W., Santos-Paulino, A. U., & McGillivray, M. (2009). *Vulnerability in developing countries*. Helsinki: United Nations University Press.

Russell, G. M., & Kelly, N. (2002). Research as interacting dialogic processes: Implications for reflexivity. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 3(3), article 18. Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/831/1806RUSSELL

Shank, S., & Nagar, R. (2013). Retelling stories, resisting dichotomies: Staging identity, marginalization and activism in Minneapolis and Sitapur. In L. Peake & M. Rieker (Eds.), *Rethinking feminist interventions into the urban* (pp. 90–107) Abingdon: Routledge.

Slim, H., & Thompson, P. (1993). *Listening for a change: Oral testimony and development*. London: Panos Publications.

Smith, C. A. (1999). Why write an expose of Rigoberta Menchu? *Latin American Perspectives, 26*, 15–28.

Smith, F. (1996). Problematising language: Limitations and possibilities in 'foreign language' research. *Area, 28*, 160–166.

Twyman, C., Morrison, J., & Sporton, D. (1999). The final fifth: Autobiography, reflexivity and interpretation in cross-cultural research. *Area, 31*, 313–325.

UNDP. (2014). *Human development report 2014: Sustaining progress: Reducing vulnerabilities and building resilience*: Author.

Viezzer, M. (1977). *'Si me permiten hablar': Testimonio de Domitila, una mujer de las minas* [If I may be allowed to speak: Testimony of Domitila, a woman from the mines]. Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores.

Wiles, J. (2011). Reflections on being a recipient of care: Vexing the concept of vulnerability. *Social and Cultural Geography, 12*, 573–588.

Yarrow, T. (2008). Life/history: Personal narratives of development amongst NGO workers and activists in Ghana. *Africa, 78*, 334–358.