



# Aid micropolitics: southern resistance to racialized & geographical assumptions of expertise.

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## **Aid micropolitics: everyday southern resistance to racialized and geographical assumptions of expertise**

### **Abstract**

Aid partnerships between global north and global south institutions are critiqued for maintaining colonial knowledge politics and restricting the participation of southern development experts. This paper draws on lifework interviews with senior civil servants within the Antigua and Barbuda government to explore how southern development experts subvert the development hierarchies that permeate partnership micropolitics. The paper first reveals how southern development experts draw on their experiences and normative discourses of 'local knowledge' to dismantle assumptions that whiteness and 'westernness' symbolise expertise in partnerships. Second, southern development experts engage in small-scale acts of everyday resistance to assert their expertise and decentre the authority and knowledge of foreign consultants. Everyday resistance allows this paper to reveal southern experts' personal agency and subtle forms of resistance, which Foucauldian analyses of power and 'spectacular' theories of resistance are unequipped to recognise. I suggest that the racialised and geographic hierarchies, which structure power and privilege in the micro-level encounters between donors and beneficiaries are not as entrenched as we may think.

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent decades partnerships between global north and global south institutions have become ubiquitous within international development under the banner of 'aid effectiveness' (Sjöstedt 2013). North-South partnerships – partnerships hereon in - stem from alternative/populist development discourse of the 1980s and 1990s, which aimed to capture the ideal of shared development goals, solidarity and trust in north-south relationships (Schech et al 2015). They were canonised in 1996 by the idealistic rhetoric of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1996) that set out to rebalance the asymmetrical north-south relations within development and to transfer the power over aid to aid-recipient countries and align interventions with the priorities and systems of recipient governments (Whitfield 2009).

Despite discourse of the harmonization and convergence of north and south capacities, partnerships have been criticised for reifying, reproducing and ultimately maintaining asymmetrical development hierarchies between northern donors and southern recipients (Lister, 2000, Easterly 2008, Bradley 2017). Within this broader debate, the aid ethnography literature has explored the daily lives and social and cultural practices of partnerships. For the most part, the aid ethnography literature suggests that global south development experts are silenced and alienated from genuine collaboration in partnerships because of discursive colonial legacies about authority, expertise and knowledge that are not geographically, gender or race neutral (e.g. Crewe and Harrison 1998, Watts 2001, Kothari 2005, Baaz 2005, Goldman 2005, Mosse and Lewis 2005, Mosse 2005, Mosse 2011, Fechter 2012, Müller 2013). These racialized and geographical assumptions suggest that legitimate knowledge and linguistic authority of development is geographically located in certain parts of the world i.e., Western countries and within the hands of certain people – predominantly white, western men (White 2002, Kothari 2006). This colonialist knowledge politics is said to be a key reason marginalising southern development experts from imposing their expertise and local knowledge on aid programmes (Kothari and Minogue 2002, Cohen and Easterly 2009). As such southern development experts are implicitly figured largely as “docile bodies, passive if occasionally resistive” (Jaffe 2014: 177).

However, with few exceptions (see Sundberg 2019, Kamruzzaman 2017) the ‘aidland’ literature has tended to focus on the perceptions, behaviours and motivations of NGO employees, consultants, expatriate aid staff, volunteers, and globally networked aid professionals from western countries<sup>1</sup> (e.g., Schech et al 2015, Mosse and Lewis 2005, Fechter 2012). To a much lesser extent, research has explored the roles, motivations and experiences of development experts of aid recipient countries. Kamruzzaman(2017: 42) labelled the latter group ‘national development experts’, which among others is comprised of ‘academics, former politicians and bureaucrats, self-appointed civil society leaders, national consultants, former UN staff, think-tanks, and other researchers working in the development sector’. This is a significant gap that creates an incomplete understanding of aid partnerships, and implicitly reifies and reproduces bias to western knowledges and experiences within development scholarship, policy and practice (Goitom 2019). Indeed, Kumi and Kamruzzaman(2021) call for more research on development experts in recipient countries, particularly on their agency, strategies and manoeuvrings to challenge foreign experts.

Against this background this paper draws on Scott’s (1985) notion of everyday resistance to explore how southern senior civil servants (SCSs) resist colonial knowledge systems and

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<sup>1</sup> There is a literature on local aid workers (see Mawdsley et al 2005, Yarrow 2011; Peters 2016; Heathershaw 2016), yet this research tends to focus on local professionals working for NGOs and donor agencies.

hierarchies when engaging in partnerships. Analytically, everyday resistance allows me to uncover the individual, relatively safe and seemingly invisible acts of opposition to power that SCSs engage in (Cohen and Hjalmarson 2020). This analytical approach responds to Jaffe's (2014) argument that Foucauldian analyses of power can obscure personal agency and the more subtle everyday ways that formerly colonised people may resist. Indeed, everyday acts of resistance may well have gone under the analytical radar in previous research because theories of resistance often presume acts are explicit, collective, and spectacular (see Bhabha 1994).

The article begins with the emergence and critical review of aid ethnographies and examines the concept of everyday resistance. Next, I outline the appropriateness of Antigua as the case site and the usefulness of lifework history interviews. From here the paper shows how SCSs draw on normative development discourses of 'local knowledge' to materially and discursively resist the racialized and geographical assumptions about expertise that permeate the micropolitics of aid partnerships. By exploring the everyday resistance of SCSs I respond to Kumi and Kamruzzaman's (2021) demand for a more holistic understanding of partnerships through the analysis of global south experts. And by bringing race into the conversation, this paper takes heed of Pailey's (2020: 739) argument that development scholarship suffers from "a 'white gaze' problem in that it remains conspicuously silent on race and racialized forms of Northern hegemony". The paper also adds to the postcolonial tradition and literature of unearthing power struggles and the political agency of the "subaltern" (Spivak 2003). Finally, the paper will be of interest to those researching the micropolitics and individual agency of development workers within the purportedly "all-powerful development institutions" (Watts 2001, 286).

### **THE 'PARTNERSHIP ERA'**

In recent decades there has been political and structural transformations in aid programmes and a move towards what some scholars label the partnership era (Whitfield 2009). Partnerships aimed to transfer power and decision-making from donors to recipient countries and to align with the policies, programmes and administrative systems of partner countries. They set out to give global south countries a greater ownership of how development funding is spent and prioritised (Hyden 2008, p.260). Partnerships also recognise the contextual nature of development and the need to incorporate local expertise and knowledge into development policy and programming (Whitfield 2009). As such, partnerships centre on respecting the sovereignty of recipient states and their right to shape decision-making. They aimed to redefine the relationship between development actors from the global North and South in ways that epitomise the 'participatory turn' in development (Impey and Overton, 2014: 115), and the localisation of aid (McWha 2011). Practically, partnership refers to a diverse range of activities from giving grants, technical assistance or equipment, sharing

information, managing projects jointly, and joining forces to lobby decision makers in a bid to build the capacity of global South actors (Eade 2007).

However, partnerships have been critiqued as providing a sense of equality without altering the structurally unequal relationship of donor and recipient (Schech et al 2015, Bradley 2017). A key reason lies in the tension between donor agencies' pursuit of both progress and emancipation (Rottenburg 2009). Progress, for donor agencies, is defined as boosting the material wealth and technical modernisation of partner countries. This idea is underpinned by a notion that industrialised and western democracies represent the standard of development and possess the knowledge to achieve such goals (Eyben 2010). On the other hand, emancipation asserts the localised nature of development knowledge and equal relations between donor and recipient (Rottenburg 2009). Practically, however, progress has been prioritised via results-based management, whereby aid is closely monitored, and outcomes are assessed quantitatively to determine that donor assistance was appropriately used (Sjötedt 2013). For example, quantifying the number of projects implemented and/or outputs such as the number of houses built, or number of women-based enterprises established. However, results-based measurements reduce partnerships to the instrumental purpose of 'getting things done' and ultimately in ways that meet donor conditionalities (Elbers, 2012; Hatton and Schroeder, 2007) at the expense of genuine incorporation of local knowledge (Mosse 2005, Whitfield 2009). This traps international development in a paradigm that is underpinned by a profound belief in standard modalities, instrumentalism and managerialism, whereby effectiveness and efficiency can be achieved with the adoption of the right management tools at the expense of genuine collaboration with recipient countries and (Hellman and Forell 2014; Mosse and Lewis, 2005). As such, partnerships are said to side-step questions about politics and power, thereby maintaining the unequal relations between northern and southern partners (Mowles et al. 2008).

The aid ethnography literature has explored how decision-making in partnerships are negotiated, debated, and compromised at the micro-level, between members of donor and recipient organisations. Accordingly, development institutions are not defined as systems with fixed boundaries, but rather as continuous interactions among people over which no one has full control (Hatch & Cunliffe, 2006). Thus, the daily interactions and personal relationships within partnerships constitute political spaces where southern development experts can subvert donor conditionalities (Aagaard and Trykker 2019). Yet, despite unsettling western knowledge systems' 'superiority' (Dübgen 2016), much of the aid ethnography literature suggests that colonial knowledge systems still operate within the day-to-day micropolitics of partnerships (Kothari 2005, 2006). Western development experts are said to broker, translate, transfer and apply the formulas for development through negotiations, mediations, translations and interpretations of western knowledge (Mosse and Lewis 2005), while non-

Western perspectives are ignored and made invisible (Roth 2019). In light of this institutional authority and power, Easterly (2006: 24) suggests that foreign development experts are somewhat heirs 'to the missionary and the colonial officer'. As such, partnerships have invited southern experts to shape development, yet they remain 'second-class epistemic informants sometimes reduced to only sources of information with the capacity to speak' (Dotson 2008, cited in Koch 2020: 59).

A major explanatory variable is the persisting idea of an ascendancy of western knowledge over the non-western (Grosfoguel 2011). Vadiya (2018: 273) suggests that local knowledge is subordinated to the transnational expert community whose dominant worldview is seen as the most 'legitimate and natural way to view the world'. The expertise of southern development experts is lessened because '[t]he division between indigenous and Western or scientific knowledge is . . . based on ideas about people rather than on objective differences in knowledge or expertise' (Crewe and Harrison, 1998: 92). And relatedly, the racialised norms about expertise in which whiteness wields structural power and privilege in the daily micro-level encounters between donors and beneficiaries marginalises southern voices (White 2002). Here, Pailey (2020: 731) argues that development has a white-gaze problem whereby 'Western whiteness remains a signifier of expertise' whether real or perceived. Amin (1972) named this process 'Eurocentrism' in which European whiteness is seen to be the origin of all meaning. White (2002: 408) suggests that whiteness may not be perceived as synonymous with intellect, but rather with power and prestige that provides 'greater access to power, to decisionmakers and to those who can get things done'.

As such, the aid ethnography literature shows how authority, expertise and knowledge become racially and geographically symbolized. These assumptions undermine the space for southern development experts to assert their influence, despite the rhetoric of partnerships. For example, when reflecting on personal experience working in partnerships as a Liberian national, Pailey (2020) suggests that challenging the ideas of white North American or European development experts was not welcome by fellow nationals as it contravenes the racial tiers which are visible but never spoken of in development. Likewise, when working as a development consultant, Kothari (2006) remarks that local development workers were visibly disappointed when they realized that she was not white and that her white colleague would be allocated meetings at Ministries and head offices of international development agencies, while she would meet with small NGOs. These observations reflect the 'colonization of the mind' in which formerly colonised people associate whiteness with progress and modernity (Ngugi 1985). Relatedly, Koch (2020) suggests that even those who criticise unequal north-south power relations, may still internalise the superiority of 'international' over 'local' knowledge.

Yet, much of the aid ethnography literature focuses on the perspectives and behaviours of western development workers. Kamruzzaman (2017) and White (2002) call for further research to provide useful insights into understanding the challenges, struggles, liberties, satisfactions and disappointments, elation and frustration, politics, confessions and agency of southern development experts that participate in partnerships. As Kumi and Kamruzzaman (2021) highlight, focus here may reveal how southern experts challenge, transform, subvert, resist or otherwise donor objectives that are brought with and by foreign consultants. Research on southern resistances in partnerships has mostly focused on NGOs, revealing how southern NGO workers employ a mixture of acquiescence and strategic subversion to try to hit the right note with donors in language and style to achieve, in part, their goals and desires for an alternative vision of change (e.g., Ancker and Rechell 2015, Ketola 2016, Mannell 2014). Townsend et al (2004) call these “independent thinking NGOs”, that create a small space in which to promote their own development ideas. Relatedly, Mawdsley et al (2005) also highlight how ‘face to face’ interactions between northern and southern NGOs foster open dialogue, improve upward and downward accountability and ultimately improve aid outcomes. Bonilla (2015) and Pugh (2017) have looked more specifically at how SCSs take action to subvert donor preferences to meet local needs, without rejecting donors outright. Yet, studies of how southern experts – particularly those working in government – transform, reify, reproduce, resist or otherwise, colonial knowledge hierarchies in partnerships are lacking.

Therefore, this paper will draw on the notion of everyday resistance to investigate the perspectives, actions and forms of resistance that SCSs may engage whilst participating in partnerships. SCSs are heavily involved in partnerships, including microscale negotiations with representatives of donors. Therefore, they are uniquely positioned within the development ‘machine’ to speak back and challenge the knowledge hierarchies that characterise partnerships.

### **EVERYDAY RESISTANCE**

Resistance is a key concept for postcolonial analyses, and it enables one to recognise how political, colonial, institutional and ideological subjugation places people in vulnerability to crises. Yet it also allows one to recognise that individuals have multiple positions that they can take in order to resist, annul and transgress these multiple oppressions (Pile and Keith 1997). Pugh (2017) suggests that critical research has become too narrow and reductive in its conceptualisations of power and agency, and alternative frameworks are needed to unpack how global south subjects navigate development institutions in formerly colonised states. Similarly, Jaffe (2014: 177) suggests that ‘the anonymity of power in Foucauldian approaches sometimes risks obscuring personal agency’ and overlooking the multiple ways in which formerly colonised people may resist. I propose that everyday resistance represents an

insightful way of examining southern resistances that can be easy to miss but nevertheless represent opposition to power in partnerships.

Everyday resistance later termed the 'infrapolitics of the powerless' (Scott 1997, p. 311) occurs where groups recognize and resist their discrimination in everyday life. Acts of everyday resistance are characterized as small scale, relatively safe and carried out by individuals or small groupings (Jenkins 2017). It is about the mundane, ordinary or otherwise seemingly invisible acts that have limited coordination, but which represent opposition to power (Cohen and Hjalmarson 2020). This form of resistance is separate from visible, coordinated, and spectacular articulations of political resistance such as rebellions, riots, demonstrations, revolutions or civil war (Scott 1985, Bhabha 1994). In this sense, everyday resistance decentres western notions of resistance. Acts of everyday resistance may not be seen as political enough to be resistant and they may not lead to broader social changes. Yet, if one contextualises these gestures and behaviours in the broader power dynamics between the resisting subject and the dominant power, their political significance is revealed. Therefore, everyday resistance cannot be determined without a power analysis that is situated in a context, a historic tradition, a certain place and/or social space. This is not only necessary in order to detect what is resistance, but in order to understand the ways in which resistance operates and how it is connected to power (Johansson and Vinthagen 2016).

Such everyday resistance covers a diversity of subtle means of resistance that are often enacted in situations where overt protest is risky. Practically, everyday resistance is quiet, routine and seemingly invisible and may include thoughts, desertion, foot dragging, false compliance, slander and evasion (Colburn 2016, Le 2021). Such actions allow less powerful groups to challenge their subordination but disguised from the dominant actor. This is a tactical decision by resisting subjects who recognise the balance of power and how public and explicit engagement in dissent may be dangerous (Bourbeau and Ryan 2018). In this way, resisting agents are conscious of their subordinate position. Therefore, they prudently assess their situation and mobilise their agency using understated weapons to resist the dominant powers.

Everyday resistance does not require explicit political motivations or to be sustained by formal organizations (Riessman 2000). Actors may not necessarily regard their actions as "resistance" at all, rather a normal part and way of their life, personality, culture or tradition (Gupta 2001). On the other hand, not everything within everyday politics is resistance, since things might be political or expressions of claims without being resistance. It is, thus, necessary on the one hand to talk about acts as being resistance when they may undermine power (Baaz et al 2017) – and on the other hand, acts that are part of the ordinary everyday life. As such, we have both aspects covered – the everyday and the resistance. There are



multiple systems of hierarchies and individuals can be simultaneously positioned as powerful and powerless within different systems, such as international development (Hollander and Einwhoner 2004). Thus, it is necessary to view power as combined configurations, in which any subject always exists in an intersection of these powers. Actors are both subordinate and rebellious and they may only resist bits and pieces of the power, as they are never fully outside of the network of powers.

Research on the subfield of everyday resistance or infrapolitics has grown since the 1980s, shedding light on the subversive agency of peasants (Le 2021), occupied populations (Bourbeau and Ryan 2018) and urbanites in authoritarian contexts (Fröhlich and Jacobsson 2019) to name a few. Though, it has not yet been applied to unpack the micropolitics of partnerships, despite the concept's ability to unearth power dynamics, discursive structures and challenges to power, guided by non-conventional actors and means (Johansson and Vinthagen 2016). In the next section I outline the case study and methods appropriate for unearthing the infrapolitics of partnerships.

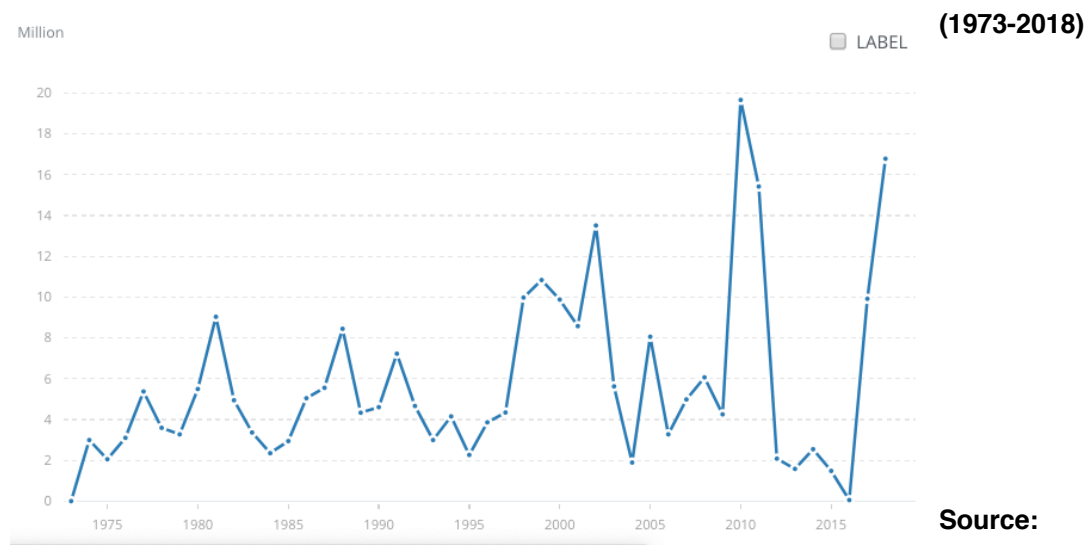
## **ANTIGUA**

My initial interest in SCSs was sparked when attending the Overseas Development Institute's conference on 'Building Back Better in the Caribbean' following Hurricane Irma in 2017. In the morning an elderly minister from one of the participating Caribbean nations spoke and made a rather emotive statement that the international community not forget his nation and to help in its recovery. Immediately afterwards a younger minister of about 35 years, from another nation spoke and directly addressed the international community. He was plainspoken that his nation has the expertise, experience and ideas to lead the recovery, but that the international community has a role to play, financially speaking. His speech was unapologetic in stressing national expertise and local knowledge, and it sat in stark contrast to the former minister whose speech felt somewhat like a plea to a paternal international community. Later in the day, during more informal tea breaks I separately spoke to two Caribbean civil servants, aged in their early thirties. They aligned most strongly with the second minister and expressed their frustration and irritation with the first minister. One labelled his opinions "*old fashioned*", and they both shared that in their home countries national development experts do not passively sit in partnerships, but instead challenge donors and impose their ideas and local expertise. These encounters piqued my interest to learn more about such moments of challenge and southern resistance and to shed new light on the micropolitics of partnerships.

Against this, I collected data in Antigua in January and February 2020. Antigua lies between the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean and was colonized by Britain in 1632. Antigua has an agricultural legacy that incorporated enslaved African labour to grow tobacco and sugarcane from circa 1674. During British decolonisation throughout the twentieth century,

the two-island state of Antigua and Barbuda was established on 1 November 1981 by unifying the two islands that are 47km apart. As such, Antigua is one half of the two-island state of Antigua and Barbuda yet remains a member of the Commonwealth and Elizabeth II is the country's queen and head of state. During the last census in 2011, 85,567 persons were residing on Antigua and Barbuda, with over 98% residing in Antigua (Government of Antigua and Barbuda 2011). At 87.3%, the largest ethnic group is of Black African descent, followed by mixed ethnic identity (3.8%), and 2.7% identifying as white/Caucasian. Just over 60% of the population is concentrated in the largest port and capital city, St Johns, which has a deep harbour that accommodates large cruise ships of tourists.

**Figure 1 Net development assistance and official aid received: Antigua and Barbuda (1973-2018)**



**World Bank n.d.**

**Source:**

Antigua and Barbuda has a small open economy that had a GDP of US\$1.6 billion in 2019 (World Bank n.d.). However, GDP is disproportionately produced in the more 'developed' Antigua. The economy is reliant upon tourism, and it promotes the island as a luxury Caribbean escape, which makes it especially susceptible to reverberations felt during global economic downturns (Gore-Francis 2016). For example, the country's GDP declined by 15 per cent in 2020 because of the impacts on the tourist industry from the global pandemic. Agricultural productivity and competitiveness have declined significantly, and the sector now only contributes three per cent to GDP, with 79% of all foods being imported. Poverty and unemployment have steadily increased across the islands, and 28.3 per cent of the population is either in poverty or vulnerable to fall into poverty (OCHA 2020). Drought and tropical storms adversely impact Antigua and Barbuda, thus development projects are increasingly focusing on climate change adaptation (Cambers 2009). The main challenge to Antigua is to bring about greater diversification of its tourism-dependent economy, a better

balance of public finances, regional integration and sustainable development (Mackay and Spencer 2017).

Data on the amounts of development aid flowing into Antigua and Barbuda began in 1973. The net official development assistance and official aid received in 2018 was an estimated \$US16, 900, 000 (World Bank n.d.). Aid flows fluctuate, with more aid flowing into the country in the years when a major hurricane impacted the island. For example, in 2010 following Hurricane Earl, and in 2017/2018 following Hurricane Irma which caused US\$250 million in total damages (see figure 1).

### **LIFEWORk HISTORIES**

I was guided by Pugh's (2017) suggestion that qualitative analyses of political life are needed to understand to what extent and why government officials in global south nations reify, transform, build on, or resist orientalist and colonial narratives. With this I adopted an in-depth, qualitative interpretive methodology, using lifework-history interviews. A lifework history is as 'any retrospective account by the individual of his [or her] life in whole or part, in written or oral form, that has been elicited or prompted by another person' (Watson and Watson-Franke 1985: 2). Lifework histories emphasise 'the importance of attempting to understand the meaning of behaviour and experiences from the perspective of the individuals involved' (Elliot, 2005: 4). This offers a contextual consideration of how the histories and experiences of individual SCSs shape their everyday engagement with partnerships (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson, 2006). This allows analysis to acknowledge how the personalities, behaviours and attitudes of individuals shape micropolitics (Mosse and Lewis 2005). The lifework-history method contextualises the agency of social actors and can give voice to participants in a way that 'gives history back to people in their own words', potentially rescuing it from dominant discourses (Thompson, 1988: 265). This offers deep ethnographic description, texture and detail, as it focuses on the trajectory of an individual's life and work, and on their relationship and behaviours within wider contexts, such as social policy processes (Bron and West, 2000). This allowed my analysis to focus on the daily interactions and relationships within partnerships, and to contextualise these behaviours within broader international development processes.

Using purposive sampling I selected nine SCSs located across five ministries of the Antigua and Barbuda government, and who had extensive experience working in partnerships (Flyvbjerg, 2006). All held Senior Policy Officer or Chief Officer positions within their respective ministries. They had between 5 and 18 years of experience working directly in partnerships within the Antiguan context. The sample included eight men and one woman, all

self-identifying as Black Caribbean. All participants lived in Saint John's, the capital of Antigua. Eight were aged between 35 and 45, with one male aged 63 at the time of interview in January 2020. Eight of the nine interviewed SCSs had completed degrees in the United Kingdom or the United States. Their degrees related to their current professional roles, and vary from environmental sciences, marine biology, conservation, and development studies.

## **RECOGNISING LOCAL WISDOM**

In this section I demonstrate how SCSs were exposed to Eurocentric and 'western' approaches through higher education institutions prior to beginning their SCSs careers. Yet, over time and with experience and engagement with critical development discourses, the SCSs began recognising the knowledge hierarchies and power inequalities inherent to partnerships. Establishing such a critical reflection is a fundamental first step in everyday resistance as the resisting 'subject' must first recognise how they are both shaped by and may shape knowledge hierarchies and politics (Le 2021).

All eight of the nine SCSs that completed degrees overseas, perceived this education would enhance their employment opportunities because degrees from Europe and North America were held in "*higher esteem than degrees awarded in the Caribbean*" (Male interviewee 6), and,

*"it's ingrained in you that those universities are the best and you know those professors are good. Even down here, we tend to learn from developed countries. We expect them to provide us with the answers."* (Male, interviewee 3)

SCSs internalised the colonial notion that 'expertise' was bound up with knowledge that is produced in certain parts of the world i.e., North America and Europe (Impey and Overton, 2014). Several SCSs also spoke openly about the discursive legacy of colonialism and residual notions that knowledge and linguistic authority resided in Britain – the former colonial power – and western countries more generally,

*"I think, because it was part of your psyche... the British were your rulers and clearly what they said was the best. Because clearly, they would know better, what do we know? They ruled us all this time."* (Male, interviewee 7)

I did not miss the sarcasm in his response, yet he was serious that he associated authority and expertise with whiteness and western contexts during his early career. This aligns with wa Thiong'o's (1986) notion of the 'colonization of the mind' and Crush's (1995) argument that colonial rule was extended and maintained through formerly colonised people's internalisation of western superiority. SCSs' understanding of global knowledge politics during their early careers resonates with Crewe and Harrison's (1998) argument that it is not *what* is known,

but *who* knows that constitutes 'expertise' as conceptions of development expertise are not geographically, gender or race neutral. Rather the identities of individuals engaged in international development are imbricated with power and the SCSs perceived that authority about development was located elsewhere and with someone else i.e., Europe and North America during their early careers (Mosse 2013). This is particularly pertinent to the micropolitics of partnerships because consultants were overwhelmingly white and "*came from Europe, North America, some French. Some Dutch people, but by and large they were from G7 countries*" (female, interviewee 9) during the early years of their civil service.

However, over time, and with increasing experience working within partnerships, SCSs began discursively challenging conventional notions of expertise. For instance, all eight SCSs who studied overseas began perceiving their international educations as myopic and unequipped to effectively understand and address the development needs in Antigua, as one SCS stated, "*I learnt about theories, ideas and policies that might work in developed countries, but it's not the same.*" SCSs drew on their local knowledge to identify slippages between the policy needs of Antigua, and the ideas learnt during their international degrees, as well as the programmes that travelled to Antigua via consultants,

*"I've learnt that a lot of the programmes from academia, and which the consultants bring with them don't focus on how man uses the resources and what is the relationship to the resource culturally...It took me time to go there and realise that the ideas I learnt over there don't necessarily have the answers for the context where I am coming from."* (Male, interviewee 3),

*"When an international agency comes in it lacks knowledge of the local situation. It lacks knowledge of the terrain. I've worked with consultants. They can't think outside the box, so what they learn in developed countries they come, and they try and replicate here. But the systems and the social networks are totally different here."* (Male, interviewee 1).

Here, SCSs perceive foreign consultants as 'one eyed giants' who may possess technical knowledge, but they do not have contextual understanding, or what Goulet (1980: 481) describes as wisdom. Therefore, SCSs recognise that consultants are unable to formulate locally appropriate programmes. SCSs' critique of their international educations also reflects broader and long-standing criticisms that higher education curriculums across the global north and global south continue to be influenced by colonial histories and Eurocentrism (Connell 2007). More specifically, the notion that colonial forms of knowledge are diffused, reproduced and maintained through higher education institutions. Many areas of higher education such as urban planning, conservation, and international development to name but a few have been

criticised for teaching only European or ‘western’ approaches with the implicit assumption that these ideas are suitable for global south contexts (Winter 2014, Pugh 2017, Kothari 2019, Carolini 2020). Yet, a discourse of difference has emerged, where the global south is viewed as materially, culturally, politically and historically different to the west, most purposely Europe. As such there is a growing unease about the applicability of philosophies and practices ‘imported’ from the west (Collyer 2016). Particularly because there is plentiful material, much of it by global south scholars, across diverse regions which can be incorporated into syllabi.

Considering SCSs’ unsettling of the geographical centrality of western knowledge, SCSs grew critical of donor objectives and their affiliated consultants, as one SCS commented,

*“You were taught, whenever you see USAID, DFID, CIDA it means ‘we’re here to the rescue’. ‘We’re here to seriously develop you’. You never thought that they set an agenda which does not necessarily mean it is the best for your country.”* (Male, interviewee 1).

With greater experience within partnerships, Antiguan SCSs first perceived slippage between donor objectives and the development needs of Antigua (Ferguson, 1994; Guljarani, 2011). And second how their local knowledge is critical if policies are to be appropriate and effective for Antigua<sup>2</sup>. These processes bolstered Antiguan SCSs to recognise their greater wisdom over international consultants. Therefore, over time, SCSs’ conception of ‘legitimate’ knowledge has shifted to reflect normative participatory discourses of situated expertise, which disrupts colonial constructions and dismantles the notion that whiteness and western knowledge automatically signify ‘expertise’. As such, SCSs are directly unsettling the notion that transnational experts and their western worldviews are the ‘natural way to view the world’ (Vaditya 2018: 273). This challenges the notion that SCSs as formerly colonised people may associate whiteness and ‘westernness’ with progress and modernity (Ngugi 1985). It also undermines any suggestion that the SCSs internalise the ascendancy of western knowledge over local knowledge (Koch 2020).

Other SCSs were influenced by senior colleagues’ language of resistance,

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<sup>2</sup> Although normative development discourse suggests that inclusion of ‘local knowledge’ will improve programmes, inclusion of local elites does not guarantee this and there is a vulnerability to problems including elite capture (Musgrave and Wong 2016). Nevertheless, the current study is concerned with SCSs’ perceptions and how this shape their engagement in partnerships, rather than an assessment of how effective partnership programmes are when they incorporate ‘local expertise’.

*“My first boss in the Ministry, I heard him say it so many times. To us and to the international consultants, so I guess it became part of me. ‘These people work for us. We tell them what we need. We’re not doing it with them telling us what we need any more, because it’s not working. We can’t do it that way anymore.’”* (Female, interviewee 9)

The language of resistance becomes part of the institutional memory. It is not formally documented but is retained via informal conversations and the observation of senior colleagues. Several SCSs revealed how they transfer the notion of local expertise to junior colleagues, thereby inviting or perhaps obliging SCSs to reimagine partnerships and exercise their knowledge openly in partnerships. This stands in contrast to Pailey’s (2020: 732) experience in partnerships, where her Liberian colleagues did not welcome her “pan-African zeal”.

Antiguan SCSs also attend development conferences and summits throughout the year. These spaces have many functions including the development of friendships, networking, and most pertinent for this research, learning about one another’s lived experiences of partnerships. An epiphenomenon has been the opportunity for SCSs from different Caribbean countries to come together and informally, yet intimately, share their critical experiences of partnerships,

*“The Caribbean group, I know them very well, we work together, and we’ve learnt a lot from each other in this way. So, in these international meetings we share our stories of partnerships, and it was often the same problem with the internationals.”* (Female, interviewee 9)

As the islands share many similarities in terms of identities, culture, politics, socio-economic profile and history, the SCSs view the perceptions of fellow Caribbean SCSs as particularly trustworthy and instructive. Therefore, informed by memories, knowledge, and expectations, where trust is of central importance (Boudewijn 2020), conference and summit spaces become imbued with shared experience and a language of resistance to recalibrate asymmetrical power relations in partnerships.

The colonial construct of western knowledge systems’ superiority has been established over centuries, and it would be naïve to say that they have been entirely dismantled within partnership micropolitics. As one SCS explained, *“It’s changing slowly. We’re becoming more independent thinkers”*. However, lifework histories reveal that SCSs reflect on their professional experiences and draw on normative development discourses to create their own counterhegemonic discourses of development and unsettle their previous understandings of

global knowledge politics. This constitutes the first important element of everyday resistance – the recognition of a power imbalance and that they are both objects and agents of change (Le 2019). The next section builds on this, revealing how SCSs’ engage in acts of everyday resistance to the development knowledge hierarchies that are embedded within partnerships.

### **EVERYDAY RESISTANCE IN AID PARTNERSHIPS**

SCSs’ acts of resistance include subtle disagreements with consultants, dismissal of consultants, rejection of donor objectives, confrontational arguments, and an increasing desire to work with southern partners and/or consultants from global south countries. Such acts disrupt the development hierarchies which permeate the micropolitics of partnerships (Mosse and Lewis 2005).

All nine SCSs talked about situations when they or their colleagues resisted ideas brought to Antigua via donors’ consultants. These ranged from discrete and cautious forms of disagreement to explicit arguments that risked individuals and the relationship with donors,

*“I looked at this consultant, an English guy and said ‘listen, let me tell you something. You don’t have a fucking clue about what you’re saying. The reason why we’re sitting here is because you’re getting paid ninety thousand pounds, so we’re just trying to make you justify that pay...but one thing we will not be doing is paying attention to you chatting shit’. So sometimes it’s easier to tell him to pack his bundle and we try to fix it. So that’s why sometimes you hear donors say, ‘the country was not receptive to help.’” (Male, interviewee 4)*

As such, Antiguan SCSs are not only traversing the visible but never spoken of racial tiers in development (Pailey 2020), but also call out the unfair processes embedded in this system. Most notably here, stark pay inequality. It is well known that local experts earn far less than foreign consultants (McWha 2011) in which ‘aid flows actually bankroll mostly white, exorbitantly paid foreign technical assistants and advisors who flock from one development project to another’ (Pailey 2020: 736). The value that partnerships place on different knowledges is hierarchically stratified by salaries (Carr et al 2010). This undermines the expertise of southern experts, reducing them to ‘contractors’ instead of the ‘architects’ of development (Wood 2013 cited in Kumi and Kamruzzaman 2021: 1161).

One SCS also explained how Antiguan actors dissolved a partnership because of the slippage between donor objectives and local development needs and concerns,

*“I’ve known instances where we tell the donor to keep his money. When our people say ‘listen, this cannot be done here in this manner because experience has shown this’. And then the consultant digs in his heels. We just ask him to leave... one of the*



*biggest problems that exacerbates disasters in Antigua is the way international agencies come in and manage them.” (Male, interviewee 2)*

These behaviours are not “spectacular”, and they deviate from western hegemonic understandings of resistance given they are mundane, small scale and relatively safe (Jenkins 2017, Cohen and Hjalmarson 2020). One might suggest that SCSs occupy a privileged and powerful position within Antigua and so their actions cannot embody resistance. However, this ignores how SCSs occupy multiple systems of hierarchies and how their power shifts when occupying global and domestic development spaces (Hollander and Einwhoner 2004). Put differently, SCSs’ acts of polite disagreement or aggressive communication are exposed as political acts of everyday resistance when they are contextualized within the knowledge politics inherent to partnership, and broader north-south relations based on historical colonialism, exploitation and oppression. Despite the innate politics of their actions, the SCSs did not perceive their acts as resistance. Rather, they interpreted them as part of their professional responsibilities in order to support locally appropriate development,

*“Well, it can be uncomfortable, but I just say it. I let them know that I don’t agree. That’s my job at the end of the day. It’s all very polite, but completely professional.” (Female, interviewee 9).*

This resonates with Gupta (2001) and Baaz et al’s (2017) assessments that actors may not have conscious political intent, but instead view their behaviours as part a normal part and way of their life, personality, culture or tradition. Yet, SCSs do not see these actions as separate and detached from their colonial history,

*“I think we have given away our power before, because I guess we were colonial and that was our history. But now, we say we have our own power, we know what works here.” (Female, interviewee 9).*

Northern development experts have been critiqued for denying history to justify technocratic development (Woolcock et al 2011). Yet, in contrast SCSs do not deny how their colonial history permeates partnership micropolitics. Rather they recognize that their contemporary mobilisations of local knowledge sit in opposition to an aid history and broader colonial history in which Antigua has been stripped of autonomy and self-governance by western countries and institutions.

When SCSs impose their local expertise in partnership spaces they invoke normative

development discourses of situated expertise to legitimise why they challenge and even dismiss consultants. Yet, in line with everyday resistance, all nine SCSs shrewdly assess the balance of power, recognising the risk of rejecting partnerships and associated financial support (Bourbeau and Ryan 2018). Therefore, SCSs engage in a balancing act to both secure development aid and ensure development projects are informed by local expertise. The result is a form of ‘pragmatic resistance’ – a strategic dance carried out by SCSs, which involves interplay between the donor objectives and the development interests of Antigua (McCammon et al. 2008). SCSs aspire toward the reform of partnerships, yet for the most part, they refrain from behaviours that aggressively confront partner organisations, such as rejecting aid, dismissing consultants, or ignoring consultants’ ideas in their entirety. For instance, SCSs acknowledge that consultants from the global north have valuable knowledge to offer, but that knowledge from external actors is not always necessary,

*“We had a guy from Germany who was expert in water pollutants. Another guy from France who helped us with advocacy campaigns. But sometimes they send people we just don’t need...A French woman from the World Bank who came to help us understand and improve bird habitation on the island. But this is Antigua. We have so many people with that knowledge” (Female, interviewee 9).*

In line with Bonilla (2015) and Pugh (2017) five SCSs discussed the importance of financial assistance from ID partners and how SCSs must balance good relations with donors, whilst simultaneously pushing, pulling, questioning and challenging the ideas that travel with consultants,

*“OK, sure, we can’t throw the baby out with the bathwater. It’s not that straight forward. We have to be smart of course because they [donors] hold the money, and yes, we need that support. So, we have to be smart and push him [consultants] as much as possible without jeopardising the whole thing” (Male, interviewee 1).*

Dancing pragmatic everyday resistance entails skilled negotiation and striking a balance between “*pushing boundaries*,” and “*toeing the line*,” terms that SCSs used to describe their behaviours within partnerships (Chua 2012). Boundary pushing expands the cultural norms to accommodate more challenges to consultants and development hierarchies, whereas line toeing adheres to the limits of those norms to maintain partnerships. Toeing the line too much will maintain asymmetrical development hierarchies, whereas challenging too aggressively may provoke the retaliation of development partners (McCabe et al 2020). The Antiguan SCSs draw on their own sets of values and knowledge to address what they consider unfair policies or donor decisions. Yet, simultaneously find themselves in situations where they struggle to determine ‘appropriate’ behavior to maintain partnerships. It is this ambiguity and

moral complexity that may leave them in a position of latent unease. By the same token, this is also a reason why these issues warrant further investigation.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The micropolitics of aid partnerships have been widely critiqued for maintaining and reifying colonial knowledge politics and restricting southern development experts from accessing decision-making processes (Schech et al 2015). One of the key analytical explanations is the racialized and geographical assumptions about expertise that permeate partnerships. Yet, much of the aidland literature has prioritised the experiences of western, and predominantly white development experts. For this reason, Kamruzzaman (2017) and White (2002) call for further research on the challenges, satisfactions and disappointments, frustration, politics, confessions and agency of southern development experts that participate in partnerships. Against this background, I brought theories of aid micropolitics and everyday resistance into conversation with one to reveal how southern development experts challenge and resist the development hierarchies and learning processes that characterise partnerships. I advanced two central claims.

First, the Antigua case demonstrates how southern development experts draw on their professional experiences and the normative discourses of local knowledge to critique the discursive and material inequalities inherent to partnership micropolitics. In turn, southern experts dismantle their previous assumptions that whiteness and 'westernness' symbolise expertise, authority and knowledge (Kothari 2005). In this sense, southern experts express Goulet's (1980: 481) thesis that white western consultants are 'one eyed giants' who lack the contextual wisdom that is so vital for a holistic understanding of development needs and effective aid programmes. Indeed, the Antigua case reveals how southern experts decentre ideas that white transnational experts have the most 'legitimate and natural way to view the world' (Vaditya 2018: 273). In doing so, the southern experts subvert the suggestion that their 'minds have been colonised' with regards to development knowledge (Ngugi 1985), and they directly challenge the ascendancy of western knowledge over local knowledge (Koch 2020).

Second, the Antigua case revealed how southern development experts are not 'docile bodies', but instead engage in acts to disrupt the colonial knowledge hierarchies that play out in partnership micropolitics (Jaffe 2014: 177). Practically, they assert their expertise and challenge the authority and knowledge of foreign consultants and donors more broadly. In doing so the southern experts disrupt the unidirectional flow of knowledge, subverting the implicit positions of mentor and mentee that permeate partnerships. As such, southern experts routinely contravene the racial tiers and white gaze of development, which are visible but rarely spoken of in partnerships (Pailey 2020). Moreover, the Antigua case suggests that resistance to development hierarchies is institutionalised by the words and actions of

southern experts who encourage colleagues to reimagine and reconfigure the knowledge politics and rules of engagement in partnerships. This allowed the paper to move away from analyses that focus on how the knowledge and capacity of Southern partners are subsumed, eclipsed or erased in partnerships (e.g., Crewe and Harrison 1998, White 2002, Kothari 2005, 2006, Mosse and Lewis 2005, Easterly 2006, Vaditya 2018).

Analytically, the adoption of everyday resistance allowed me to reveal southern experts' personal agency and subtle forms of resistance, which Foucauldian analyses of power and 'spectacular' theories of resistance are unequipped to recognise (Jaffe 2014, Bhabha 1994). Indeed, if we do not read acts of everyday resistance as "real" resistance nor as political, we risk reproducing the same systems of power that de-legitimize the actions, agency, and political consciousness of southern actors (Cohen and Hjalmarson 2020). And we misrecognise the colonial histories and global patterns of uneven development, which render these acts significant beyond the spatial boundaries of partnerships, and compelling for understanding the broader relations and dialogue between the global north and south. In this way, this paper extends the broader body of work that is concerned with global South resistance to externally imposed development intervention (Escobar 1995).

Perhaps reflecting a pragmatic turn across the discipline, many contemporary geographers celebrate the everyday as a site of resistance (Pugh 2013). Although this could be welcomed from a pragmatic perspective, we should not become too celebratory in the case being discussed here. Quotidian life in partnerships is also characterized by processes that donor objectives continue to tacitly dominate. Yet, I suggest that the racialised and geographic hierarchies, which structure power and privilege in the micro-level encounters between donors and beneficiaries are not as entrenched as we may think. In ending I suggest there is still much to be learnt on the agency the forms of resistance that southern development experts engage when participating in partnerships.

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