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A R T I C L E

Over the rainbow

The politics of researching citizenship and marginality

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with different methodological enquiries in researching citizenship and marginality in a developing context. It is based on reflections emerging from a five-year collaborative international research programme that focused on enhancing the efforts of the poor and marginalized groups to define and claim their rights and make citizenship matter. The article deals with the politics and dilemmas inherent in the different method-ological stances and positions of action research and other sister approaches towards the question of citizenship. Reflections from the researchers are interspersed with theoretical issues to high-light the messiness of the research process. The article argues for the need to challenge dominant framings in development, to be more modest about and redefine what we mean by policy influ-ence and research impacts, to be more process-oriented and reflexive and to engage more strongly in a pedagogy of the powerful.

KEY WORDS

- action research
- reflexivity
- researching citizenship and marginality

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Research on development is normative, engaged, and seeks to make a difference. After all, it focuses on the dispossessed, the marginal, the excluded, on power relations, and aims at the empowerment of the voiceless and increasingly focuses on the 'pedagogy of the powerful'. Development researchers often work towards a world somewhere over the rainbow that is free of social injustice and unequal power relations. But all this makes development research even more loaded and contested than other kinds of research (see Mehta, Haug, & Haddad, 2006). However, how aware and reflexive are researchers of their own biases and positionalities? Do final research accounts pay attention to questions concerning power and politics in the course of the research process? What are the dilemmas and contradictions encountered by researchers in both the North and South when they work with marginalized and powerless groups? What methodologies and methods do researchers draw on while researching questions of citizenship and marginality? This article provides some theoretical and personal reflections on these issues by drawing on the experiences and testimonies of researchers involved in the Development Research Centre (DRC) on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability.[1]

The article emerged out of a reflection and synthesis process during the research. In the period 2003–2005, a small methods group emerged. Researchers from Mexico, Brazil, India and the UK began to critically reflect on the methods that they had employed while conducting research on participation and citizenship. In particular, it was felt that there were many ethical dimensions to the research that had implications for knowledge generation, development practice and the research participants. Furthermore, researchers felt that a research programme such as the DRC should try to combine theoretical and policy-relevant reflections around questions of citizenship, participation and accountability with a concrete engagement with the politics of research and praxis. Although the article is ascribed to a single author, it is very much the result of oral and written reflections from the methods working group.

While the article deals with the politics of research in one very specific research programme, it hopefully has a wider relevance for those concerned with the politics of research, action research, researching citizenship, and development research more generally. Many funding bodies are prioritizing programmatic funding to large research centres. Most of these are led by northern institutes such as IDS, a globally renowned development research institution. Thus the lessons from this DRC will be relevant for many large international research programmes that juggle a range of commitments around knowledge generation, policy influence, and equitable research partnerships. Furthermore, while insights from critical anthropology and the sociology of development (e.g. Escobar, 1995) have highlighted the importance of reflexivity and power relations in development studies, this is not yet mainstream. This is quite surprising given that development research is concerned with social and economic change and with improving

human well-being. This article thus invites the development community to engage with how the research process is influenced by power relations and how researchers have the power to influence the research product through their own ideological and moral commitments and personal backgrounds. All this calls for an awareness of the fragility of our final research products and conclusions and the need for modesty regarding how much can be achieved through research that seeks to make a difference.

The article begins with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the researcher as a 'schizo', given the distance between her and the research participants. The use of 'schizo' is not intended to be offensive. This article builds on the way it has been used in Deleuze and Guattari (1972). It then goes on to discuss the dilemmas and politics of researching citizenship and marginality by drawing on both theoretical and personal insights and experiences of DRC members on a range of issues related to methodology, methods, ethics, positionality, reflexivity and power. Specific examples of in-country research by the DRC programme are also provided. Personal statements and reflections (presented in italics) are interspersed throughout the text. This style has been consciously deployed and is intended to highlight the messiness and confusion embedded in the research process that rarely come to the fore in conventional research papers and reports.

The researcher as a 'schizo'?

> . . . capitalism, through its process of production, produces an awesome schizo-phrenic accumulation of energy or charge, against which it brings all its vast powers of repression to bear . . . there is the twofold movement of decoding or deterritorial-izing flows on the one hand, and their violent and artificial reterritorialization on the other
>
> . . . As for the schizo, continually wandering about, migrating here, there, and every-where as best he can, he plunges further and further into the realm of deterritorial-ization . . . (Deleuze & Guattari, 1972, pp. 35–36)

We live in a fractured and contradictory world. The promise already seems to have gone sour with an imperialist war fought in the name of freedom and democracy; natural disasters killing thousands and rendering millions homeless; suicide bombings everywhere; pronounced methodological fundamentalism and autocratic rulers in US and UK politics; new forms of 'Othering' in Europe, India, and elsewhere; the increasing influence of corporate power and control over our lives, our water, our basic rights and so on; and the militarization of aid in the name of 'security'. But at the same time, we have been united in our commitments to reduce poverty. We have the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Millennium Project. Africa has been 'in' and sexy thanks to Bono, Bob Geldof, Tony Blair and the Africa Commission. And those concerned

with development want to make a difference by working towards a fairer and more just world.

> *I suppose I should begin with myself: I am Lyla, a professional researcher at IDS and your synthesizer and narrator. I believe research should have emancipatory and liberational outcomes but I'm often not sure whether what I do really makes a difference. Yes, sometimes, I feel like a 'schizo' as I try to make sense of development, the overlapping worlds of modernity, pre-modernity, and hypermodernity in the societies and countries that I am familiar with. I am often torn between activism and academia; between Europe where I live, and India where I grew up. Sometimes I think being at a research institute in the North such as IDS enables me to have the power to engage with many different realities and dip in and out of academic, NGO, and policy worlds and say things that will be taken seriously. At other times, I think it is too distanced from what really matters. It then feels like a strange bubble. I am not alone, I think.*

> John Gaventa (IDS, UK, henceforth John): *I would like DRC research to be linked to social change and emancipation but I struggle with issues of distance versus groundedness. One of the things I miss in this programme is the groundedness that I felt in my previous job at an NGO in the USA. It is challenging to balance the different roles of director, manager, colleague and ally, all of which affect how I behave and it is confusing for me and everybody else. There is also the tension which goes with now being in a powerful position. Before, I was a young activist. Now I am a middle-aged white man in a mainstream institution, trying to coordinate large research programmes with multiple, often conflicting, accountabilities.* (Methods Workshop, 27–29 April 2005)

> Carlos Cortez (UAM-X, Mexico, henceforth Carlos): *My relationship to this research programme needs to be linked to my split and fractured life. Even as a student I was always trying to do something because I thought a lot of things were not acceptable. When I was involved as an activist I thought we needed to be more analytical. And when I started my academic career I started to be worried that this was very abstract and not related to practical and experiential realities. I have the privilege of being part of different groups, working with people who combine theory and practice and are very creative. But balancing all their competing interests calls for 'delicate equilibrium'.* (Methods Workshop, 27–29 April 2005)

Why does it matter?

Deep down, academics, community workers, researchers, practitioners, activists and policy-makers working on marginality, development, and citizenship often face tussles and huge contradictions. But we rarely articulate them. In fact, development studies, given its positivist and post-positivist origins, almost discourages critical reflection and reflexivity. More often than not, our working papers, our journal articles and books are sanitized, distanced and authoritative accounts. The entire process of research and fieldwork, so crucial for knowledge genera-

tion, along with the experiential elements of research are banished from the final text. Such academic distance and authority have been questioned, at least in anthropology and qualitative sociology (see Clifford, 1983; Rabinow, 1984; Smith, 1989).

But what happens to all the fragmentary pieces of knowledge and information gathered by researchers? How does one translate real life experiences rooted in everyday lives to academic text? More often than not, the experiential aspects and dark bits of knowledge generation are banished from the final account.

> Ranjita Mohanty (Society for Participatory Research – PRIA, henceforth Ranjita): *How else can the researcher discuss what she researches on without including her own dilemmas that take her sleep away, ethics she holds close to her heart, politics she engages in, her ego she fiercely protects and her renunciations that trouble others? How else will she even begin telling what her [re]search means – at times an overwhelming all-consuming act and at other times such a trivia that she wishes she could have instead been something else, anything, really, because it simply does not matter? But she continues to be the [re]searcher.*

> Andrea Cornwall (IDS, UK, henceforth Andrea): *What I write about regarding what I've learnt in my DRC research is a delicate matter. I've produced versions of it in different forms. The one I am still holding close to my chest, the one that is closest to the 'action', uses the narrative form of a story in which the reader meets the characters and gets a whiff of the politics that they're engaged in. But is this whiff too pungent for the DRC to bear given the normative bias towards making positive stories out of citizen engagement? It is, after all, always easier to spin the story, to find and amplify that which fits the beliefs and feelings we have about how things ought to be, than it is to delve into the murkier depths of what is really going on.*

The researcher is never a *tabula rasa*. Consequently, the final research product is a 'situated' account given by a particular researcher at a particular point in time. Every academic endeavour ensues from a set of interactions between the researcher and those participating in the research and is the result of the researcher's insights and experiences gained in the world of ideas and in the empirical world. The final output can only be a reconstructed account of facts, events, observations and theory as interpreted by the researcher. It is also a process imbued with power relations, for the researcher has the power to select, highlight and contextualize certain elements of the data.

The DRC and research

Over the past five years DRC researchers have engaged with theory, methodology and praxis in different ways. Some IDS researchers like me have brought empirical insights generated from other projects to the DRC. By contrast, the Nigerian team has used 'theatre for development' to learn about and push the frontiers of citizenship and accountability issues in the Niger Delta and in the Northern

Delta. In Mexico, Carlos Cortez has worked with diverse networks to advance the Chiapas struggle, and Luisa Paré and Carlos Robles have balanced their commitments to environmental work and watershed management with doing DRC research. In Brazil, researchers have used extensive surveys to understand civil society and citizen engagement in health councils. In India, the PRIA team has used action research to make sense of and try to bring about social change amongst nomads and indigenous peoples. We do not all share similar paradigms. We have positivists, post-positivists, critical theorists and constructivists amongst us, as well as those who mix and match different approaches. We all have different views regarding how we see research and what its purpose should be.

> Jenks Okwori (Theatre for Development, Nigeria, henceforth Jenks): *I believe that academics must be useful to their communities beyond generating knowledges which only they or conventional policymakers can consume. And they can do so via civic professionalism through which their research is linked intricately with the changes and happenings in local communities.*

> Naila Kabeer (IDS, UK, henceforth Naila): *I would not see my research as contributing necessarily to change at the local level. Instead, I see my research as speaking to power by engaging with dominant policy debates and dominant discourses. I would not be a good activist. Instead, my skills lie in translating local experiences to the global level. I suppose this could be called a kind of activism too but I would be uncomfortable if the DRC privileged only one kind of activism.*

At one level, it is interesting to compare research experiences and examine the range of methods that can be used for researching citizenship in developing contexts. At another level, we are also interested in tackling head on and unbanishing all those messy and tricky questions around ethics and the politics of research dilemmas to examine: marginality and powerlessness; the politics of knowledge and situating the researcher, her identities and key experiences in the research process; the impact of various methodologies on research outcomes; and the ethical dilemmas of researching *on* citizenship while working *with* citizens, alongside the challenges of dealing with power relations within the wider network.

Approaches to researching citizenship and marginality

Citizenship is often made out to be universal and natural but in reality it is characterized by a history of exclusion and struggle (Kabeer, 2005; Lister, 1997). We have thus largely been interested in the perspectives of the excluded: the non-persons or non-citizens who lack access to the most basic rights such as land, health, water; those whose voice rarely gets to count in expert framings of science or knowledge; and those whose very existence is denied because they are different from the dominant culture (e.g. the Indians in the Zapatista struggle). This raises a lot of challenges for empirical research, not least because notions of both

'citizens' and 'citizenship' are highly contested both in theory and practice (Fairclough, Pardoe, & Szerszynski, n.d.). Thus critical research is required at two levels: one to unpack problematic discourses of citizenship that exclude large groups of disenfranchised and marginalized people; and the other to examine the performative aspects of citizenship (to see how people position themselves as citizens and are treated by others as citizens (see Fairclough et al., n.d.).

Researching citizenship thus means engaging in critical social research. This begins with disclosure but, as Bourdieu says, 'To become aware of the mechanisms which make life painful, even unlivable, does not mean to neutralize them; to bring to light the contradictions does not mean to resolve them' (Bourdieu, cited in Baumann, 2005, p. 1097). Thus Sygmunt Baumann, drawing on Bourdieu, argues that no matter how sceptical we are about the social effectiveness of one's message, nothing is less innocent than being *laissez faire* (Baumann, 2005).

Bourdieu, until his death a few years ago, combined theory, praxis, and methodology. He was familiar with both ethnographic methods and statistical analysis and was opposed to rejecting one in favour of the other. He believed that theory and methodology could not be separated, as is evident in the following: 'I have never accepted the separation between the theoretical construction of the object of research and the set of practical procedures without which there can be no real knowledge' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 33). Moreover, for him even the most minute empirical observation involved theoretical choices and the most abstract theoretical puzzle could not be clarified without an engagement with empirical realities.

Others such as Paolo Freire went a step further. They are not merely interested in disclosing the nature of human misery. They seek to change it and seek a research programme that contributes to the struggle for a better world. Freire seeks to transform society by transforming power relations. This entails not just taking power away from those who have it but reinventing it, demystifying power and thus creating a more just society. Action research and participatory action research are heavily influenced by Freire's work and leanings (see Gaventa, 1993).

Still, researching marginality is tricky. Even when we make attempts to be fair, compassionate, and honest while conducting research with marginalized groups, overt and covert disparities and discrepancies can still persist. We all have our burdens and legacies. So does the term 'research'.

> Andrea: *When I joined IDS in 1998 it was to work with the Participation Group, for some of whom 'research' was a dirty word, associated with adjectives like 'extractive'. That suited me fine at the time. I'd finished my fieldwork in Nigeria feeling as if I never again wanted to be the white spectator writing about the lives of black women who had no opportunity to speak for themselves except through my narratives – for all that I loved listening to people's stories and spending my days tracing the contours of their lives. I'd gone from there to immersing myself in activist par-*

ticipatory research on estates in south London, choosing to work in my own back yard rather than test my positionality once again by returning to the subject position of privileged white observer-participant.

For some indigenous peoples, research is one of the dirtiest words in their vocabulary (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Research provided the justification to describe, document and represent the 'Other'. It is associated with colonialism's most sordid legacies. There are risks that development and citizenship research can replicate these colonial legacies yet again (this time under the guise of participation, citizenship and accountability). This is all the more tricky when we are working with marginalized and poor people who often cannot read what we write and thus cannot challenge our conclusions, reports and writings.

Reflexivity and positionality

Reflexivity is the conscious attempt to identify how we as researchers influence the research process and how the whole research process is structured around issues of dominance and power, gender, class, age and race. Feminist research has been key in promoting reflexivity (e.g. Harding, 1987; Smith, 1989). Here, power relations in the research and the exercise of power during the research process are identified. Similarly, there needs to be concern for accountability and cognizance of the ethical decisions in the research process, and the politics and interests of the decision-makers need highlighting upfront.

Most DRC researchers feel that our research should have emancipatory outcomes contributing to social change at macro- and micro-levels. Others like Naila feel that their contribution is through influencing policy debates. But there are tensions stemming from our personal backgrounds and institutional positioning. For example, IDS researchers like John, Andrea and me feel we have been removed from on-the-ground realities in a way that we were not previously used to, and thus feel tensions between distance and groundedness. Others such as Steve Oga Abah from Nigeria (henceforth Steve) expressed constantly negotiating plural positions: simultaneously coping with a position of disadvantage alongside a position of privilege. He describes himself as a disadvantaged village boy from a minority group who went to university and now occupies a privileged position as a university faculty member. His experiences as part of a minority group sensitize him to research on citizenship, rights and entitlements. But his position of privilege can also help facilitate support for issues of accountability, rights and entitlements (Methods Workshop, 27–29 April 2005).

Institutional positioning also plays a key role since the institutions we are based in for DRC research can be enabling or restricting and the hierarchies in them can also impact on DRC research and outcomes. Finally, we are also moulded and influenced by funding and donor agendas that can be short-term

and shift over time. Being funded by a northern bilateral agency such as DFID can offer legitimacy in some situations while in others it can arouse suspicion as Jenks has reflected earlier.

Methods and methodologies

The legacy of 20th-century interpretive sociologists, feminist scholars and post-modern anthropologists has largely made it acceptable that there is no one universal gaze or explanation for what makes an individual/society/culture work. Every gaze is filtered through the lens of gender, language, class, race and so on. Similarly, since all knowledge is situated and shaped by its locality, cultural, historical, and social specificity, there is no one objective observation. It is based on the assumption that objectivity is an:

> impossibility, since each of us, of necessity, must encounter the world from some perspective or other (from where we stand) and the questions we come to ask about that world, our theories and hypotheses, must also of necessity arise from the assumptions that are embedded in our perspective . . . Researchers must view the research process as necessarily a co-production between themselves and the people they are researching. (Burr, 1995, in Colombo, 2003, p. 160)

Thus no one method can grasp reality and all its complexities. Instead, there needs to be a deployment of a range of methods to make sense of the world and unravel all its taken-for-granted characteristics (see also Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) in order to, as Wittgenstein says, 'get hold of the difficulty deep down. Because if it is grasped near the surface it simply remains the difficulty it was. It has to be pulled out by the roots; and that involves our beginning to think in a new way' (cited in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 1).

Twenty-first century researchers are also like *bricoleurs*[2] – like the handy-man, the *bricoleur* employs different methodological strategies in the unfolding of a research situation and also seeks to understand multiple perspectives and meanings. *Bricoleurs* may tinker away but their commitment to social change is explicit. To contribute to social transformation, *bricoleurs* seek both to understand the forces of domination that affect individual lives and to remove knowledge production and domination from elite groups (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005).

What was the *bricolage* of methods and approaches that different DRC researchers used? Most of the researchers who provided reflections for this article appreciated the fact that the DRC allowed them to accommodate a plurality of methods and that there was a marked absence of methodological rigidities. This, however, should not be read to imply a lack of rigour. One of the important themes within qualitative and participatory research is how to evolve differing

understandings of rigour, and how we apply those to our own work. This plural-ism ranged from quantitative and closed surveys in Brazil to action research in India. I now discuss experiences in India, Nigeria, Mexico and Brazil.

Action research in India

Ranjita is from PRIA, a large Indian NGO known for its action research, with over 20 regional offices, and a range of programmes on participation, govern-ance, and social action. Ranjita acknowledges that action research is a contested concept. She sees it as research which has the potential of leading to action and change. Methods then become means to an end. PRIA has given her the institu-tional space to use action research and also experiment with other methods.

> Ranjita: *The world of action research initially evoked a sense of ambivalence in me. Who will initiate action? Me or someone else? I am quite aware that those engaged in field action seldom read what I write. To bring about change I need to give tips and recommendations. I could never do that in the beginning. I was reluctant to be prescriptive. But later, along with colleagues who have experience in intervening in local realities to bring about change, it became possible to develop a framework for action. I still however hesitate to prescribe an action agenda. This engagement revealed an altogether different way of looking at research. Instead of researching to test theories and concepts, what I am researching can lead to change.*

Doing action research in an NGO can be more targeted towards social change than can research from a university department. Still, in the context of a large international research programme, PRIA's research needed to focus on meeting international research standards and analytical rigour (perhaps to comply with the programmatic need to write up the research and findings). This led to the perception that the overall impact on local change was more modest than it could have been. Furthermore, doing action research in the context of the DRC meant that Ranjita focused more on debates on democracy, state and civil society rather than on local-level issues in Rajasthan.

There is a wider debate regarding whether action research necessarily means privileging local action at the expense of analytical rigour. Furthermore, is it research for targeted and strategic action or is it research that arises out of action and is inspired by praxis? Whatever may be the case, there is the need to investigate more systematically how effective research programmes such as the DRC can be in linking research with action (at the local, national and global levels) and also to understand the contradictory outcomes of action research. For example, local communities may prioritize action that is beyond the scope of the outside researchers' interest and remit.

Theatre for development work in Nigeria

The theatre for development work in Nigeria helped create synergies between NGOs, activists and academics, and facilitate methodological conversations between people who otherwise would have been stuck within their own disciplinary confines. For Steve and Jenks, research must have a practical outcome but legitimacy is key. They had to work hard to gain it but once it was established it was possible to work at the community level with local leaders. In Abah's words:

> Perhaps one of the outcomes of this project would be to discover the interface between theatre for development and Participatory Learning for Action. Very often research methodologies exist in discrete forms just as their proponents may defend their areas of interest and specializations. Yet there must be a common agenda between these methodologies in so far as they are talking about making potentials and possibilities realizable in a manner that they open up new ways of seeing. (Abah, 2005)

Drama served as a research tool to gather and analyse information, to summarize key issues and findings for presentation to community stakeholders, and to prefigure the development of action strategies. Steve, Jenks and their colleagues empowered villagers to stage plays highlighting their own problems and concerns (see Abah & Wheeler, 2005). The drama also raised wider issues concerning citizenship and power. Examples include how villagers are caught in an intricate nexus of corruption at every level of the complex web of institutional relationships and how this impacts on the lives of ordinary citizens. In one drama the characters question notions of citizenship and the social map out of which they discover the oppressive coalition of the mosque, courthouse/prison and the Chief's Palace. The drama thus is an instrument of analysis and for planning future actions.

> Steve: *Given that the research took place in a context from dictatorship to recent democracy, issues of rights and citizenship are often confused. This is why is it interesting to interrogate these issues, linking interdisciplinary perspectives. We believe that the research must always lead to practical action at the community level, and we usually end with action plans. The communities expect them too. But can a research programme such as the DRC support such action plans?*

> Jenks: *In most of the communities in Nigeria where the DRC research was conducted, people constantly ask: why is DFID doing this research? This could indicate their distrust of research or the fear of a hidden agenda or the possibility of opening up spaces for the articulation of grievance or all rolled into one. But even with this questioning, the scope of the DRC's work (seven countries) conveys some form of added value or credibility to the research in the eyes of participants. Most participants in our research communities feel comfortable and almost privileged that their communities are sites for action research. For them their narratives are being taken*

beyond the limits of their communities to international policy arenas, where they hope rightly or wrongly that their stories of neglect on the part of the Nigerian state will become the subject of pressure from outside for the state to act.

The struggle of indigenous peoples in Mexico

In Mexico, the research on the struggle of indigenous people and gender in the Chiapas was located within a wider network of social scientists, philosophers and students, intending to develop collaborative and interdisciplinary research and action. 'Collaborative interactions' were used to dismantle the so-called boundaries between traditional and scientific knowledge to not only understand the problem but also to link up with proposed action. Thus the focus was on: interaction through dialogue rather than conventional surveys; interviews that could facilitate open reflections; focus group discussions that allowed for creating and recreating agendas that the women and students could follow up in their own regions. Finally, non-discursive forms of expression such as murals helped to express emotions that could not be captured in dialogue (e.g. worry).

> Carlos: *Action research led to the confluence of different actors with different worries, perspectives and even ideas of time. It opened up not just the possibility of creating a space for interaction between different knowledges ('popular' and 'scientific' knowledges) but also the scope to develop different actions. As action-oriented researchers we tried to learn from the process and to develop the capacity to act, including the social capacity of acting to change some relations (from technical to political). Given that we were in a violent situation in which trust did not exist, it was difficult to pinpoint who were the good and who were the bad. Often the social scientists tended to assume that they had all the right questions and answers. It was a sobering experience for us all. Just because people do not speak, it doesn't mean that they do not know.*

Other work in Veracruz, Mexico, focused on how to build on local processes of mobilization to create participatory management of the watershed and increase accountability in how reserve resources are managed. Through this action-orientated research, Luisa Paré and Carlos Robles had to reconcile their own agendas as environmental activists with that of the demands for livelihood alternatives from local people. This required a sensitivity to and respect for the existing and often fragile process of mobilization at the local level.

> Luisa Paré and Carlos Robles: *The real objective for local people is how to have more alternatives for their livelihoods, with the added benefit of protecting the environment. But the discussions about this have led to an exchange between what we as researchers want and what the local people want. We have been encouraging them to consider projects that are viable over the longer term and are environmentally sustainable – and projects that challenge the client-oriented culture that is*

prevalent . . . We have learned how to work with existing processes of social mobilization rather than convene new processes and push them on people. The result is that the space we have helped facilitate can be used for many things – and it is being used to resolve conflicts.

'Conventional' research in Brazil

Unlike the work in India, Nigeria and Mexico, the Brazilian team used more 'conventional' research methods and was not explicitly interested in action research or research for social change. The team was interested in investigating how inclusive 31 local health councils in São Paulo were and the level of associational activity and participation in the working of the local health council. This included deploying a range of methods – qualitative research (interviews and the follow-up of meetings), surveys, literature reviews, and participatory exercises. These different approaches helped map the profile of participants, the ways the councillors were recruited, and the nature of relationships established between the council, civil society, and the political and health system. These methods also helped to reveal the institutional structures that facilitated inclusiveness.

> Vera Schatten Coelho (Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento, Brazil, henceforth Vera): *To explain why some some councils were much more inclusive than others we used both qualitative and quantitative data. For example, we found that some public officials organized databases with relevant information about the associations/organizations present in the sub-municipality, as well as other initiatives that aimed to open the council to a large spectrum of organizations. Yet, other officials remained closed to such initiatives. To understand these differences we interviewed a sample of public officials using a semi-structured questionnaire that traced their life histories and political networks. Using all this material we sought to explain why some public officials used more 'inclusive' strategies than others. In sum, using both qualitative and quantitative methods during the research aided the process of generating data and explaining the findings.*

Andrea's reflections on engaging with this more 'conventional' research style are interesting:

> Andrea: *I came to rediscover the value of conventional research at the same time as I sought new ways of connecting these methods with the less conventional and more participatory process I was engaging in. Surveys might be maligned by participatory researchers as the most distancing of instruments but they produce invaluable insights – and the numbers to convince. But as I spent more time in the field, I found the old tools that I'd learnt as an anthropologist came into their own. I learnt more about what I was researching from hanging out with councillors, sitting in the health council office gossiping with people who stopped by to say hello and share the latest news, watching what went on in the meetings – and then dissecting dynamics with*

> *people in the street outside after they had finished. What all this taught me was that maybe it was time to think more about the creative complementarities of conventional and participatory research – and about when an outsider's perspective can be useful to say the unsayable, observe what remains hidden to those who are involved in something, and provide the sparks for a debate that might otherwise never happen.*

This quote highlights how the researcher plays many roles and wears many masks à la Goffman (1969), how she is sometimes an actor 'front of stage', sometimes 'backstage'. Sometimes the naïve outsider is able to pursue questions and interview people on issues that would have been hard for one of the positioned locals.

It is not the purpose of this paper to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the methods deployed in the four cases presented. As discussed, researchers in India, Mexico and Nigeria were explicitly concerned with action research and research that sought to bring about social change in the communities participating in the research. The methods ranged from dialogue, mural design, focus group discussions (Mexico), to drama (Nigeria). All these different strategies helped enhance local understandings of rights and citizenship as well as the causes of structural inequality.

The Brazilian team approached the issue of engaging with social change in a number of different ways. Vera's research on understanding the politics of participatory spaces in health institutions that impact significantly on the lives of the poor used quantitative methods to influence policy in ways that were arguably more credible and convincing as a result of their conventional basis. Andrea's research was initially participatory action research, aimed at strengthening the potential of citizen oversight through creating spaces for reflection on citizen engagement in health policy councils. It turned into ethnographic research over time, as the political context in the municipality changed and openings for stimulating change began to close. More recently, things have shifted and opportunities are now arising to influence the municipal government and other actors in the municipality; plans are back on track for engaging the state and civil society with what can be learnt and what can be done as a result of what has been learnt.

Thus, much depends on how methods are used and to what end; much depends also on the political opportunities that exist in a given context and the spaces that are available or that can be opened up to influence. While surveys can be highly extractive, they can generate data that can speak to powerful people. They can also complement qualitative and participatory research. Similarly, qualitative research can be extractive and ridden with power politics. Thus a lot hinges on the intention of the researcher, her approach to research and her research participants, rather than the methods per se.

Ethics and power relations

Ethical dilemmas arise when researchers experience conflicts that cannot be addressed by their own moral principles or through official ethical codes (Hill, Glaser, & Harden, 1995). There is a universal research ethic that stresses informed consent, protecting the interests of subjects, maintaining confidentiality, and preventing the disclosure of identities where this could harm research participants. These principles are often in university codes and some of them are hopelessly inadequate for developing country settings. Moreover, in participatory research other ethics also emerge, such as those of reciprocity, using the research for change, and being clear about the involvement of those being researched in the process. Thus formal ethical codes are often inappropriate in the context of participatory or action research.

Conventional ethical codes have also been challenged by the 'ethics of care' and by participation scholars. This 'ethics of care' has been influenced by the feminist communitarian model and provides moral imperatives to form solidarity, foster empowerment, and encourage a connectedness between the researchers and the researched (see de Laine, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). For example, feminists such as Carol Gilligan and Linda Steiner talk of the need to replace notions of impartiality and formality in ethics with affection, intimacy, nurturing, egalitarian and collaborative processes, and empathy (see Christians, 2005).

Research often has highly unanticipated outcomes and it is impossible to predict in advance one that may be harmful. Clearly, it gets tricky when the researcher has to decide what can and cannot be written up. Either you don't publish, wait for an opportune moment after things have died down, or publish and be damned. These are personal choices that researchers make.

Moreover, there are significant risks involved in trying to use research for social change. Action-orientated research can generate expectations at the community level that researchers themselves are not able to fulfil. In Nigeria, community organizations have been asking the Theatre for Development Centre to help them build a factory to process their ginger as a result of the research. One of the key issues for the DRC is how to address the expectations that arise amongst the communities as a result of the research process (see Abah & Wheeler, 2005). There is also the risk that research can be used for different and contradictory purposes. For example, in Nigeria a visit from international researchers led to the idea of an exchange visit to Belize in the Caribbean. But the village hierarchy saw this as an opportunity to invite a businessman on the trip to make business contacts. Although the visit has not been made, it has created an undercurrent of mutual suspicion between the village authorities and the Youth Association (Abah & Wheeler, 2005). Researchers also often have to balance out competing interests at all levels, from dealing with their host institutions to village stakeholders and government. In Mexico, Luisa Paré and Carlos Robles were

often caught between the agenda of environmentalists who wanted to conserve the rainforest, and the indigenous communities who wanted to improve their livelihoods.

During the methods workshop we were painfully aware of the power relations that shape our research, given that most of us conduct research from positions of privilege about people in difficult situations. Bishop and Glynn (1999) identify five key arenas to evaluate power relations in the course of research: initiation, benefits, representation, legitimacy, and accountability. Although we may make sincere efforts to be respectful and sensitive during the research process, the very act of trying to be inclusive can lead to a blurring of the actual power differentials that persist between researchers and the research participants (Elmesky, 2005). One way to overcome these dangers is to make research participants researchers so that both university researchers and community-based groups can experience each other's lifeworlds. This was to some extent successful in Mexico, Nigeria, and India. Overall though it is tricky to develop relationships that are empathetic and respectful while also complying with standards that lead to good research. A small consolation can only be a constant awareness of this tension and these ethical dilemmas, and making them an integral part of the research.

Making a difference?

We are aware that the policy process is not linear but a dynamic interplay of actors, processes and ideological currents. These are shaped by processes of power and politics. Development Research Centres are created in the UK and framed by certain globally accepted standards of what counts as influence and impact. These include citations in northern journals, measuring impacts on donor debates. However, all this can obscure local understandings of influence and impact. In this programme we have tried to challenge this conventional understanding of 'policy-level' impacts and influence to tease out a range of local-level impacts and understand the different spaces that were created through the DRC research. For example, understandings of accountability were never really part of Mexican research discourse. But through DRC, research accountability has emerged as a theme to include in Mexican research agendas. Similarly, DRC research has already been picked up in teaching (e.g. in UK development studies curricula and in Nigerian academic work). Thus in many ways there is a recognition that researching citizenship, be it in Nigeria, Mexico or India, can help citizens as actors learn and change through the research process.

We also need to be modest about what's possible in a research programme. As feminist Ruth Chance says:

> I think the more modest you are about what you are doing, the better off you'll be. You can count on it that time is going to upset your solutions, and that a period of

great ferment and experimentation will be followed by one of examination to see what should be absorbed or modified or rejected . . . The swing of the pendulum will come and maybe you'll start all over again, but it does seem to inch us forward in understanding how complex and remote solutions are. (Chance, quoted in Gorfinkel, 2003, p. 27)

In contrast, other logics, such as responding to donor requests for 'success stories' and 'policy impact' do not encourage such modesty nor nuanced versions of change. Even those within donor agencies who sympathize with these more reflective, self-critical approaches are under pressure to show how research which has been funded by the UK taxpayer is making a difference. As researchers we seek to be accountable for how this is done in the communities or constituencies with which we work. But we are also recipients of UK government funds, a position which affects to whom we must report, and how we are perceived by the communities with which we work.

Conclusions

Being part of an international network such as the DRC demands a kind of 'delicate equilibrium' to balance out competing needs and interests. But it is also highly enabling since it helps us engage with a range of people, build research capacity across different solidarities (activist, academic and students) and learn from other country experiences through visits and field trips. The network also helps grant legitimacy to local actions since it 'opens ears at home' (e.g. in the case of Nigeria). It has also been beneficial in raising awareness, for instance about accountability issues that were new in Mexico.

Much development research is based on a model that evidence, produced by researchers, can contribute to change by powerful decision-makers. The reflections here suggest (as does a critical literature on the policy process; see Keeley & Scoones, 2003) that the process is rarely so straightforward, and that researchers must navigate a series of competing demands, roles, and expectations. Moreover, development research can also change researchers, in turn affecting them as development actors. In so doing, citizenship research in certain circumstances and using particular approaches is a process of engagement that also changes relationships between researchers and citizens, and which can contribute to how both see and act upon the world and the policies within it. Policy research is not only about evidence and outcomes but also about the process through which these are constructed.

This article has also highlighted the dilemmas of being based at a large northern institute while conducting research in the South. But there is also a role to be performed by research stemming from a northern institute such as IDS, given its international reputation and its ability to understand and engage with

dominant policy debates. Critical research from the North tends to be at least respected if not followed or listened to and such research can potentially play a far more significant role in the 'pedagogy of the powerful'.[3] This would include exploring different ways of involving the powerful decision-makers, policy-makers and elite groups to learn and be reflexive about their own roles in the problems currently experienced by the poor and the marginalized. This is clearly a challenge for future development research, given the increasing interconnected-ness between the problems in the South with policies and politics in the North.

This means not losing sight of the bigger picture. We conduct our research in a highly contradictory world, especially post-Iraq war. For the past few years, many western governments have been legitimizing the war in Iraq and donors have advanced relationships between security and development in problematic ways. While there are multiple positions on these issues in development agencies and we would all agree with the need for a human security agenda, it is often not understood in terms of dignity, human well-being and rights. In fact, debates of citizenship, rights and accountability have also been powerfully recast in these troubled times to justify the war on terror.

Thus, now more than ever before, there is the need to challenge and reshape these dominant framings more powerfully, to redefine what we mean by influence and research impacts by integrating the local level and more long-term perspec-tives. It is also important to be more process-oriented and reflexive, bolder in how we want to make 'another world possible' and engage more strongly in a pedagogy of the powerful. After all, in an age of cynical reason, we have to ask critical questions and need to decide more forcefully how to engage with the powerful and take the sides of the weak. At the same time, we need to maintain a pragmatism of hope. It is better to be a somewhat idealistic, radical but confused 'schizo' than an ambivalent, or worse, opportunistic one.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1   The DRC, based at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), was one of the seven research centres funded by the Department for International Development (DFID) in 2000 to facilitate research collaboration across countries. The Citizenship DRC is a five-year collaborative initiative that focuses on enhancing the efforts of poor and marginalized groups to define and claim their rights and make citizenship matter. In the first round (2000–2005) partners included IDS (University of Sussex, UK), the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (Bangladesh), the Centro Brasileiro de Análise e Planejamento (Brazil), the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (India), the Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México/Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana – Xochimilco (Mexico), the Theatre for Development Centre (Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria) and the Centre for Southern African Studies/School of Government (University of the Western Cape, South Africa).

2   Kincheloe and McLaren (2005) develop the concept of *bricolage*, as articulated by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) who use the term in the spirit of Claude Levi-Strauss (1966) and his lengthy discussion of it in *The savage mind*. The French word *bricoleur* describes a handyman or handywoman who makes use of the tools available to complete a task (Harper, 1987). *Bricolage* can imply the fictive and imaginative elements of the presentation of all formal research (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005).

3   This was expressed by Robert Chambers at the DRC conference in November 2005.

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