

Where silence speaks-insights from Third World NGOs

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to unpack the conflation between the silence and purported passivity of the Third World NGOs (TNGOs). Explaining the invisibility of their voices in the critical and post-development perspectives, it locates the inquiry in the context of the action of these TNGOs.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper follows the phronetic research approach, which involves a case study of a locally developed Indian NGO. It uses phronetic inquiry along with Ashis Nandy's notion of "silent coping" as the conceptual framework. To explain the purported passivity of TNGOs in the texts under global circulation, the paper uses Walter Dignolo's discussion on "texts in circulation".

Findings – The uncertain nature of action – that it begets further action possibilities; precludes the prospect of visualizing such action spaces in the context of their generation. This emergent nature of local action spaces makes it difficult to capture them within the dominating global discursive structures, thereby creating local spaces of agency for the TNGO actors. Selective appropriation of artefacts and texts from the global circulation and the creation of alternate stake structures at the local level support the realization of such action spaces. Further, such local artefacts and texts do not travel into texts circulating globally, thereby rendering the TNGOs invisible and silent in the reading of global texts and leading to the TNGOs being framed as passive.

Originality/value – This paper locates the voices and acts of the TNGOs and highlights the mechanisms that enable them to silently cope with structures of discursive domination, thereby contributing to post-development studies and post-colonial organizational analysis.

Keywords Post-colonialism, Coping, Agency, Phronetic research, Post-development, Third World

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Development remains a highly debated issue. While Haines (2000) and others associate development with "modernization and progress", others have theorized it as a colonizing discourse that produces the "Third World" as passive subjects of development (Escobar, 1995; Esteva, 1992). Critical and "post-development" scholars (CPD scholars) trace the discursive roots of development to the post-World War II American strategy of managing the Third World (Escobar, 1995; Naz, 2006). They argue that bilateral and multilateral aid agencies found Third World NGOs (TNGOs) as able alternatives to the State; even so, TNGOs were characterized as lacking in capacity – "NGOs [...] seldom had a clear strategic focus, often lacked technical capability, and seemed reluctant to cooperate with other organizations [...]" (Korten, 1990, p. 13 as cited in Lewis, 2008, p. 45). Such "lacks that hinder development" have established hierarchical binaries between the West and the Third World, leading to the creation of the capacity building programmes of TNGOs, thereby making "such development" a colonizing discourse that reinforces the colonial difference (Cooke, 2003, 2004; Dar and Cooke, 2008; Escobar, 1995).



While the above critique unearths underlying power relations, it does not carry the voices of the TNGOs, rendering them absent, invisible and silent. In this global discourse, it then becomes difficult to visualize any action space for the TNGOs, suggesting their complete discursive domination. This invisibility and silence of the TNGOs gets interpreted as an indication of their passivity, thereby conflating silence with passivity. This paper explores the conflation of silence and passivity and thus contributes to post-development and postcolonial organizational analysis (Banerjee and Prasad, 2008; Prasad, 2003, 2012). The remaining paper first reviews the literature on the TNGOs. The second section elaborates on the conceptual framework. The third and fourth sections discuss methods and findings, respectively. The paper concludes with the view that the complexity of emergent action spaces generated at the local level cannot be observed *a priori* from the global discourse. The invisibility of these action spaces in the global discourse renders the TNGOs silent in the reading of such a discourse.

2. Literature review

A major strand of literature on the TNGOs traces the extension of aid networks through a complex maze of resource flows from international organizations, the State, civil society and corporate organizations, and sees the TNGOs as a response to this flow (Lewis, 1998, 2006; Roberts *et al.*, 2005). Focusing on this strand identified above, CPD scholars have argued that development through its plans, policies and programmes for TNGOs has diffused Western notions of development in the Third World. Originating from the colonial centre of power, “such” *development* proliferates and circulates as a set of “fairly entrenched and institutionally developed set of knowledges and practices in the NGO sector” (Roberts *et al.*, 2005, p.1849) in the Third World. As an empirical demonstration of the asymmetrical power relations in the field of development, Khan *et al.* (2010) explicates how local NGOs experience conflicting identities and feel like “foreign agents” (Khan *et al.*, 2010, p. 1428) due to the lack of voice in the design of these interventions and are merely passive implementers of these projects. These interventions are driven by donor interests which alienate NGOs from the local community as, several other prominent issues that plague the community do not figure in the donor’s agenda of development (Khan *et al.*, 2007). The local NGOs are therefore viewed as devoid of any mechanism of reclaiming their ties with the community or creating space for action to work toward the interests of the local people.

The above instance shows how an institutionally driven set of knowledge circulates globally and penetrates down to the local site of action. Here, development is viewed as a global discursive structure where the Third World is represented as incapable of pursuing “developments” on its own. Within this apparently monolithic global discursive structure (Grillo, 1997 as cited in Hopper, 2012, p. 61) the voices of the local TNGOs are not heard. To the extent that the TNGOs are visible, they appear as disciplined “subjects” and silent carriers within such global discursive structures.

The above critiques raised key debates within the international community to push for the “right to development” and ensure greater participation of all the stakeholders of development. These debates were initially raised by the Third World nations in the early 1980s to support demands for fair trade policies from the First World countries and push for the acknowledgement of social and economic rights – as “rights” by funding countries. However, these debates encountered the scepticism of international organizations, funding agencies and Western states regarding the acknowledgement of development as a right. Consequently, the rights-based approach (RBA), which was introduced in the late 1990s within international circles “displayed little awareness of the earlier struggles around the right to development” (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2004, p. 1423; Uvin, 2002, 2004, 2007).

Also “RBA language was being used in the context of ‘international cooperation’ and in ‘aid’ where funding countries lie outside the purview of the notion of rights” (Cornwall and Nyamu-Musembi, 2004, p. 1424). Subsequently, the RBA entered the policy documents of the international bilateral and multilateral agencies and developmental organizations to lay down the guidelines for the TNGOs to implement the RBA in the Third World countries.

To explain these discursive shifts within the discourse of development, Mignolo (2000) uses the notion of coloniality of power. Coloniality of power is used to indicate the colonial matrix of power, which is defined as “a structure of governance and control (of governance, of the economy, of knowledge and subjectivity [...] of sensibility) [...] The logic of coloniality guides all imperial and global designs” (Kalantidou and Fry, 2014, p. 175). Explaining the logic of coloniality, Mignolo emphasizes that while earlier the mandate was “the civilizing mission of the secularized modernity” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 22), it later became coined as the “development and modernization project” post-World War II (Mignolo, 2000, p. 22). Even the shift from needs-based to rights-based approach in development remains situated within this colonial matrix of power as local voices continue to be silent in these ideological debates. Kabeer (2005) argues that these theoretical debates happen in an “empirical void” (Kabeer, 2005, p. 1) which are bereft of the voices and perspectives of the recipients of these initiatives. Mignolo therefore argues that from the exterior of the colonial matrix of power, i.e. from the erstwhile colony, the differences between these discursive shifts appear minimal (Kalantidou and Fry, 2014). The asymmetry of power is only re-enforced which creates new global discursive structures, thereby re-establishing hierarchies. Using the notion of “texts in circulation” Mignolo (2000) explains that texts which emanate from the colonial centre of power circulate globally and universalize, thereby becoming “global texts in circulation”. These global texts form an integral part of the global discursive structures.

To rupture this asymmetry of power, the recent TNGOs’ literature has focussed on how NGOs negotiate and resist these structures through hybridity (Claeye, 2014; Dar, 2014). Deconstructing extant critiques of donor-imposed practices (such as writing and producing formal reports) as “top-down”, Dar demonstrates that “NGO workers draw on hybridization as a way of navigating between donor and local rationalities” (Dar, 2014, p. 2) as a response to donor practices. The “space” created at the encounter of donor and local rationalities results in the production of local hybrid accounts containing elements of both formal and informal reporting practices, thereby leading to a subversion of the hierarchical difference. However, the practice of report writing also produces hybrid experiences for the local workers who feel partly empowered by writing donor reports, but also experience difficulty in communicating in a different language. This restricts the possibility for complete subversion of the hierarchy.

So, while hybridity appears to resolve the asymmetry of power, Mignolo (2000) argues “hybridity appears as the visible outcome, that does not reveal the coloniality of power inscribed in the modern world imagery” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 41). Also, “the notion of hybridity [...] suggests a discontinuity between the colonial configuration of the object or subject of study and the postcolonial position of the *locus* of theorizing” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 94). In that respect, hybridity remains a critique from the interiority of the colonial difference, as the geo-epistemic location of enunciation does not get displaced. In such a critique, the dislocation of the categories of the centre and periphery as defined by the colonial matrix of power does not occur, and the boundary between the categories remains unquestioned. This, therefore, prompts us to look for a critique from the exteriority. A critique from the exteriority looks for a *locus* of enunciation in the Third World local to locate those texts, which do not appear in the global texts of circulation. In this regard, Nuijten (2012) examines the impact of the agrarian reforms introduced by the government in the 1990s on the locals,

which focussed on notions of participatory development and local management. By tracing the voices of the local Ejidatario communities in Mexico, the paper deciphers the immanent logic in “their own ways of coping with life and searching for solutions” (Nuijten, 2012, p. 194). Such native logic is not taken into cognizance by governmental reform initiatives, and locals remain indifferent to the reform. In this regard, another strand of literature on the TNGOs, in contrast to the first strand identified at the beginning of the section, looks at the TNGOs as outcomes of local voluntary initiatives of actors (Jammulamadaka, 2009; Kabeer, 2005; Lewis, 2008) engaged in social development in their native countries. Taking a cue from this work, we shift the gaze towards the local TNGOs and locate the voices of these actors.

3. Conceptual framework

Given that global texts tend to overlook local voices, these texts are devoid of values shaped by the geo-historical location of other Third World locals. Mignolo (2000) therefore calls for unearthing these local voices to challenge the ubiquity of these global texts. Engaging in a critique from the exteriority then becomes an ethical concern for us. To bring out these local voices and infuse local values back into these global discursive structures, we engage in a phronetic enquiry. Phronetic enquiry is based on the Aristotelian concept of phronesis, which deals with the morally informed way of acting. Flyvbjerg (2001, 2006, 2008) introduced phronetic enquiry as a means for researchers to engage in research based on value rationality. He argues that it is the socio-historical and geo-ethico-political context that “endows phronetic researchers with the possibility to be aware of the social arrangements” (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 101) which lead to the creation of global texts and therefore challenge their domination. In this regard, our own position and situatedness in the Third World makes it justifiable for us to take the value position of the local TNGOs and engage in a phronetic methodology. We seek to uncover narratives of how the TNGOs silently cope with global texts in circulation and create action spaces for working towards the interests of the communities. We specifically seek to locate those voices, which appear silent in the global discourse and give an illusion of being passive, therefore conflating silence and passivity.

To examine this conflation, we draw upon Ashis Nandy’s theorization of silence in power relations of subjugation through his notion of “silent coping” discussed in the book *Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (1983). Analyzing the social psychology of the colonized living under subjugation, Nandy explains the absence of visible opposition or heroic battle by the “silent” masses of India (often interpreted as a sign of passivity). About the silent Indian, he writes:

The meek inherit the earth not by meekness alone [...] but through categories and concepts and even defences of mind with which to turn the West into a reasonably manageable vector [...] The first concept in such a set has to be the *victims’ construction of the West*, a West which would make sense to the non-West in terms of the non-West’s experience of suffering. However, jejune such a concept may seem to the sophisticated scholar, it is a reality for the millions who have learnt the hard way to live with the West during the last two centuries (Nandy, 1983, p. 12, emphasis added).

The ordinary Indian had a local intention of surviving the day under the powerful forces of colonialism. In his cognitive space, he acknowledged his own position in the power relations of subjugation and therefore did not engage in a heroic battle with the West. Through defences of the mind, he learnt to domesticate the West by devising ways of managing the powerful. So he does not protest against the powerful, but dialogues silently with his deepest consciousness, evaluating and negotiating with constraints and action choices. While this silence risks being misinterpreted as “passively conforming to such oppression”, it helps in preserving his faith and retaining a “latent rebelliousness” (Nandy, 1983, p. 104) for release at any apt moment. It involves the constant lookout for those outer-friendly forces with whom

he can partially share his faith. Further, seeing the West as a transient ruler from a native consciousness and cosmology prevents him from either eulogizing the West or feeling defeated by its overwhelming presence. Silence is then a powerful resource for him, which he learns to use profitably and strategically. The strategic use of silence provides scope for further action possibilities in terms of what is “feasible” and “not feasible” and creates micro-spaces of the agency for the actor enabling further manoeuvring. All of the above aspects of silence makes it a useful coping strategy for “domesticating the West” (Nandy, 1983, p. 108, emphasis added). In addition, given that CPD scholarship has postulated a homology between development and colonization, as shown in Figure 1, it becomes more pertinent to use Nandy as a theoretical frame for our analysis to interpret the silence of the TNGOs.

4. Research context and methods

We selected Nirbhik Trust (NT) (name changed), a local NGO whose engagement in local developmental interventions began prior to any donor entry in that region of India. This fulfilled our requirement of studying local attempts at developments. NT had also been involved in relations with the government through the pursuit of many programmes and with several foreign funding agencies which had made their entry into India during the 1970s. This satisfied our methodological requirement of an NGO situated in a nexus of relations with dominant actors like the State and donors to establish the field of power relations. In this particular case, the key dominant actor who has “stood in” for donors in the nexus of power relations determining the conditions of action for the TNGO was the post-colonial State. The international donors were just making their entry into the country during the 1970s when NT was also just founded. So, while CPD literature has treated international donors as key actors for promoting developmental activity in TNGOs in the backdrop of the neo-liberal agenda, we treat donors and the postcolonial State as institutionally equivalent. This equivalence has been alluded to and explained by Mignolo (2000) through the notion of coloniality of power. We also provide an instance of such institutional equivalence through a mapping of the interests and agendas of the various institutional actors, i.e. the World Bank, donors and the post-colonial State in the forestry discourse, which is discussed later in the findings section. We ensured that access to the organization could be obtained. Phronetic research focuses on concrete experiences situated in a given context as exemplars. Thus, this study focuses on one programme, Wasteland

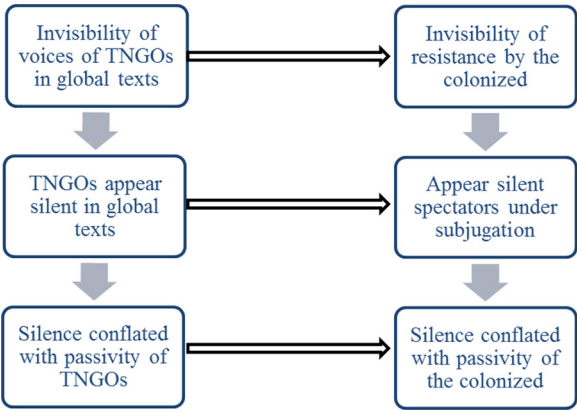


Figure 1.
Analogy between the
conflated categories of
silence and passivity
of the colonized with
TNGOs in global texts

Development (WD) as an exemplar of management at NT. WD is the “text” this study analyzes (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Prasad, 2002). WD is amongst the earliest and successful programmes of NT conducted in the 1970s, which built the credibility of NT in the field of social development. In the oral narratives, several references were made to the WD programme etched in the memory of organizational members. Consequently, we chose to probe further into it.

Data for the study were obtained from five types of sources. The first source constituted souvenirs[1] published by the organization from 1971 to 2005. The second source was written accounts (published and unpublished) of and by the founder of the organization, including his autobiography written in the vernacular which contained details of programmes as well as the actions of the organization. Overall, we referred to around 400 pages of documents. Third, seven people were interviewed which included the founder who initiated WD, the present secretary of the organization (son of the founder), the joint secretary, two board members and two older employees associated with WD to clarify issues and supplement the gaps. These interviews ranged from 40 minutes to two hours. A total of ten hours of interviews were carried out. The interviews were cross-referenced with other data. Fourth, the source we referred to were reports pertaining to the time period 1975-1985 produced by the Government of India and the Government of the state of Andhra Pradesh, conference proceedings produced by government-run institutes on social forestry, publicly available documents in the online repository of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Bank. In total, we referred to ten publicly available documents retrieved from the above sources. The fifth source consisted of books and papers by forestry experts and academics pertaining to that time period. All of these reports and documents provided us with a contextual understanding of social forestry during that period.

Following the guidelines of phronetic research, we first compiled the data and listed the programmes that had occurred prior to the commencement of WD to establish necessary linkages between the events during 1970-1980. We then reconstructed the local context during that period. We also delved into the forestry discourse of the 1970s for an understanding of the broader context, which formed the backdrop of WD. We focussed on securing every minute detail regarding the events and traced the actions of the founder, his relations with other actors, the practical choices and judgements made based on his own evolving understanding of local problems. In this process, we also delineated the nexus of power relations in which the founder and NT were placed. Based upon the above analysis of tracing the sequence of actions, we created a narrative of WD while situating the actor in the framed “local” context. The reconstruction of the narrative and the analysis went through a number of iterations through discussion among all the authors to ensure coherence and consistency before achieving closure. This helped us uncover the prudence[2] and practical rationality informing mundane little local actions and rendered them meaningful.

5. A decade of failed experiments – Prakash’s journey

Dr Prakash (name changed), the founder of NT, left for India in 1967 the same night he defended his PhD in metallurgy in the USA, and he went straight to his native village to begin working and living there. Eventually, he established NT in 1976 and has since been working in around 100 villages for integrated rural development in the Vigyan district (name changed) of Andhra Pradesh.

In his initial forays into rural development, while working in 1969 for a government programme which sought to identify and train beneficiaries for disbursement of loans to purchase cattle, Prakash encountered the apathy and indifference of the locals. Dairying was the second most important occupation of the people in that region. He realized the

6. Wasteland development – creating possibilities from “wasted” lands

Prakash sensed an opportunity in social forestry which was being promoted by the government under its forestry policy on wastelands to meet the fuel and fodder needs of the locals. Wastelands mainly referred to “degraded as well as unutilized land subject to deterioration from natural causes or lack of soil and water management which could be brought under vegetative cover through reasonable effort” (Saigal, 2011, p. 16). The government adopted the social forestry policy to keep the locals away from forests, which were earmarked for production forestry, i.e. use of forests for industrial purposes.

Prakash, therefore, fabricated land use solution around the 5Fs – fuel, fodder, food, fertilizers and fibre – and approached the district collector[5] to lease 50 acres of wasteland in the village of Sweet Springs (name changed) to carry out plantations. He got an initial funding from OXFAM in 1978 for afforestation of wastelands under the social forestry

Taaptipuram Taluk (1979)	
No. of villages	84
Population	140,815
Literacy	21%
Tenant Farmers	20%
Families keeping animals	60%
Housing	Mud huts
Diet	Rice
	Chillies
	Vegetables (occasional)
Income sources	Agriculture
	Agriculture labour wages:- Rs 2-5 per day
	Labour work in cities (off-season migration)
Malnutrition	Widespread protein and vitamin deficiencies

Table I.
Socio-economic profile
of the people in the
villages at
Taaptipuram Taluk
(1979)

Source: Souvenir (1980), Nirbhik Trust

programme. The donor agencies were also looking for credible individuals working in rural development. While he received government permission for fodder, land use for the other Fs were not sanctioned by the secretariat[6]. As a makeshift solution, the sympathetic Collector provided Prakash with an addendum to the sanction letter granting the administrative consent to pursue the other Fs and avoid likely delays in the re-approval of an amended proposal.

Prakash's first act in 1978 was growing cashew (*Anacardium occidentale*), serving the twin purpose of providing food as well as generating livelihood for the locals. Social forestry discourse promoted fast-growing exotic varieties like Eucalyptus (for pulpwood and fuelwood), *Prosopis juliflora* (fodder), *Casuarinas* (fuelwood) as key plantations in afforestation programmes (Bachkhetai, 1984). Eucalyptus was the most popular amongst these exotic varieties, often leading to free distribution of eucalyptus seedlings by the government (Palanna, 1996).

Prakash planted eucalyptus at the topmost part of the farm as a windbreaker to arrest soil erosion. Unlike the free seedling (mostly eucalyptus) distribution programmes which hardly generated any interest among the locals, the high yield of cashew plantations within one and half years on the barren land caused huge excitement. While 75,000 cashew seedlings were distributed in 1979, the demand grew successively and reached 0.15 million in 1980.

The positive results from the cashew plantations led Prakash to experiment further by growing several fruit-bearing trees (around 40 varieties) including banana, curry leaf, drumstick, guava, Indian blackberry (*jamun*), jack fruit, mango, papaya, pomegranate, custard apple (*sitaphal*), tamarind etc. that led to the creation of local markets within the region, thereby creating a thriving village economy. These farm activities departed significantly from those in the government-owned fuelwood plantations (mostly eucalyptus) where the locals received only wages for planting and overseeing the trees and were permitted to use eucalyptus branches and twigs as fuelwood (Saigal, 2011; Singh, 1989).

The growing interest of the locals in Prakash's activities compelled him to think of ways of sustaining their interest while operating within the limitations of the land lease arrangement. He started growing vegetables, a staple diet of the region and other fruit-bearing trees by slowly phasing-out fodder plantations from around 23 varieties on a 15-acre land to around 14 varieties on a 12-acre land and bringing down the fodder production from 0.36 million kgs in 1980 to 10,000 kgs by 1983. Meanwhile, he addressed the issue of dairying by purchasing high-quality milk-animals with funds from Evangelische Zentralstelle für Entwicklungshilfe e.v.[7] (EZE), a German funding agency, and cross-breeding them with local cattle to improve the milk yield. He initiated a programme where a female cross-bred calf was given to a beneficiary on a promise of returning to NT the first female calf born. In this way, out of 125 such cattle distributed, around 100 were returned back to the farm by the locals, for further redistribution to other beneficiaries, a sign of the sustained involvement among the locals. Building a dairy farm on that land was also convenient for NT as the fodder requirements of the cattle were being met from the farm itself.

Such acts however incurred the wrath of the new district collectors and officers (*tehsildars*)[8] who came in the 1980s and accused him of using the land for purposes other than fodder. This was because the addendum provided by the first Collector mentioning the approval for land use on the 5Fs was found missing at the Collector's office and the officers refused to acknowledge NT's copy of the same. Prakash was also rearing animals (dairy, sheep, goat and poultry) to demonstrate income generation possibilities to the locals, which fell outside the purview of the land lease contract. The collectors threatened him with cancellation of the lease forcing him to pay higher taxes. He paid these realizing that he was

situated in adverse power relations with the authorities and was operating under a massive constraint. Paying higher taxes was a way of preserving his space of action.

The returns from the plantations were also providing Prakash revenues to partly self-fund his own experiments without having to specify expected targets and outcomes to donors – something that would have been difficult while experimenting. Further, he demonstrated to the local community the returns from floriculture (a complete departure from social forestry). The returns from floriculture fetched Rs 50 per day as compared to an income of Rs 30 per day from traditional crops. This act led to the adoption of floriculture in the region by the locals and also provided income to Prakash for his own experiments.

Meanwhile, he also looked for ways to address the concerns of *Etikopakka*, a toy-making craft languishing in the region due to lack of attention by the government authorities. The artisans would often face the wrath of the forest authorities for smuggling the wood (a key raw material) for their craft from the forests reserved for production forestry. To address this issue, he approached an acquaintance from the forest department for seeds of the tree and grew them on the farm to cater to the artisans' needs.

In doing all the above, he continued to remain in adversarial relations with the collectors and paid higher taxes. In 1990, i.e. after twelve years since the inception of WD, Prakash finally broke his silence and forged an association with a sympathetic collector convincing him to release an order for tax reduction. However, these action spaces became contested again as he was accused by other officials of bribing the collector. Handling defamation silently was another act of silent coping for him to continue with WD till 1995.

The initiatives which were undertaken by Prakash under the WD programme were reported in detail in the 1984 souvenir, six years after the programme was initiated when the returns from the plantations were substantial. In the souvenirs post-1984, the programme remains sparsely framed as NT's successful intervention in WD. A key paragraph from the *Silver Jubilee Souvenir* (in 2003) describes the programme as a "no-holds-barred success":

NT's wasteland development programme began with the afforestation of the hill slopes at sweet springs [...] It proved to be a no-holds-barred success and NT's most quoted statement came to be – "There's no such thing as wasteland, it is just wasted land". After this experiment, NT went on to take three more projects [...]"

The sparse framing of the programme in the later texts was a strategy of preserving Prakash's space of agency by keeping the 5Fs invisible and preventing himself from facing constraints from the Departments of Agriculture[9], Animal Husbandry and Handicrafts (with jurisdiction over the activities related to other Fs). The only other text where the 5Fs find mention is the founder's own autobiography published by NT in 2009, in a vernacular language, where he breaks his silence 30 years after the intervention and narrates those constraints and the friendly forces who bailed him out of adversity. Breaking his silence was now affordable to Prakash with the elapse of time, given the local legitimacy and acceptance of the experiments through cascading adoption in the nearby villages and his recognition at the national level through induction in the National Wasteland Development Board. The strategic use of silence proved advantageous to him by keeping him invisible from the outer forces and their administrative and discursive machinery.

7. Toward a critical interpretation of silence

Situating Prakash's efforts in the wider national context, we see that in 1976, the National Commission on Agriculture initiated a major policy on production and social forestry. While production forestry was focused on increasing industrial wood supply for wood-based products such as paper and pulp, social forestry was designed to meet the fuel and fodder requirements of local communities and unburden production forestry by discouraging locals

from entering the forests for their needs. Social forestry usually covered barren wastelands, degraded lands and land on the sides of roads, canal banks and railway lines:

[...] by taking up programmes of raising trees, grasses and fodder [...] it would be possible to meet the requirement of fuelwood, fodder, small timber [...] at the same time these programmes would remove a serious impediment in the practice of production forestry. (GoI, 1976, p. 120)

At the international level also, the discourse on social forestry was gaining momentum. In 1975, an influential study by Eckholm (1975) pointed to the growing “fuelwood crisis” in developing countries and raised concerns over growing deforestation. A report by de Montalembert and Clément (1983) claimed that around 2,000 million people in developing countries depended on fuelwood and other biomass fuels for their daily activities, out of which around 1,160 million were not able to meet their daily requirements from available supplies. Such demands were also unlikely to be met through oil and electricity, especially for the rural poor (Pfeffer and Behera, 1997). Thus, afforestation was suggested as a viable strategy by forestry experts, leading several international funding agencies to route aid to the developing nations in the 1980s (Arnold *et al.*, 2003; Casson, 1997; Saigal, 2011).

We see that though the national forestry discourse included community needs, it was kept secondary to industrial needs, which is further supported in the choice of eucalyptus for social forestry – a variety which primarily met industrial needs along with fuelwood requirements of locals (leaves and twigs). Within the discourse of forestry, eucalyptus was in demand for industrial and domestic paper use. Its ability to grow quickly under harsh conditions, with low supervision needs and with high-survival rate along with desirable ecological effects of preventing soil erosion made it a preferred choice for production forestry among policy-makers and industry (Abbasi, 2004; Palanna, 1996). This led to schemes by forest departments for the free distribution of eucalyptus seedlings and by 1974 around 1,025,487 acres of land in India were covered by eucalyptus plantations alone (Casson, 1997). Eventually, eucalyptus found its way into social forestry domain, as it was preferred by scientists and forestry experts who recommended it to be grown on barren lands. The significance of eucalyptus can be gauged from the overwhelming coverage it received in publications on social forestry. The chapter “Exotics in social forestry” in Bachkheti (1984) [published from Birla Institute of Research], as an instance, devotes nine pages (out of total 12 pages) to eucalyptus, whereas six other species were limited to the remaining three pages. Around this period, the World Bank also promoted eucalyptus plantations through social forestry in response to the “Fuelwood Crisis” of the 1970s in the Asian countries (Casson, 1997; Palanna, 1996). Backed by such institutional resources, eucalyptus became a key feature of the global and national discourse. In the local context of Prakash’s action, traces of this “global” discourse were also present in the form of social forestry and eucalyptus plantations. Prakash participated in the national discourse, engaged with government and donors through social forestry and yet planted eucalyptus only in a single line along the top of the hillock of tree plantations for arresting soil erosion, recognizing its properties as a windbreaker and a shield against soil erosion. He accepted the “global” on his own terms and domesticated it by displacing it from its universal status and called it one of the Fs among his 5Fs. This is evident in the special social forestry chapter in the 1984 *NT souvenir* where the discussion around eucalyptus is limited to only one out of 14 pages, while the rest of the chapter covers fruit-bearing trees, fodder species, horticultural farm, floricultural farm, *Etikopakka* tree plantations, in great contrast to the expert report cited earlier.

A look at the stake structure around the trees in the national discourse and Prakash’s local action further highlights the transformation practiced by Prakash. Under social forestry, eucalyptus was a manifestation of the stakes of the:

- *government*: keeping locals away from production forestry;
- *wood product industry*: good source of pulpwood; and
- *local people*: wages for labour and fuel wood.

As wages and fuelwood were the only stakes for the locals, this invited minimal participation from them (Saigal, 2011).

Prakash was, however, creating a different stake structure on the farm for the locals through several small departures from the national discourse on social forestry, as shown in Figure 2. In addition to wages, working tools were sold to the wage labourers at cost price and recovered in instalments from their weekly payments to create a sense of ownership among them along with the sale of vegetables at a discount. He distributed the seedlings of the vegetables and fruit-bearing trees to the locals for raising their own plantations. Prakash also employed them in income-generation activities such as pickle making, soap making and others for which the raw materials were already available within this farm’s trees. These acts created stakes for the local people, for the wellbeing of the tree and the farm, an element missing in the national discourse. The sequence of activities on the farm, as discussed in the earlier section, illustrates how this stake structure was an emergent phenomenon and did not exist *a priori* as was the case in the national discourse. The first act was latching onto social forestry and yet moving away from a monoculture of eucalyptus to cashew plantations, food and cash crops for the locals. Each of the subsequent species (trees) and activities introduced were contingent on the results of prior activities. The locals now overcame their disengagement and started participating and making claims on the farm. One such instance of the locals’ involvement in the farm could be seen in the act of guarding of papaya

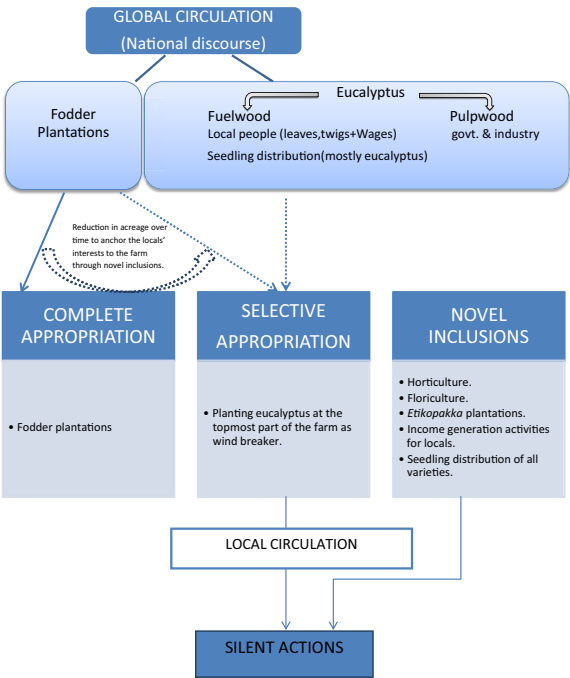


Figure 2.
Commonalities and
departures from the
national social forestry
discourse in the local
context of action

plantations from being stolen by outsiders. This was indicative of the sense of ownership that these locals felt toward the farm as a result of the benefits they derived from the farm-related activities. The locals realized that it was in their own interest to guard the plantations (Souvenir, 1984).

As each act of Prakash was begetting scope for further acts, the interests of the community and Prakash were also getting enmeshed. He had to accede to their demands to anchor their interests to the farm. Prakash's own strategic silence *vis-à-vis* the state became important to guard the land against threats of lease cancellation, and secure the means of "engaging" with the local community, i.e., animating them and helping them break their silence. During his early years, he had realized that the locals were indifferent and apathetic toward any outside initiative because they had been subject to centuries of oppression and had become silent and withdrawn (Jammulamadaka, 2014). Hence, they saw these outside initiatives as one of the many short-lived streams of interventions, which came and left in a few years. The silence of the locals was situated in their own understanding of these outside interventions as having negligible engagement with their daily lives. Hence, they would never associate their hopes with these initiatives and therefore saw them as transient. This was their strategy of coping.

Prakash's understanding of development meant breaking this "silence of the locals" and animating them so that they took charge of themselves. Thus, the farm was an instrument of animation for him in breaking inertia and the local silence. As he enmeshed his interests with the numerous interests of the local community through an emergent sequence of actions around the "farmland", he overcame the villagers' indifference towards outsiders. Hence, the stakes of remaining silent *vis-à-vis* the authorities with power also gradually escalated for Prakash. He played on "silence" as a strategic category to preserve those action spaces and keep himself invisible from the outer world. He clung onto social forestry and managed to create that local space for breaking the silence of the locals, who would have otherwise seen social forestry as another bureaucratic initiative. All of the departures made were manifestations of a single major departure from the social forestry discourse, i.e. the privileging of the locals. Keeping silent in front of the authorities was, therefore, Prakash's strategy of coping with the authorities in power.

We, therefore, see two different manifestations of "silent coping" under conditions of subjugation. Prakash understood the local pragmatic logic of sustained "silence of the locals" and therefore could empathize with them. He could see a homology between their silence and his own position in relations of domination. This homology led him to acquire the understanding of transience from the same cultural repertoire, which he shared with the locals to deal with the power relations in which he was subjugated. He also therefore saw these power relations as transient. His own silence relied on the negotiations with the silence of the masses. This is how he silently coped. The account, therefore, appears to be a case of double appropriation of the notion of "silent coping" that Nandy (1983) suggests. Seen from a national discourse, Prakash appears silent. He neither publicized his actions nor did he seek to transform the national discourse, or protest against the authorities for charging him with higher taxes on the leased land. He, therefore, appears as a passive implementer of the social forestry discourse. His silence appears broken intermittently in instances like the forest department appreciating his afforestation endeavours, or his induction into the National Wasteland Development Board.

8. Unpacking the conflation of silence and passivity

To explain why voices of the TNGOs are unheard in the global texts of circulation, we draw upon Mignolo's (2000) distinction between texts which circulate at the global level and texts which remain at the local level (Mignolo, 2000). Mignolo (2000) traces the history of social sciences and argues that the texts of social sciences were circulated in imperial languages. Even though a

larger number of people spoke Arabic than French, yet “Arabic, with a longer history than French [...] became epistemologically marginal in the colonality of power” (Mignolo, 2000, p. 71). Mignolo (2000) argues that the imperial languages started circulating and universalizing under different historical conditions backed by resources from the imperial centre and became global texts claiming a universality of explanation. In this process, other texts being articulated in other local languages in Africa, Asia and Latin America remained local. So the local texts which could not circulate, appeared “silent” in texts of global circulation.

The account of Prakash and his departures from the social forestry discourse, and the absence of references to the departures within the national discourse can be explained through Mignolo’s argument on “texts in circulation”. It is these global texts in circulation through aid networks, State and donor reports, planning and monitoring systems, policy documents and academic texts backed by institutional resources, which CPD scholars examine in critiquing development.

Our exemplar shows that although the global texts circulate down below to the site of action, they do not achieve “saturation” in the distant local site, given their fewer touch points in the daily lives of the locals. A locally enacted artefact, on the other hand, has greater engagement in the lives of the locals through their direct involvement in numerous local acts – exemplified in this case by caring for the trees, watering the seedlings, embarking on new livelihoods etc. Hence, such artefacts achieve a greater circulation in the local context than the global texts as seen in the increased demand for cashew seedlings from 75,000 to 0.15 million, thereby restricting the power of the global texts manifested through the failure of the free seedling distribution programmes of the government. At the level of local action, Prakash’s own selective appropriation of eucalyptus shows the displacement of meanings around eucalyptus (as a marker in the social forestry discourse) enacted silently by him, both in action and in the souvenirs.

Yet, these local artefacts created in the local context of operation do not travel upwards as texts in global circulation and circulate only at the local level. It is the invisibility of these local artefacts and texts in reading of the global texts that leads to the TNGOs being framed as passive.

9. Conclusion

Initiatives within the field of development have gone through various shifts from the needs-based approach in the 1970s to the rights-based approach in the 1990s. These shifts have resulted from key theoretical debates seeking to define and redefine the “right” approach to development from the colonial matrix of power. Every such approach has been yet another medium for imposing the mandate from within the colonial matrix of power on the Third World local. Therefore, irrespective of this progressive shift from “identification of needs” to “granting of rights”, the local voices still continue to elude these debates (Kabeer, 2005). Critical and post-development scholars’ critique of development is based on their reading of global texts in circulation that are devoid of local texts. The absence of the local texts, therefore, makes these global texts in circulation monolithic. As a result, scholars are unable to locate the voices of the TNGOs, which leads to the framing of the TNGOs as passive recipients in these global texts of circulation. By locating the voices of the TNGOs, we show that silence of the TNGOs in these global texts does not necessarily mean passivity. Silence is used strategically by the actor to create scope for generation of action spaces by carefully navigating through the constraints in the context of action. Such action spaces are created as the outcomes of each act inform possibilities for further acts. The ongoing negotiations of the actor while navigating the political landscape at the site of action show that action spaces are emergent in nature and cannot be visualized *a priori*, making them

both invisible and unpredictable in the global texts of circulation. This emergent nature of the action spaces created in the Third World local makes the capture of these spaces difficult in a sedimented form within the global texts of circulation. Even our demonstration of the existence of these spaces in this paper cannot lead to a loss of these spaces, as they cannot be captured in a sedimented form by texts. The theoretical difficulty of capturing these emergent action spaces renders discursive domination incomplete and creates an agency for the local TNGOs.

By demonstrating the existence of autonomous local texts in circulation through the case exemplar, we also respond to Mignolo's (2006) call for:

[...] delinking from the tyranny of these global texts by reinvesting what has been silenced, making visible what has been rendered invisible, to affirm the presence of what has been declared absent (Mignolo, 2006, p. 33).

The local texts are therefore not generated out of translation, imitation or hybridization of the global and the Third World local texts. They are generated as a consequence of the socio-historical and geopolitical situatedness of the actor, which shapes the value position of the actor. Such a value position enables the actor to selectively appropriate artefacts and texts from the global texts in circulation and attach new meaning and significance to those artefacts in the local context. These artefacts invested with new meanings in the context of operation do not travel as texts in global circulation and therefore appear invisible in the global texts.

Notes

1. The souvenirs are published by the organization for limited circulation.
2. Phronesis emphasizes prudence or practical wisdom involved in managing a particular situation which cannot be explained by universal rules about managing (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 2006).
3. Prakash was a native of the village. However, he left for the USA to pursue his PhD. Hence, he was initially perceived as an outsider.
4. Taluk means sub-division of a district, comprising a cluster of villages for revenue purposes.
5. District Collector is the main administrative officer of a district in India.
6. Office of the state secretariat refers to the highest administrative position in the bureaucratic system of the state government.
7. e.v is a German abbreviation for eingetragener Verein which means registered association.
8. Tehsildar is an administrative officer for collecting tax from a Tehsil. Tehsil means a sub-division of a district.
9. Refer to: www.aponline.gov.in/APPortal/index.asp for jurisdictional arrangements of the government departments of Andhra Pradesh.

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