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THE SECOND BIENNIAL NGOS AND NONPROFITS CONFERENCE 2015

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ABOUT THE INTEREST GROUP ON NGOS AND NONPROFITS:

The Interest Group on NGOs and Nonprofits formed in 2009 in response to a sharp increase in papers and publications. Nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations (NGOs) are both extremely diverse and growing in importance. That said, the terms “NGO” and “nonprofit” obscure more than they reveal, generalizing a heterogeneous cluster of faith-based organizations, grassroots groups, labor unions, women’s groups, and international NGOs. Currently we do not have mechanisms to even estimate how many nonprofits or NGOs exist worldwide.

NGOs and nonprofits have a lengthy history, playing a wide range of often-contradictory roles contingent upon spatial and historical contexts. But especially following shifts heralded by neoliberal globalization and the “New Policy Agenda” in the 1980s, NGOs are playing more and more central roles in a host of arenas: public health, education, “development,” violence against women, literacy, advocacy, human rights, and so on. In addition, an increasing number of professional anthropologists work within NGOs and nonprofits as consultants, research staff, volunteers, and even directors.

The AAA Interest Group on NGOS and Nonprofits exists to facilitate collaboration among anthropologists who study NGO phenomena across a wide range of sites and social issues. Our goals include: creating a space for dialogue, networking, planning conference sessions and publications, offering a critical assessment of the literature, becoming a point of contact for new anthropologists wishing to meet others, establishing a repository of how NGOS and nonprofits have been studied by anthropologists, brainstorming future directions, and raising the visibility and profile of NGO/nonprofit studies within the discipline and the American Anthropological Association.

CONFERENCE COORDINATING COMMITTEE:

Amanda Lashaw , University of California Santa Cruz	Rebecca Mantel , Rice University
Siobhan McGuirk , American University	Rebecca Nelson , University of Connecticut
Misha Quill , University of Iowa	Mark Schuller , Northern Illinois University
Aviva Sinervo , San Francisco State University	Christian Vannier , University of Michigan-Flint
Kim Walters , California State University, Long Beach	

Email: ngoanthro@gmail.com

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS:

Tuesday, November 17

08:30 — 1:30	Registration	Turnhalle
09:00 — 10:00	Breakfast	Turnhalle
10:00 — 10:30	Welcome	Turnhalle
10:30 — 12:15	Session 1	
	NGOs and Social Movements: Ethnography at the Intersections of Engagement	TV 440/540
	Flipping the Classroom: Toward a Reengineering of Post-Aid Delivery Impact Evaluations	TV 444
12:15 — 01:30	Mentoring /Networking Lunch	Turnhalle
01:30 — 03:15	Session 2	
	Desirable Futures: Temporalities, Trajectories, and Hope in the NGO Sector	TV 440/540
	Investing in Collaboration: Reviewing the Posner Center's International Collaboration Fund	TV 444
	Encountering Philanthropists in the NGO Landscape: A Workshop for Ethnographer-Practitioners	TV 640
03:30 — 05:15	Session 3	
	Meeting Ethnography across NGO-graphies	TV 440/540
	Redefining Success and Failure	TV 444
	Internal NGO-graphies: Navigating "Citizenships" In and Through Transnational NGOs	TV 640
05:15 — 05:45	Reception	St. Cajetan's
05:45 — 07:30	Plenary	St. Cajetan's
	Vincanne Adams , University of California, San Francisco Julie Hemment , University of Massachusetts, Amherst Heather Hindman , University of Texas at Austin Saida Hodžić , Cornell University	

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS:

Wednesday, November 18

07:00—10:00	Registration	Turnhalle
07:00—08:00	Breakfast	Turnhalle
08:00—09:45	Session 4	
	Children as Objects of Humanitarian Intervention: NGO Commodification of Disadvantaged Childhoods (Part 1)	TV 320A
	What Is This “Local Knowledge” That Development Organizations Fetishize? (Part 1)	TV 320B
	Development’s Translations	TV 440/540
	The Corporatization of NGOs	TV 320C
09:45—10:00	Coffee Break	Turnhalle
10:00—11:45	Session 5	
	Children as Objects of Humanitarian Intervention: NGO Commodification of Disadvantaged Childhoods (Part 2)	TV 320A
	What Is This “Local Knowledge” That Development Organizations Fetishize? (Part 2)	TV 320B
	Civil Society and the Law	TV 440/540
	NGOing: NGOs as a Verb	TV 320C
12:00—01:30	Working Group Lunch	Turnhalle
01:30—03:30	Discussion	Turnhalle



Some sessions will be recorded for webcasting, denoted by this symbol.

Please visit our [website](#) for the **Individual Presenters Appendix**, containing contact information, and paper abstracts and keywords (where applicable), for all presenters.

Conference Twitter hashtag: #NGOographies

SESSION ABSTRACTS:



NGOs and Social Movements: Ethnography at the Intersections of Engagement

Organizers: Angela Storey and Amanda J. Reinke

Format: Panel

Keywords: *social movements, activism, collaboration, alliances, politicization*

Amanda J. Reinke, University of Tennessee

Social Justice Inactivism Among Alternative Justice Practitioners in San Francisco

Yang Zhan, Binghamton University

The Dilemma of Representing the Migrant Workers: The Case of an NGO Defending a Migrant School in Beijing

Daniela Marini, University of Colorado Boulder

Political Agroecology: Social Movements Opening Spaces for Political Innovations on Food Systems in Río Cuarto, Argentina

Courtney Kurlanska, Rochester Institute of Technology

When Civil Society Isn't Civil Anymore: Save the Mountain or Save Yourself

Angela Storey, University of Arizona

Untangling Engagement: Deciphering Alliances and Activism in Cape Town

General discussion

Non-governmental organizations often have complex relationships with contemporary social movements. NGOs may practice strategic participation in social movements related to their work, and movements may seek out or avoid connections to NGOs, raising questions for both participants and scholars about the nature of interactional spaces and organizational relationships. This panel examines points of intersection between NGOs and social movements, specifically exploring how collaborations—or decisions not to collaborate—prompt transformation in individuals and organizations as they navigate modes of socio-political engagement. From alliances and cooperation to division or co-optation, social movement-NGO junctures provide opportunities for examining activism and inactivism shaped by layered political and economic landscapes. In response to guiding questions proposed by the organizers, panelists consider how ethnographic work at points of organizational meeting and transformation—whether constructive or dissonant in outcome—can be generative to theoretical and practitioner understandings of social action.

Papers consider organizational and individual transformations by responding to the following questions: What factors frame determinations for or against NGO-movement alliances? How do alliances impact organizational outcomes? How do alliances or interactions impact trajectories of politicization, modes of representation, and the circulation of knowledge?

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

Flipping the Classroom: Toward a Reengineering of Post-Aid Delivery Impact Evaluations

Organizer: Amy Greene

Format: Workshop

Keywords: *practitioners, project evaluation, bureaucracy, data management, international aid*

Amy Greene, Project C.U.R.E.

NGO work on any scale has its challenges. Learning what a local community needs, wants, and how to best implement changes in a socially sustainable way is an ongoing process for nonprofits worldwide. NGOs that conduct humanitarian aid on a global scale face the added challenge of designing and maintaining a centralized system of data. This data is collected in the form of Impact Evaluations, surveys filled out by the aid recipients that are used internally to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their aid delivery system. These evaluations directly shape how future projects are conducted.

This audience-centric session mimics the Harvard Business School's model of group problem-solving to explore some of these challenges. During the first 20-30 minutes of the session, a representative of [Project C.U.R.E.](#) will explain the process of providing customized cargo deliveries of medical equipment and supplies to healthcare facilities, the major component of the NGO's overall global aid. The speaker will explain the purpose of the evaluations and distribute abbreviated versions of the organization's actual Impact Evaluation to the audience. The speaker will explain the obstacles faced by the NGO in collecting the most valuable data from these evaluations, data that will shape future cargo deliveries and help Project C.U.R.E. with its continuous process and performance improvement efforts, and the current lack of an impact evaluation specific for disaster relief container shipments.

The audience will then break into groups. Each group will be tasked with developing suggestions on how to improve the impact evaluation, specifically: 1) resolving the low response rate by the recipient healthcare facilities to complete the evaluations, 2) assessing how the questions themselves can be reworded or retooled to achieve more meaningful responses that can shape future cargo delivery solutions and inform internal process improvement initiatives at the NGO, and 3) identifying key questions that should be addressed in an impact evaluation for a disaster relief container solution. Groups may choose between these questions or attempt to address them all. After the audience has had 30 minutes to deliberate, each group will take 5 minutes to present their proposed resolutions. The remaining time will be used for open discussion about the proposed resolutions, as well as the merits and potential dangers of large-scale bureaucratic processes intended to assess project impacts in diverse settings.

This session is open to all conference participants, regardless of particular scholarly or professional background. These impact evaluations are used globally by countless

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

major NGOs. The improvement of these documents requires insights and judgments from individuals with broad experiences in various fields and field sites. This session is intended to be mutually beneficial to both audience participants and Project C.U.R.E., an NGO seeking anthropological understandings of local knowledge(s) and cross-cultural communication in order to improve their humanitarian practices.



Desirable Futures: Temporalities, Trajectories, and Hope in the NGO Sector

Organizer: Conference Coordinating Committee

Format: Panel

Chair: Mary Mostafanezhad

Keywords: *NGOization; emerging networks, assemblages, and landscapes of power; policy interlocutors/publics; NGO knowledges and information frameworks; constructions of need*

Felix Schubert, Leeds Beckett University

Do Study-internship Programs in Washington, D.C. Catalyze Elitism in the NGO Sector?

Mary Mostafanezhad, University of Hawai'i at Manoa

The Chronopolitics of Exile: Hope, Heterotemporality and NGO-economics along the Thai-Burma Border

Josh Fisher, High Point University

Waiting for NGOs: Chronopolitics and the Urgency of Hope and in Sustainable Development

Roger Norum, University of Leeds

Time and the Other? Liminality, Sociality and Hope in a Community of NGO Professionals

Lindsay Vogt, University of California Santa Barbara

The Rise (and Fall?) of the National Knowledge Portal Concept in India

Development work is often goal-directed and teleological by nature. Notions of desirable futures are the engines driving many NGOs. This panel explores the politics of planned and unplannable futures and trajectories in the world of NGOs. Among students hopeful for eventual employment success in high-profile NGOs, career aspirations can lead to the concentration of privilege and power through elite intern programs. In their professional lives, some NGO personnel must creatively manage the social and personal vagaries of a profoundly transitory lifestyle. In NGO practice, the futures desired by aid recipients regularly clash with the temporalities of development work defined by short-term grants and the vicissitudes of transnational attention. More immediately, desired futures often strain against present imperatives. Economies of knowledge and sustainability, values of sociality and corporatization, and tenets of (neo)liberalization contribute to imagined NGO outcomes. Yet, the affective experience of hope pervades many of these temporal orientations to the future.

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

Investing in Collaboration: Reviewing the Posner Center's International Collaboration Fund

Organizer: Doug Vilsack

Format: Workshop

Keywords: *collaboration, poverty, workshop, practitioners, international development*

Doug Vilsack, Posner Center for International Development

Melissa Theesen, Childrens' Future International

Monica LaBiche Brown, Africa Development Promise

Maria Rosa Galter, AfricAid

Small group and general discussion

This session will explore the results of the initial seven collaborations supported by the Posner Center for International Development's International Collaboration Fund, which engaged 16+ Tenants and Members, as well as the impact of similar funds supported by major U.S. and International donors. The [Posner Center](#) is a 25,000-square-foot shared workspace in Denver, Colorado with 57 Tenants and 90+ Members with a mission to build a community of innovators who grow lasting solutions to global poverty. The International Collaboration Fund was founded in October 2014 to support innovative projects that broaden and strengthen the work of Posner Tenant and Member organizations. Applicants are encouraged to submit ideas that will help them build capacity, explore new directions, take risks, fuel action, and improve the impact and knowledge base of our network. Learn more about existing International Collaboration Fund projects [here](#).

This session will begin with an overview of the International Collaboration Fund and the outcomes of the seven initial projects that were funded. We will then break out into small groups to discuss ways to improve the International Collaboration Fund process and other ways to promote collaboration in the international development sector. We will re-convene at the end of the session to report recommendations to the group.

Center Background: In 2011, iDE, a Denver-based group that increases incomes for more than 20 million rural farmers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, initiated an ambitious plan to finance and develop a consortium to inhabit the world's first shared space for international development. In 2012, after a collaborative design and planning process with the Denver Housing Authority, Engineers Without Borders USA, Bridges to Prosperity, Nokero, Denver Urban Gardens, and many dedicated partner organizations, more than two dozen Tenant organizations were recruited, many with a market-based approach to solving global challenges. iDE served as the founder and landlord until late 2013, when the Posner Center for International Development was "spun off" from iDE as an independent nonprofit organization.

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

Encountering Philanthropists in the NGO Landscape: A Workshop for Ethnographer-Practitioners

Organizers: Connie McGuire and Katie Cox and Michael Montoya

Format: Workshop

Keywords: *funders, philanthropy, practitioner-ethnographers, accountability, praxis, collaboration*

Connie McGuire, University of California, Irvine

Katie Cox, University of California, Irvine

Michael J. Montoya, University of California, Irvine

NGOs, in their roles as state-like implementers of social welfare and control, are in many respects beholden to their funders. The role of philanthropy as a form of governing in itself is multifaceted and not usefully understood as either benevolent or nefarious. In this interactive workshop participants will explore three interrelated NGO-graphies: 1) the role of philanthropic organizations within network fields of power, 2) the ways philanthropy can both force alignments to neoliberal regimes of governance and open space to advance alternative and counter agendas, and 3) the double-binds and conundrums that ethnographers navigate in their work with NGOs and granting agencies.

The session organizers will present several scenarios, based on their work as grantees of a major funder in California, in which the role of the ethnographer-practitioner has been (mis)understood, challenged, and reworked. The session organizers use multiple theoretical/practical concepts, such as accompaniment, healing, and co-production, to frame their approach to working in a southern California NGO-graphy and in solidarity with residents most affected by the problems that NGOs purportedly work to ameliorate. Workshop participants will have the opportunity to think together about the potentials and pitfalls for ethnographer-practitioners engaging with granting agencies. Scenarios will include balancing multiple commitments to a funder, the ethnographer-practitioner's sociopolitical and personal commitments, and the ethnographer-practitioner's accountabilities (relational, political, intellectual, social) to the people with whom they live, learn, and work.

This workshop will explore ways ethnographers and other researchers mediate the competing demands of their funders in ways that goes beyond flat-footed critique. People with whom we frequently find ourselves aligned demand allies that can contribute pragmatically or otherwise to their struggles. The organizers will facilitate up to three breakout groups to think seriously about such demands and their ethicopolitical challenges.

SESSION ABSTRACTS:



Meeting Ethnography Across NGO-graphies

Organizers: Jen Sandler and Nancy Kendall

Format: Panel

Keywords: *knowledge production, ethnography of meetings, institutional spaces*

Nancy Kendall, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Jen Sandler, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Celeste Alexander, Princeton University

Andrew Walsh, University of Western Ontario

Jorge Legoas Peña, McGill University

General discussion

Ethnographic fieldwork of and in NGOs often takes place within meeting settings. From meetings within communities, meetings of NGO staff, meetings between NGOs and funders, meetings between NGO program staff and local leaders, and meetings of transnational multi-stakeholder groups within which NGOs play prominent roles, participant observation in meetings often constitutes a significant quantity of ethnographic fieldwork on NGOs. Furthermore, in many local contexts, much of the “everyday” that occurs outside of formal or planned meetings, the nonformal contexts that have been the traditional location of anthropological knowledge production, often involve planning, discussing, positioning, or otherwise relating to meetings of some sort.

Meetings are ubiquitous, often taken-for-granted rituals of contemporary NGO life. This panel will explore what roles different types of meetings play in the shifting landscape of NGOs vis a vis funders, states, social groups and actors, and transnational bodies. How might ethnographers understand and engage with meetings as sites, objects, and ultimately technologies by which shifting NGO relationships with funders, states, and people are shaped? This session will engage panelists as well as participants in a discussion of meeting ethnography across diverse NGO settings. There will be significant time allocated to open discussion of the challenges of meeting ethnography, from fieldwork to engagement and analysis to representation.

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

Redefining Success and Failure

Organizer: Neena S. Jain

Format: Workshop

Keywords: *nonprofit management, international development, humanitarian assistance, practices/practitioners, project evaluation, health*

Neena S. Jain, emBOLDen Alliances

NGOs, communities, and contexts are complex landscapes and dynamic environments. However, the definitions by which NGOs frequently define success or failure have been static and unyielding to critical distinctions and community-specific perspectives. Current research and global circumstances demand a paradigm shift in how we view and share our definitions of both success and failure throughout the entire NGO stakeholder chain as well as community value network. Dr. Nigel Fisher, former UN Humanitarian Coordinator for Haiti voiced: "Haiti [for example] was littered with the skeletons of 'successful' aid projects." What have our past lessons taught us? What are our barriers to fundamental change? How do we define "success"? In the book *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid*, an international NGO project manager explains: "The phrase 'paradigm shift' is scary for many people. It calls into question everything they are doing and they think they have to start from scratch, relearn everything...[when], in fact, it is precisely the hard-won experience that prompts the shift." Through sharing experiences and engaging collaboratively, we can redefine success and failure, adopt these new conversations and measurements into practice, and thus change the paradigm.

In this workshop, we will engage in exercises to examine and share Best Practices in redefining success and failure. Our NGO, [emBOLDen Alliances](#), uses a methodology centered on listening and iteration, and through bringing global expertise to locally-based solutions. We specialize in understanding capacities within specific contexts and tailoring our guidance to match specific needs. Our objective at this conference is to examine current definitions of success and failure of NGOs as both organizations and programs, analyze gaps and illustrate best practices in community engagement, and construct action plans integrating new definitions into the NGO Project Cycle along the stakeholder chain and amongst community networks.

After a short context description led by Neena Jain, this session will continue with a guided discussion and facilitated small group work to collectively explore the following questions: In whose eyes are these terms (success/failure) defined, or in whose eyes should they be? How can we best incorporate a critical examination of NGO work honestly and transparently throughout all NGO stakeholders? How can measures of success or failure as collaboratively defined drive the paradigm shift we seek and call for in international aid? If each of us is a change agent in our communities and NGOs, what will we change today in our practice?

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

Internal NGO-graphies: Navigating “Citizenships” In and Through Transnational NGOs

Organizer: Rebecca Peters

Format: Roundtable

Keywords: *“human landscape”, practitioners, rights, responsibilities, management, identity, citizenship*

Rebecca Peters, Syracuse University

The Transnational NGO Initiative, Syracuse University

Patricia Kunrath Silva, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul and University of California-Irvine

Jessica-Jean Casler, University of Florida

General discussion

This roundtable considers the internal, human geographies of transnational NGOs. We consider the organizational and other “citizenships” experienced by transnational NGO staff members: for instance to a global office and to a national office that might have competing priorities, or to both an organization and a profession that might emphasize different approaches to one’s work. TNGO practitioners must navigate any such competing priorities and claims, and may experience differential privilege within these different contexts and networks. Session participants will share observations, experiences, and analysis on the topic and the discussion will inform the design of an ongoing project researching the identities and experiences of TNGO staff members.

Children as Objects of Humanitarian Intervention: NGO Commodification of Disadvantaged Childhoods

Organizers: Kristen Cheney and Aviva Sinervo

Format: Panel

Keywords: *humanitarian intervention, childhood, discourse, constructions of need, commodification*

Part One

Aviva Sinervo, San Francisco State University

Child Vendors in Peru

Drew Anderson, Australian National University

Indigenous Children in Australia

Miriam Thangaraj, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Child Workers and Consumers in India

Erin Moore, University of Chicago

Adolescent Girls in Uganda

Kristen Drybread, University of Colorado, Boulder

Drug-involved Girls in Brazil

General discussion

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

Part Two

Sara Thiam, Johns Hopkins School of Public Health *“Taalibe” (Qur’anic school students) Beggar Children in Senegal*

Colleen Walsh Lang, Washington University in St. Louis *HIV+ Children in Uganda*

Estella Carpi, The University of Sydney, and
Chiara Diana, Aix-Marseille University *Syrian Refugee Children in Lebanon*

Caroline Compretta, University of Mississippi Medical Center *Urban Children in the United States*

Kristen Cheney, International Institute of Social Studies *Orphans Worldwide*

General discussion

Within days of the April 25th Nepal earthquake, local and international child-focused NGOs were soliciting assistance for children in need, often focusing on children left orphaned by the earthquake. Though similar actions taken after the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia and the 2010 earthquake in Haiti increased child trafficking and led to unnecessary institutionalization, NGOs continue to reify categories of “children in need” in order to raise funds for assistance – often endangering the very children they intend to help. Humanitarian discourse and practice provide a good frame to examine how entire transnational charitable industries create and mobilize categorizations of disadvantaged childhood to direct global resource flows. Yet this inquiry into the objectification of childhood must also consider the experiences of children themselves as they respond to, reject, embrace, or work within NGO narratives of their lives. This session will reflect on how NGOs’ targeting of children (re)creates particular types of vulnerable child identities and even creates demand for ‘savable’ children – perpetuating the need for services that cater to them. The consequences of such processes will be analyzed with regard to their effects on child recipients. Each session participant will focus on a particular category of “disadvantaged child” targeted for NGO intervention in a specific location. We welcome audience engagement in our extended discussion following the presentations.

The questions guiding the presentations and discussions include:

- What processes of humanitarian discourse and practice enable the creation and reification of categories of “children in need”? How do these categories circulate? What are their intended and unintended consequences? What resources and knowledges are mobilized in their creation?
- How are particular categories unique to geographic locations? How might they be similar across disparate cultural, global contexts? What does each “case” illustrate that might be useful in considering other “cases” of NGO intervention?

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

- How do children respond to, reject, embrace, or work within NGO narratives of their lives?
- What is the relationship between constructed vulnerable child identities and children's experiences? Between the need for NGO services catering to children and the commodification of such need? (How do NGOs' particular requirements in providing services create landscapes of need?)
- What effects do these processes have on the targeted children? On their families or peers or other interlocutors?

What Is This "Local Knowledge" That Development Organizations Fetishize?

Organizer: Rebecca Nelson

Format: Roundtable

Keywords: *knowledge production, development discourse, local/West binaries, conservation, medicine, education, agriculture*

Part One

Laura S. Jung, American University

Laura Nussbaum-Barberena, University of Illinois at Chicago

Kristina Baines, Guttman Community College, CUNY

Rebecca Nelson, University of Connecticut

Zev Gottdiener, SUNY Buffalo

Kevin Ritt, University of Denver

Lynn M. Selby, University of Texas at Austin

General discussion

Part Two

Sandra T. Hyde, McGill University

Shireen Keyl, Utah State University

Jacklyn Lacey, American Museum of Natural History

Katherine L Silvester, Indiana University, Bloomington

Aklilu Habtu, St. Mary's University, Ethiopia

Aniruddha Dutta, University of Iowa

Angie Abdelmonem, Arizona State University

Ivana Topalovic, University of California, Riverside

General discussion

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

This roundtable will be an exploration of the kinds of knowledge produced and valued by non-governmental organizations and nonprofits. For some time, development organizations have sought to elicit and incorporate indigenous knowledge in their programs, seeing this as a more participatory and “bottom-up” approach than universalizing, “top-down” technocratic solutions. Scholars have critiqued the notion that Western and indigenous knowledge are dichotomous; however, Thomas Yarrow (2008) suggests that it is more useful to investigate how and when people invoke the idea of a binary between Western and indigenous knowledge. The literature suggests that while NGO workers are “brokers of meaning,” they are not necessarily filling a preexisting gap between the incommensurable discourses of development professionals and local people—instead, they are successful at convincing others of meanings, creating spaces for themselves to act and accomplish their goals. This conversation will be an opportunity to think critically and theoretically about how the concept of the “local” is used, both within organizations and within ethnographic/social science fieldwork.

Guiding questions for the roundtable will include:

- Do development organizations “fetishize” local knowledge?
- How are the forms of knowledge valued by NGOs—technical, local, cultural, linguistic—linked to or detached from geographic contexts?
- What characteristics make knowledge “local”? Conversely, how can knowledge be “de-localized” or made transferrable? How do development organizations dichotomize “local” and “international” knowledge?
- What is at stake when actors claim local knowledge?

Development’s Translations

Organizer: Conference Coordinating Committee

Format: Panel

Chair: Rachel Hall-Clifford

Keywords: *NGO discourses; advocacy, rights, and other rhetorics; policy interlocutors/publics; NGO brokers, bureaucracy, and management; constructions of need*

Nicholas Carby-Denning, University of Chicago

“NGO-ing” as Translation: Acción Ecológica, the “Rights of Nature” and the global movement to keep the “Oil in the Soil”

Eric Hirsch, University of Chicago

Austere Development: Institutional Restraint and Entanglement in an Andean NGO

Juliana Flinn, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

Black Littles, White Bigs

Rachael Goodman, University of Wisconsin - Madison

“They Have Relations with the NGO”: Rethinking What “Benefit” Means in the Kumaon Himalayas

Rachel Hall-Clifford, Tamara Britton, Lissette Farias, Briana Nichols, Karla Umana, and Ryan Lavalley, NAPA-OT Field School, Guatemala / Agnes Scott College

Transnational Information Politics, Power, and the Child Migration “Crisis”: Guatemalan NGO Perspectives on Causes of Child Migration

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

According to Latour (2005), translations are the interactions between actors that catalyze transformations. As a major node of contact between transnational subjects, NGO networks produce myriad, ongoing translations that are highly salient to global processes of change, including interpretation, misrecognition, and appropriation. This panel examines the work of translation at the interfaces between organizations, their donors, and their “target populations.” Scholarly attention to NGO brokers and interlocutors highlights that plans for intervention are never implemented linearly. As mediators, NGOs operate at the center of messy flows of resources, ideologies, and representations. Lewis and Mosse (2006:13) argue that development projects should be analyzed not within their existing arrangements but rather as an “interlocking of interests” that produce new social realities. In this vein, the panel foregrounds processes of translation at NGOs—in both discourse and practice—as they negotiate ideologies of benefits, achievements, or crisis; arrangements of sociality or information; and the impacts of (insider versus outsider) perception and imagery.

References:

Latour, B. 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford University Press.

Lewis, D., & Mosse, D. 2006. *Development Brokers and Translators: The Ethnography of Aid and Agencies*. Kumarian Press.



The Corporatization of NGOs

Organizer: Leigh Campoamor

Format: Roundtable

Keywords: *corporate philanthropy, neoliberalism, partnership, resource extraction, citizenship, “enlightened capitalism”*

Anne Galvin, St. Johns University

Karin Friederic, Wake Forest University

Leigh Campoamor, Lafayette College

Amber Murrey-Ndewa, Oxford University

General discussion

The growing corporate investment in social programs and development initiatives has reconfigured the role of NGOs worldwide. Corporations, whether seeking to repair their image, open new markets, or achieve particular ideological projects, often describe their relationships to NGOs and states as partnerships through which valuable resources, including expertise, are exchanged. Referred to through rubrics such as corporate social responsibility and “enlightened capitalism,” this new form of governance complicates NGOs’ already slippery status as both thoroughly neoliberal institutions and sites of resistance. Moreover, the explicit incorporation of the state into these schemes speaks to recent discussions that theorize the contemporary moment as “post- neoliberal.” This roundtable seeks to critically assess these shifting

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

networks and institutional configurations through a series of questions, including: How do NGOs negotiate these new scales of aid, whereby transnational corporations increasingly set the agenda for investment in local social issues? How do NGOs perform a mediating role for corporations that consider local “culture” to be a barrier to development? What are the implications of NGOs and corporations mutually appropriating each other’s language—that is, democracy and rights rhetoric blending with terms such as “innovation” and “social engineering”? How does the political-economy of aid intersect with corporations’ extractive practices?

Civil Society and the Law

Organizer: Nermeen Mouftah

Format: Critical Discussion

Keywords: *law, legislative authority, inter/national legal frameworks, state/civil society, postcolony*

Maxine Kamari Clarke, Carleton University

Giulia El Dardiry, McGill University

Jessica Lambert, Boston University

Julia Morris, University of Oxford

Nermeen Mouftah, Northwestern University

Raied Haj Yahya, Simon Fraser University

This session will explore the dynamic interplay between inter/national law and civil society. In understanding the complex linkages and effects engendered by NGOs, the role of the law in governing, constraining, and enabling them is rarely considered. We will investigate state antagonism towards and patronage of civil society, as well as how civil society endeavors to shape or subvert legislation. Drawing on empirical examples from national and transnational contexts, our conversation centers on civil society and the law in the postcolony, where two apparent tendencies suggest a seeming paradox: lawlessness appears to be the order of the day, while at the same time, a fetishization of “a culture of legality” is pervasive (Comaroff and Comaroff 2006). Starting from this provocation, our case studies will examine: the effects of the threat of NGO laws on human rights and philanthropic organizations; NGOs’ role in legal advocacy; constitution and law-making in the (counter)-revolutionary impasse as it shapes new spheres of dis/order; anti-state campaigns against the adoption of particular treaties and the role of NGOs in effectively shaping supportive or antagonistic sentiments; and the manner in which NGOs mediate the encounter between international and national law. This session will revolve around a set of “critical questions” which will be circulated among panelists and attendees prior to the conference. In taking up these questions in relation to our own research, each panelist will explore the importance of legal apparatuses in shaping the vast tapestry of NGO-graphies in our respective field sites, as well as reflect upon the role of the law in civil society more generally.

SESSION ABSTRACTS:

Questions: As anthropologists, how can we best incorporate the power of the law and its contestations in our understanding of the broader political landscapes of civil society? How does the law create conditions of precarity and possibility, risk and security, pressure and support for NGOs? How do legal apparatuses regulate the formation, mission, and day-to-day work of NGOs? What sorts of frictions are created when local and international NGOs collaborate? What are the effects of state regulation on human rights lobbying, the delivery of social services, and the interactions between local NGOs, international agencies and private individuals/enterprises? What sorts of narratives are produced in the “legalization” of civil society and how does anthropology contribute to this narrativization? How does geography as well as regional politics and histories shape the kind of NGOs that emerge?



NGOing: NGOs as a Verb

Organizer: Mark Schuller

Format: Installation

Keywords: *practices, relationships, subjects, interactive installation*

Mark Schuller, Northern Illinois University

NGOs are infamously difficult to define; as Bernal and Grewal and others have noted, they are defined as what-they-are-not: states. This definition-through-negation and the normative desire to reserve some NGOs as “democratic” or “grassroots” has led to numerous classificatory schemes, limited understanding of the term. Rather than focus on the NGO form, it might be useful to think through NGOs as a verb. Examining NGO practices (and relationships), rather than the category itself, may be a more useful way forward. A common critique after Haiti’s earthquake was NGO-ing, by which the speaker usually meant adopting a bureaucratic structure or adopting a project logic, justifying the use of foreign funding. “NGO-ing” (either “do-gooding” or “activisting”) might make more sense as a signifier than “NGOs” as a noun. NGOs all “act,” and these actions serve as justifications for their existence and use of funds. Posed this way: what do NGOs do as opposed to what are NGOs can lead to a productive set of conversations exploring similarities between entities across sectors and organizational types. Highlighted in a grammarology of NGOs is an analysis of relationships, who is envisioned as the subject and who is the object, recalling MacKinnon’s (1989:124) famous quote. This installation will use butcher block paper and various colored post-it notes for participants to co-create. This is an open, facilitated session wherein all participants are welcome to share their observations and analyses.

TIVOLI MAP:

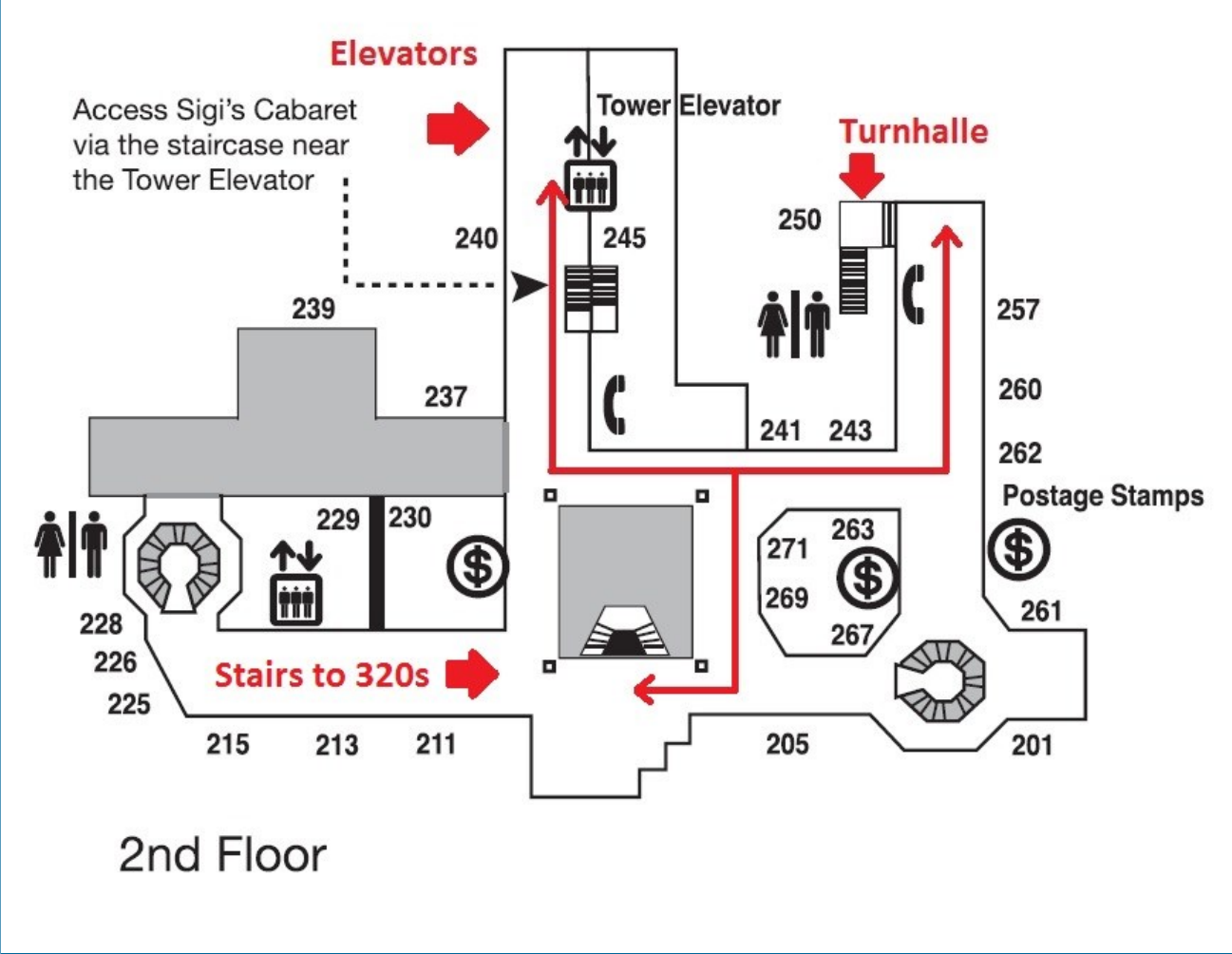
Directions to the Conference Rooms:

TV 320s can be reached via the stairs from second floor (the main level).

TV 444, 440/540, and 640 can be reached via the tower elevator, or by using the staircase next to the elevator.

The Turnhalle is on the second floor (the main level), located in the southeastern corner of the building.

Food court facilities can be found on the first floor.



CAMPUS MAP:

AURARIA CAMPUS GENERAL MAP

