

JUICE



The Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography

Volume 4 Issue 1

table of CONTENTS

Doing Gender on Stage: Karaoke and Gender Presentation by Andrew Bisenius	01
Negotiating Development: An Ethnographic Study of Implemented and Latent Cultural Capital of the Christian Karen of Northern Thailand by Malcolm McDermond	11
A Campaign of Intersections: Evaluating Perceptions of the Our City of Colours LGBTQ Posters in Metro Vancouver by Simon Lam	25
Expressing Criticism, Emotionality and Community In the Spanish Socioeconomic Crisis by Mayahuel Gomez-O'Cadiz	40

EDITOR'S introduction

Research takes time. It is exciting to see what our authors accomplish in their shorter research periods. Ethnography is about trying to reach a saturation point where you know as much as you can know about your site and the people in it. The papers here bring us into four places where people are making sense of themselves and the worlds they inhabit. And at times the subjects make changes to those worlds.

The articles in this issue derive from a diverse set of research sites: Spain, Thailand, Canada, and the United States. Bisenius examines the performance of gender in a karaoke bar. Lam explores the presentation of LGBTQ identity in public space through a poster campaign. McDermond spends time working through the specific cultural capital of a small community in Thailand. Gomez-O'Cadiz takes us to the workings of ideology and social protest in contemporary Spain.

The JUE regularly publishes two issues a year. Our submission deadlines are January 31st and July 31st.

See you in the field.



The Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography

Volume 4 | Issue 1

Doing Gender on Stage: **Karaoke and Gender Presentation**

Andrew Bisenius

Portland State University, bisenius@pdx.edu

ABSTRACT

This article investigates how karaoke participants “do gender”. An ethnographic analysis of a karaoke bar in the Northwestern U.S. demonstrates how individuals routinely accomplish gender presentation. Previous research has indicated that karaoke’s simulated character can provide a conduit for personal growth and interpersonal empathy. Each karaoke performance allows for several dimensions of gender presentation/identification (e.g. song choice, performance attitude, and clothing). In addition, audience participation and their reaction to the performer is observed to gauge the accountability of each performance. My findings indicate that men are more likely than are women to perform ironically, establishing that masculinity is reinforced by the efficaciousness of affecting the social environment through their use of humor. Additionally, the ironic male performance allows for the individual to avoid the risk of incompetence, a compromising component of masculinity that demands aptitude. In contrast, women are more likely than are men to perform mimetically, where an individual experiences a type of transcendence through the act of singing. Also, women performers tend to demonstrate the passive value of appearance in order to strengthen bonds with friends. Finally, I find that female performers tend to generate empathy from female audience members, reinforcing the traditional conception of femininity as nurturing.

Keywords: doing gender, karaoke, masculinity, femininity

INTRODUCTION

As I walk into the dimly lit Sing Song Lounge, I am immediately greeted with loud music and the bartender's smiling face. It's another busy Friday night at this popular karaoke bar, full of groups seeking to sing the night away with their companions. I am without company and this absence of others is painfully obvious in such a highly social environment. Once I find a seat, I look over the songbook as a 20-something year old woman is belting out Queen's "Somebody to Love". Most of the audience is in a state of awe as she slides down to her knees and sustains a note for about thirty seconds. I feel as if time has slowed during this sonic experience—the performer has put me in a hypnotic state. The singer is no longer just another karaoke participant; she has become Freddy Mercury incarnate. Once the performance is finished, the audience erupts in fits of applause and cheering while the red-faced performer smiles and waves out to the crowd. She returns to her seat and her friend group elatedly congratulates her.

The feeling of warmth from this experience dissolves my initial feelings of loneliness, and I feel compelled to participate despite my lack of vocal talent. I select a song from the book, fill out a song request slip, and return it to the emcee's booth. Since I cannot wow the crowd with my voice alone, I intend to entertain them with my humor instead. Karaoke allows a unique occasion to not just sing along with popular songs. It provides a medium for reaching complete strangers in creative ways. As the aforementioned illustration demonstrates, karaoke presents an opportunity for extending interpersonal interactions and sharing experiences. While this activity may initially appear to be innocent and rather mindless, karaoke is certainly rich in sociological content. When considering the gender of each participant, patterns indubitably emerge in the variation of performance styles. From this observation the question arises—how exactly do karaoke participants “do gender”?

LITERATURE REVIEW

West and Zimmerman's "Doing Gender" (1987) attempts to conceptualize gender as a distinct category, independent from biological sex. In opposition to the essential natures suggested by the biological model, the authors claim gender is a product of social situations and a rationale for various social arrangements, providing a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society (West and Zimmerman 1987, 126). Gender is therefore an activity of managing behavior within a normative social structure, whereby an individual must exhibit certain conduct that is viewed as appropriate for their respective sex category. A web of methods are used by individuals to routinely accomplish gender, culminating in the construction of a gendered social reality. This conception differs significantly from the popular notion of gender roles—an idea that assumes two distinct categories (masculinity and femininity) of behavior can be easily applied and recognized in the multiplicities of interactional situations. In contrast, doing gender consists of managing such interactional occasions so that, whatever the particulars, the result is either gender-appropriate or -inappropriate, that is, accountable (West and Zimmerman 1987, 135). Accountability is a crucial component of doing gender. Being accountable entails not only presenting an account of one's gender but to apply the sex categories to others in order to assess an individual's success in meeting the normative expectations. Accountability therefore entails that doing gender is to engage in conduct at the risk of gender assessment (West and Zimmerman 1987, 136).

As a theoretical framework, doing gender expands the scope of sociological investigation into the continuous construction and maintenance of the binary gender categories of masculinity and femininity. As the authors note, many situations are not openly sex categorized to begin with, nor is what transpires within them obviously gender relevant—yet any social encounter can be pressed into service in the interests of doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987, 138). This implies the doing of gender can be observed in any social space. Thus, I use the concept of doing gender in order to investigate how karaoke participants do gender at a popular karaoke bar in the Northwestern United States.

Previous empirical research of karaoke further demonstrates its sociological significance. In "Once More, With Irony: Karaoke and Social Class" Rob Drew claims karaoke's

mimetic character can provide a conduit for personal growth and interpersonal empathy (Drew 2005, 371). This claim entails that karaoke is fundamentally an exercise of expression and self-transformation. The author argues social class determines how one views his claim, with lower- and working-class individuals finding more affinity to its transformative character, while middle-class urbanites develop an alternative, ironic understanding of karaoke. Therefore, the opposing performance styles, mimetic and ironic, are to be understood as enactments of social class.

A mimetic performance is at the heart of karaoke. Drew makes this point salient by noting, “Karaoke performance is an essentially mimetic practice...its template is not a written set of lyrics, nor even a song composition, but a full-blown, prior performance: a popular recording” (Drew 2005, 378). Initially, this mimetic quality would appear limiting but in fact it allows for a wide range of expression, from song choice to the minor details of a performance. Karaoke fosters an environment where individuals can experiment with different popular genres that may not appear to correspond with their identity of perceived tastes. The audience serves a mirroring function that transmits approval or disdain for the attempt to embody an identity that is unfamiliar yet appealing to the performer. The performer’s attempt at self-transformation is thus a crucial component of the mimetic performance and the act of karaoke itself.

An ironic performer stands in opposition to the mimetic call of karaoke. They reject the limited range of expression that demands submission to the original popular song in order for a successful performance. The ironic performance category is determined primarily by its distanced mode of performance expressing class distinction and exclusion through cultural forms and practices (Drew 2005, 374). Within the middle-class karaoke scene, karaoke became accepted based on the mutual agreement that it is not to be taken seriously. Popular indicators for signifying this lack of sincerity include singing in exaggerated and inappropriate styles, adopting comic voices, or frequent laughter throughout a performance (Drew 2005, 376). Humor and subsequent laughter can be interpreted as a vehicle to successfully distance themselves from the performance practice in itself. Thus, laughter from the performer and audience demonstrates participation in the collective joke.

By investigating how karaoke participants do gender at a

popular karaoke bar in the Northwestern US, my research draws heavily from Drew—especially his categorization of mimetic and ironic performance styles. I argue that men are more likely to adopt an ironic performance style because of a fear of incompetence and refusal to submit to the lyrics. In this refusal to follow the lyrical structure of the song, men demonstrate their gender ideal of “efficaciousness” (West and Zimmerman 1987, 141). By deploying tactics of humor and detachment, men are able to affect the social environment to produce laughter. In contrast, women tend to sing in a mimetic style, submitting to the scripted lyrics while simultaneously expressing self-transcendence. I argue that women performers tend to demonstrate the passive value of “appearance” in order to strengthen bonds with friends. Also, women who take an active approach to singing engage in a process of self-transformation and share the emotional content of this self-expression with the audience. I then shift my focus from the performer to the audience. I find that female performers tend to generate empathy from female audience members, reinforcing the traditional conception of femininity as nurturing.

METHODS

This article is the result of approximately 20 hours of ethnographic research conducted over eight weeks in an urban karaoke bar located in the Northwestern US. By adopting the ethnographic methodology, a researcher can access the experience of the karaoke participant and audience. It has been said that the role of the ethnographer is to reveal the multiple truths apparent in others’ lives instead of focusing on “the truth” (Emerson 2011). Due to the nightlife nature of most karaoke bars, I attended the site during the night (9pm-1am). I visited the site eight times with a duration that varied from one to four hours. I collected data by recording detailed jottings on my mobile device. Since I would typically not return home until late at night, I wrote field notes based on my jottings the day after observation. I always attempted to write as soon as possible the following day and never allowed more than 24 hours between visiting the site and writing field notes. By allowing a significant passage of time between these two events, I acknowledge the potential for less valid data. Nevertheless, my methodology is sanctioned for research being conducted in late hours to avoid careless mistakes due to fatigue (Emerson 2011, 49).

The name of the site has been changed in order to maintain confidentiality and will be referred to as Sing Song Lounge. Sing Song is a rather large, one-story building with two distinct sections. The first section resembles a typical bar including dim lighting, a large wooden bar with countless bottles of alcohol displayed on shelves, booths, numerous televisions, pool tables, video lottery machines, neon signage of beer companies and a photo booth. The walls are covered with 4x6 photographs of smiling faces taken at the site in the past. The two sections are separated by a rather narrow hallway. The second section is designated for karaoke. It is more dimly lit than the first section with small neon lights on the ceiling emanating a bluish glow and has a rectangular shape. There is ample seating for at least 80 people, with numerous tables pushed together, along with bar-style seating along the northern wall. One of the two bar-seating areas is across the cocktail waitress' station, and is where I normally sat for observation due to its more central location. The southern wall is lined with windows, advertising the karaoke to those who pass by on the busy street. At the west end of the room, the karaoke jockey or "KJ" sits behind a booth that is between two large television screens, which display the scripted lyrics. The "stage" is marked by the black and white checkered floor along with a disco ball dangling from the ceiling and is directly in front of the KJ booth. Music can be heard from any point in the site and even outside at times. There is commonly a lot of traffic between the two sections and so the number of audience members can vary dramatically per performance.

Given the demographics of this particular part of the city, patrons were overwhelmingly white, around the age of thirty and the distribution of men and women was generally equal. Most of the patrons would be thoroughly intoxicated by the time I ended my observations. The site was chosen based on its reputation and popularity as a bar that offered karaoke every night of the week. While I did observe a small group of regulars, generally the participants were in groups (typically composed of four or more individuals) that I would only observe for one night. Additionally, I chose to exclude the Sing Song's employees to narrow my observations to strictly performances. I spoke most often with employees, and they offered me valuable information about the site, such as the busiest nights to attend and Sing Song's history. I did not conceal my purpose as a researcher, and my motives for patronizing the site were never brought into question.

After my second visit I decided to perform. While I had prior karaoke experience, the thought of performing intimidated me because I attended the site alone so I had no guaranteed support. The decision to perform ultimately was caused by my feelings of being an outsider. I concluded that if I sang, then I would generate some potential for social interaction with the strangers around me along with eliminating the potential for making others uncomfortable with my presence as an observer. Additionally, performing provided rich insight into the experience of the individual on stage. The emotional and physical response that comes with the vulnerability of performing gave me a heightened awareness of the performances, since I also had to select a performance style. I did not consciously choose a performance style, but I would have coded myself as an ironic performer. I most frequently performed Salt-N-Pepa's "Push It" due to the convenience of familiarity and comfort with its vocal simplicity. This personal decision allowed me to dismiss concerns that a performance must be based in some deliberation but most likely was a result of individuals reacting to a heightened sensitivity to interpersonal communication. While my performances served a function of allotting me important insight into the experience of the performer, it was difficult to observe the audiences response and these findings will not be included.

RESULTS

Ultimately, karaoke performances generated gendered meanings. First, I look at how these gendered performance styles bifurcate into two primary categories—ironic and mimetic. I find men were more likely than women to perform ironically; women were more likely than men to perform mimetically. Second, I look at the response from the audience members. I find women performers tended to generate empathy from other women audience members, resulting in women audience members joining the women performers on stage to show support.

Masculinity in Ironic Performance

The ironic performance style is characterized by its overt detachment from singing, thereby negating the risk of failure. One of the most frequent signifiers for demonstrating detachment was the deployment of humor. Humor is typically presented explicitly, through facial expressions, uses of the stage space, vocal tone, song choice, and diverting from the original lyrics

with crude substitutions. In addition, this style tended to have a strong effect on the overall environment. This observation aligns with West and Zimmerman's claim that masculinity strives for an ideal of "efficaciousness"—a notion that one can affect the environment through an exercise of physical strength or appropriate skills (West and Zimmerman 1987, 141). In my observations, males overwhelmingly utilized this performance style. The ironic style can be aligned with presentations of masculinity in two primary ways.

First, the ironic style avoids the risk of incompetency. Demonstrating competency is a crucial characteristic to the construction of a masculine identity (Pascoe 2005, 337). By engaging in an ironic performance the male performer does not have to worry about impressing the crowd with their vocal skill, nor do they express any emotional content. By limiting the danger of judgment by the audience, the odds of being seen as competent increase significantly. The detached mode of performance allows for any deflection of potential criticism because it communicates that the performer simply does not care about traditional karaoke. With an ironic style, all that can be expressed is humor. Thus, it is the role of the ironic performer to express these sentiments as well as demand the audience to pay attention to them by loudly performing.

An instance of this ironic performance was when a white male in his 20s approached the stage with a wide grin across his face. On first glance, his appearance seemed to be crafted for his karaoke performance. His long, frizzy blonde hair is parted down the middle and was adorned with a purple headband. He wore a white Hawaiian styled shirt with orange and yellow parrots perched upon some tropical branches along with some faded, tightly fitting blue jeans. Performing "Simply Irresistible" by Robert Palmer, he began by jumping up and down energetically. He yelled the lyrics into the microphone, along with some occasional laughter. About halfway through the song he moved his hips violently, simulating a sexual act. The laughter of the crowd began to overpower the audio as he continued to move around fiercely, yelling along with the chorus louder than before. During the musical break he let out small fits of laughter into the microphone as he continued his air-humping act. Once the song ended, the red-faced performer was sweating profusely as he returned to his table of friends and was greeted with numerous high-fives. He and his group of friends were all laughing hys-

terically. He sat down on a stool and proceeds to kiss one of the women in the group. This performance served as an ideal type of the ironic performance. As an appropriate demonstration of masculinity as hyper-sexual, the performer humorously alluded to sexual acts. His use of yelling, comedic attire, song choice, and stage presence all illustrate his use of skills in order to affect the physical and social environment. The amount of effort put forth by the performer to provide such a comedic performance demonstrates how strongly he desired approval from the audience as well as commanding the audience's attention.

While men used the ironic style most often, there were some men that demonstrated masculinity in a mimetic style. Typically, these men were either older than the average patron (40+ years old) or they were with a female significant other. I can only assume that the differences of performance styles between generations reflect the shift in attitudes towards karaoke over time (Drew 2005). For example, a stocky white male in his 40s with a grey beard wearing a leather bandanna along with a leather vest over a leather jacket, a large oval belt buckle and blue jeans sang a country tune I could not identify. This very masculine, biker sort of man met all the criteria for a mimetic performance (e.g. eyes closed, seriousness, adhering to lyrics etc). While he was not a very strong singer, his genuine performance demonstrated prior research that karaoke is classed (Drew 2005). This man's clothing signifies allegiance to the working-class. The difference in attitude would therefore be due to the possibility that this individual has been performing karaoke before the creation of the ironic style in the 1990s.

Some men also utilized the mimetic performance when they were with a female significant other. For instance, a white male in his 30s with blonde spiked hair and sideburns, wearing a pink hoodie over a grey shirt with blue jeans and brown leather boots sang Joe Cocker's "You Are So Beautiful". He made a significant amount of eye contact with his female partner in the audience, who had a bouquet of flowers laid across her lap. He closed his eyes during the more vocally demanding parts and would flash a smile to her during the musical breaks. When the same performer sang another song, whenever the romantic lyrics were about a "lover" he would point at his female friend and make strong, prolonged eye contact with her. This mimetic performance serves a function of expressing sentiments of love to his female partner. Prior research has investigated the emergence of the "sensitive"

man, which expresses love and romance. These characteristics are valued more highly in men because they are not seen to be a part of their essential masculine nature, thus presenting a potential threat to their masculinity. It has been argued that this apparent alternative masculinity is simply another method of demonstrating their masculine identity because it signifies their desirability to women and active heterosexuality (Weber 2012, 917). Therefore, these performances do not discredit the claims that an ironic style is masculine, but rather strengthen the argument that karaoke is a gendered activity.

Femininity in Mimetic Performance

The mimetic performance embodies the spirit of karaoke. Additionally, a mimetic performance is vulnerable to critique, where one's performance can be evaluated as successful or not. The physical attributes can include a serious attitude, closing of the eyes while singing, adherence to the lyrics, microphone techniques, and swaying/dancing to the rhythm. I find that femininity is expressed in the mimetic performance because of its submission to the scripted lyrics and expressing a transcendence of self that the performer intends to share with the audience. Depending on the performer, a mimetic performance can range from a quiet performance where the performer appears nervous and timid to a performance that reenacts pop star qualities. Thus, the feminine mimetic performance generally manifested itself in two subcategories, the Shy Girl and the Diva.

The Shy Girl was the most frequent performance from women. It usually was accompanied with a duet, which will be discussed later. Typically, this performance would be defined by a performer staring at the screen, standing still, and quietly singing. This passive style of performance supports the idea that females are to value "appearance" whereby women are to manage themselves as ornamental objects (West and Zimmerman 1987, 141). For instance, a white female in her 20s sang Queen's "You're My Best Friend" with a soft voice that was barely audible over the backing track. She stood still with her eyes fixed on the screen. There were conversations that were louder than the performance. Then a female friend of hers came to her rescue, grabbed another microphone and sang the rest of the song alongside her. As is characteristic of the shy girl performance, it would typically be steeped in anxious energy. The performance began passively and quiet, illustrating the importance of appear-

ance over active interaction. By engaging in the mimetic performance, they attempt to reach a point of self-expression, but their tendency toward passivity hindered their ability to do so. After observing enough of these performances, I noticed the female performers were singing exclusively for their friends. They were searching for connections with their other female friends, and these friends would typically approach the stage and join in on the performance. So what the Shy Girls desired was ultimately bonding with their female friends. Therefore, self-transcendence was less about the vocal performance and more about deepening interpersonal connections.

To be a Diva, the performer needed to demonstrate mastery in her performance. This would include all of the criteria listed above, along with a certain energy that transforms perceptions of the person. For instance, a heavier white female in her 30s with long blonde hair and a red bandana was wearing a grey low-cut shirt, blue jeans, and red converse shoes approached the stage. As she began her rendition of Queen's "Somebody To Love" I could immediately tell she was a trained singer as she belted out a flawless performance of the rather difficult song. There was never a moment of dissonance, even when she would sing an octave higher than the original vocals. She closed her eyes frequently demonstrating her mastery over the lyrics. Using microphone techniques such as pulling the microphone away from her mouth as her voice increased in volume, she was able to accomplish a professional quality performance. Swaying to the music, she would also pat her thigh with her free hand to the rhythm. As the song progressed so did the redness in her face—she put all her effort into the performance. At the climax of the original song, she fell to her knees, leaning her head back as she sustained a note for well over five seconds and remained on the ground for the remainder of the song. This performance demonstrates the transformative magic behind karaoke. Before the performance, it would be hard to imagine the performer as being someone with a stunning voice. She not only submitted to the lyrics, she completely embodied the song. It is precisely this embodiment that allows for a person to share with others the kind of self-discovery that can happen during a performance. By disregarding the call for passivity, they actively engage with the song to generate a connection with the audience.

Audience Participation

Without an audience, karaoke would be a rather meaningless activity. Through a variety of tactics, the performers strive to connect with the audience and obtain approval for their performance. The audience functions as a regulatory mechanism, displaying approval in the form of applause and disapproval through lack of applause and indifference. Doing gender requires such a regulatory process, where individuals monitor their own and other's behavior in regard to its gendered connotation (West and Zimmerman 1987, 142). Applause during and after a performance generally varied on the performances and no significant themes were found. In my observations I found women performers tended to generate empathy from other women audience members, resulting in women audience members joining the women performers on stage to show support. Support could take the form of a premeditated duet, spontaneous duet, or simply joining the performer on stage and dancing. I interpret this finding to signify that women utilized self-regulation not only to give encouragement to the performer, but also to demonstrate their nurturing nature—a hallmark trait of femininity.

Typically, the Shy Girl performances received the most support from audience members. Rarely would a Shy Girl complete a song alone. I never observed a duet of two Divas. The most common form of support appeared as a premeditated duet, where two or more performers would sing a song cooperatively. By and large, duets were utilized by female performers. For example, two white females in their 20s sang a song that was unfamiliar to me. They decided to only use one microphone even though there was an additional one available, and this caused them to have their faces close to each other. As they sang, they made direct eye contact with one another and were holding hands. Their voices were rather quiet and sometimes they would giggle. This performance demonstrates how two females cooperatively present themselves as passive, ornamental objects who support each other through such a vulnerable situation.

A spontaneous duet occurred when a single performer would begin the song and then someone would join in mid-song. Typically, this would occur when a female performer was struggling through a song, was too quiet, or had a rather terrified look on her face. Usually the late addition would fall closer to the Diva category, and inject the performance with an active enthusiasm. Using the previous example from the definition of the Shy Girl, the timid performer began her performance heavily

struggling, with a voice that was hardly audible. A white female in her 30s that was larger than the performer grabbed the other microphone and began singing loudly. She had black and bleach blonde hair that was pulled back into a ponytail, wearing a sheer black lace dress and had a few colorful tattoos on each arm, along with black boots that went up to her knees. As she put her arm over the shoulder of the initial performer, she belted out the chorus, injecting energy into the performance. The previously timid performer gained confidence from this display of support and enthusiastically completed the song along with her friend. This performance demonstrates the general importance of cooperation for the Shy Girl, as she was instantly relieved of the anxious energy once her friend joined her. Due to the passive nature of the Shy Girl performance, she needed a livelier partner to encourage an active style.

The most popular form of audience participation was when audience members would join a performer on stage but would not sing. This would usually be in the form of dancing, and overwhelmingly this form of support was shown by women in the audience. The gender of the performer was less significant than the duets, but still female performers received the most support. If any men engaged in this activity, it was due to their relationship with a woman already on stage or an attempt to signify humor. Thus, this final form of support further solidifies the claim that women in the audience are engaging in a self-regulatory activity, demonstrating their nurturing natures and tendency toward cooperative interaction. For instance, a white female in her 30s with short blonde hair, wearing a loosely fitting black blouse, a medallion necklace that hangs to her abdomen, a black skirt, black leggings and black boots sang Liza Minnelli's "Don't Tell Mama" timidly. Two white females approached the stage and began dancing by slowly swaying. As the song progressed the dancers began moving their arms in the air slowly and moving their hips. This gave the performer more confidence as the volume of her voice increased and she also began to move around with her supportive crew.

Another example involves a black male in his 30s performing "Under the Sea" from the film "*The Little Mermaid*". He wore thin rimmed glasses, a green sweater, a gold watch, faded blue jeans and black boots. His performance was very ironic, given the silly nature of the song, and he was smiling and laughing throughout. Four white females in their 20s approached the

stage and started to dance around him. Everyone on stage was laughing, as well as everyone in the audience. At the end of the performance, one of the females shook his hand as the crowd cheered loudly. So while there were differences in gender, the female audience members maintained their passive form of dancing as ornamental objects, while simultaneously actively engaging in a cooperative activity of song and dance.

DISCUSSION

Ultimately, this research suggests that males and females do gender according to their perceived biological sex at the Sing Song Lounge. Men utilize the ironic performance style in order to present their masculinity, which involves a fear of incompetence and demonstration of efficaciousness. Women performed mimetically to demonstrate their femininity, presenting either a passive performance that is quiet and appearance based, or an active performance that attempts to express feelings of self-transformation with the audience. Additionally, women performers were much more likely to generate empathy from female audience members, resulting in displays of cooperative and nurturing natures. Karaoke provides a medium for a hyper-performance of gender, where an individual is given the opportunity to select a song they feel represents who they are. Moreover, they can choose a performance style that will determine the possible outcomes for how the performance will be evaluated. It is clear that generally, men and women chose their respective performance styles in order to maintain accountability for their gendered performance.

These findings of gender performances rely heavily upon

the context of the karaoke bar, which provides a space for individuals to experiment with different identities. It would be insufficient to claim that these gendered performances can be transferable to other social interactions. Also, the findings of this article are not intended to be generalizable to all karaoke bars. The study of this karaoke bar exposed the gendered meanings behind such a casual activity. By noting some recurring themes, this investigation provided valuable insight into how gender performance permeates even the most insignificant events. The dichotomous nature of an essentialized gender model manifested itself within the two opposing performance styles. These similarities between the two types of categorization demonstrate how idealized notions of masculinity and femininity function as mutually exclusive categories. While there were mimetic males and ironic females, there was no one that mixed the two styles, thus respecting the borders of these categories. In the end, the findings of this article indicate that gender does not arise out of the contingency of individuals but is the product of social interaction and accomplishment.

When thinking of possibilities for future ethnographic research, it would be interesting to investigate how gender is done differently in karaoke bars that are more racially diverse or in the more working-class karaoke bars. The racial and social class uniformity of Sing Song lounge undoubtedly affected my observations of gendered performances. Also, studying karaoke nights in gay bars could yield interesting results due to the lack of heteronormativity operating within a site. Extending outside of ethnographic methodology, it would be beneficial to gain insights of the attitudes of karaoke participants through the use of interviews. This could generate a more nuanced understanding of what performance styles actually mean to the performers as individuals.

REFERENCES

- Drew, Rob. 2005. "Once More, With Irony: Karaoke and Social Class." *Leisure Studies* 24(4): 371-383.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. 2011. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. University of Chicago Press.
- Pascoe, C.J. 2005. "Dude, You're a Fag': Adolescent Masculinity and the Fag Discourse." *Sexualities* 8(3): 329-436.
- Weber, Jennifer B. 2012. "Becoming Teen Fathers: Stories of Teen Pregnancy, Responsibility, and Masculinity." *Gender & Society* 26(6): 900-921.
- West, Candace and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender and Society* 1(2):125-151.

*This work is licensed
under a Creative
Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-
NoDerivs 3.0
Unported License.*



The Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography

Volume 4 | Issue 1

Negotiating Development: An Ethnographic Study of Implemented and Latent Cultural Capital of the Christian Karen of Northern Thailand

Malcolm McDermond

Messiah College, mmcdermond14@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Draving upon my five months living with a Karen ethnic-minority family in Northern Thailand between February and July of 2013, I explore the ways in which development is negotiated and can be negotiated by utilizing cultural capital and other resources within the village of Melaoop. In order to do this I engage the broader body of development discourse and paradigms. Using data collected through my ethnographic research, I first present the cultural capital and the implemented techniques through which the Christian Karen of Melaoop negotiate development: primarily selling cultural products to outsiders, protecting the natural resources, and working with outsider non-government organizations. I also highlight my observations about the unique Christian Karen expressions of institutions of communality, gender, and religion that have a latent capacity to impact how development is negotiated in the future. Throughout this paper there is a palpable tension between the insider/outsider perspective seen not only in the locus of development but also in the collection of ethnographic research itself. My research illustrates how various opinions and actions indicate the primacy of religion, cultural ethics and beliefs, gender roles, and economic incentives as culturally formed institutions that impact how development pressures are negotiated both individually and communally.

Keywords: development, cultural capital, negotiation techniques, insider/outsider perspectives

INTRODUCTION

It was a hot afternoon in the long days before the monsoon rains came. We, Uncle Wit and I, were sitting on his porch lounging in the heat of the day. Warm winds stirred the trees in front of us. Something was stirring in his mind as well, I could see it on his face. He took a long drag from his banana leaf cigar. As he exhaled he said, "All this development is destroying the forest. People come here and cut down the trees and fish in our rivers. What can people give their children if not good nature? What kind of development is this that destroys the forest?" His words lingered in my mind long after the smoke he exhaled had drifted away in the warm breeze.

Development, as both ideology and practice, has garnered greater attention and debate in academic, economic and political circles than ever before. Universities the world over are offering degrees in sustainable development, international development, and public policy and development just to name a few. The development debate, however, has raged on for centuries since the first Europeans expanded their colonial empires, justifying this encroachment with rhetoric of progress, enlightenment and development. Over time the old paradigms and practices of empire have given way to many new forms and ideologies of development. The United Nations, arguably the most international and global association in the history of humankind, recognizes the need for local involvement and local initiative as the preferred means of development rather than a national or international level enterprise (Sachs 2011, 80). Even the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, two of the key actors in creating development paradigms, are reevaluating their own macro level stances on development (Güven 2012, 870). Despite these acknowledgements, the reigning paradigm for development is still one in which outsiders develop communities or areas in ways and means decided by non-local entities, as self-evidenced by the fact that these multinational organizations are dominating the creation of development paradigms.

If this is the kind of rhetoric of macro-level development, how then is development understood on the local level in local communities by local people? Are there cultural resources that local communities have been using to negotiate their own development and make known their own agenda in light of external forces? Are their cultural resources that local people are not utilizing that could be used in development projects and if so, do

outsiders have any authority to speak into these communities about such resources? Is external initiated development always imperialistic and against the will of the people? These are just a few questions raised when we consider the complexities and nuances of the current state of development.

These questions were first raised in my mind during and after my ethnographic study of a Karen family in Northern Thailand. I saw earthmovers and cement trucks rumble along little dirt roads through the remote mountains as they laid cement and built new roads. I watched government bureaucratic buildings erected on land seized from tribal peoples. I saw rice fields destroyed to build bridges and bring police security. I listened as my host family enthusiastically talked about the exciting new development and empathized as they worried and pondered about the implications of such development for their lives and their children's lives.

Considering these experiences and questions, I determined to understand better the complexities of how local people negotiate development in light of their cultural resources and capital. This desire was born out of my own personal relationship with Karen people and my convictions and beliefs about the necessity of development for the world's underprivileged. The project and findings that follow are the products of these personal experiences, convictions and friendships that are so meaningful to me and those who shared them with me. I believe, however, that the relevance of this goes far beyond my own personal experience and can in many ways speak into the ongoing discussion about development. More and more we need to hear the voices of those who are directly impacted by the development policies and agendas of governments, transnational organizations and NGOs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To understand the contours of my research, I must first make clear the paradigmatic understanding of *development* with which I am dialoguing. One of the first and foremost agents in defining development is the United Nations. The comprehensive Millennium Development Goals were released by the UN in 2000 and have since become an authoritative basis for thinking about development. The Millennium Goals are comprised of eight broad objectives: 1) eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, 2) achieving universal primary education, 3) promoting gender equality and empowering women, 4) reducing child mortality, 5) improving maternal health, 6) combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, 7) ensuring environmental sustainability and 8) developing global partnership for development (United Nations Development Programme, 2012). These goals are focused on holistic development, recognizing the multifaceted reality of development.

However, these are merely goals and the precise processes of development are still highly contested. One of the most helpful models of development process that I relied upon was one in which development is oriented towards the needs of the community, endogenous, or originating within the community, self-reliant and ecologically sound (Ekins 1992, 99). Furthermore, it recognizes the agency of multiple stakeholders like the government, private sector and civil society in building and enriching development programs (Sachs 2011, 80). This particular model seeks to be as realistic, sustainable, holistic and local as possible.

More and more the consensus in development discourse is in favor of local or endogenous initiatives. Locally originating processes are quintessential to development. Chaikou's study of hunger in rural communities indicated that indigenous social systems were better at recognizing and communicating hunger issues than external monitoring systems (2009, 47). What this study theorized and proved is that local people are active agents of change (Chaikou et al. 2009, 44). Recognizing the importance of local agency is key to understanding the perspective with which I approach my own research.

The refocus from global or external actors to local actors also highlights other themes often missed in development discourse on the macro scale. Development, on the local scale, is primarily an external force that pervades the homes and dominates the discourse of those who the development initiatives are

aimed at aiding (DeTemple 2008, 116). Considering this, it is not then in the ivory towers of academia, on the senate floors of international organizations or in the offices of international non-government organizations but the everyday homes of those impacted by development where development is most earnestly being negotiated.

Furthermore, development programs do at times generate conflicts of interest. Paladino's study of governmental carbon emissions regulation policy illuminates how such policies created real conflicts of needs between forest dwellers and government agencies (2011, 119). In this instance, traditional means of production were prohibited because of external governmental regulations based on macro level development goals. Those affected were not the policy makers per se but rather the local community.

Additionally, it is only on the local level that one can see the way in which development impacts and shapes ethnicity and vice-versa. In West Bengal, for example, ethnic minorities took forest management into their own hands as they contested the government forestry conservation practices and effectively negotiated the external Bengali government agendas in their own favor (Sivaramakrishnan 2000, 434). In India, however, new agricultural technologies effectively eroded traditional practices and culture (Samaddar 2006, 117). It appears then that the relationship between development and ethnicity is not always negative nor is it one sided, despite the prevalence of hegemony and ethnocentrism that has pervaded development rhetoric in the past.

So then, the development which I am in dialogue with throughout my research is a dialectic of many predominant development paradigms. Development as I refer to it in the following research is comprised of local, national and international aspects. It is a holistic concept aimed at the empowerment of individuals and communities. It is a powerful force that is changing both the natural and social landscapes it encounters, for better or ill. But most importantly, it is fluid and constantly negotiated by those it impacts.

This definition of development recognizes the importance of local and indigenous agency in development discourse and negotiation. It is for no small reason that the role of those impacted by development is considered so significant in this current discussion. Indigenous communities and ethnic minorities

are those predominantly affected by development and the most vulnerable to the pressures of modernity that comes on its heels. New technologies that threaten traditional practices (Samaddar 2006, 117), government policy that divests people of traditional subsistence strategies (Hamayi 1997, 558, Kabuye 1999, 265) and creeping modernization that erodes unique religious and cultural worldviews (Torri et al. 2011, 184) are all examples of the negative impacts of development.

The erosion of culture and tradition should cause concern. Each unique cultural and ethnic group sees and creates meaning in the world through unique lenses (Nazarea 1999, 92). The loss of these unique perspectives could mean the loss of a particular worldview that has much to contribute to the global community. From an extrinsic perspective, indigenous knowledge is a resource to Western science and medicine (Stephenson 1999, 230). Traditional knowledge also encompasses agricultural and land management practices that maintain ecological fertility and health better than modern practices (Torri et al. 2011, 169). Not only can this knowledge be used to supplement Western scientific knowledge or environmental sustainability, it also is a key component of human cultural diversity, thereby enhancing humanity's overall cultural "fitness" (Hunn 1999, 27). If the cultures that hold this knowledge disappear, so do the practical benefits they have for the greater human community. But on an intrinsic level, these traditional cultures and their cumulative knowledge should be protected and conserved for their own sake.

As the above discussion highlights, development is a multifaceted and complex topic. Considering this, I intentionally drew upon multiple theoretical backgrounds to get a fuller understanding of this complex issue's breadth and scope. Most indigenous and traditional groups undergoing development are still rural, agrarian and in large part dependent upon their biological and material surroundings for subsistence. With this in mind, cultural materialism, as purported by Marvin Harris, is exceedingly relevant to understanding the cultural background of those impacted by development. Cultural materialism highlights the *principle of infrastructural determinism*, which means "the etic behavioral modes of production and reproduction probabilistically determine etic behavioral domestic and political economy which probabilistically determines behavioral and mental emic superstructure" (Harris 1979, 55-56). In other words, cultural materialism prioritizes infrastructure over su-

perstructure because infrastructure is seen as the most basic interaction between culture and the natural world. This is all based upon the fact that biological restraints of nature are the greatest and thus most influential on human cultural infrastructure (Harris 1979, 57).

Cultural materialism's emphasis upon biological factors is highly relevant to the particular traditional context where I did my research. I take for granted the fact that "local cultural practices developed through the long interaction of ecology, cultural ideas and indigenous technology" (Samaddar 2006, 108). Therefore, any attempt at understanding cultural practices must also consider the ecological and material factors with which the particular culture interacts.

However, cultural materialism does not recognize the importance of superstructure in defining culture. Cultural materialism is a strand of theory that neglects or discounts the importance of symbolic superstructure in socio-cultural analysis (Knauff 1985, 333). Therefore, I drew upon the works of Peter Berger as a means of reconciling Harris' lack of consideration for the role symbolic factors and superstructure play in shaping culture. Of particular relevance is Berger's three step process of externalization, objectivation and internalization. Externalization is the process by which the subjective human creates the external social world. Objectivation is the process by which this external social world assumes an objective reality of its own independent of the human actor. Finally, internalization is the completion of the cycle as the now objective social world reflects back upon and impacts the human agent from which it originated (1967, 4). Why though is this process significant? In any context, how one defines the social reality one is confronted with determines the essence of that reality. As development enters into rural community and community members need to negotiate this development, the processes of externalization, objectivation and internalization will define how development occurs within the community.

One final theory relevant to the research considers the actual ability of those impacted by development to negotiate the forces of development. With this in mind, social capital must be brought into the discussion. Social capital is "a particular kind of resource" available to actors because of "changes in relations" between people (Coleman 1988, 267). Social capital can take the form of obligations and expectations, channels of informa-

tion and social norms and sanctions (Coleman 1988, 269-271). Each of these provides resources to those who can “cash in” on their social relationships to better exert their own influence on the external world. This is particularly relevant to this research because what social capital exists, what is implemented and what is latent within these communities are all questions of particular interest to me. Furthermore, in light of the previously mentioned importance of local actors and agency in development, the need for positive social capital is paramount.

Despite the antithetical nature of the two theories, cultural materialism and the social construction of reality: both theories provide necessary perspectives to my research. Cultural materialism highlights the reality that culture is built upon the specific environmental context in which that said culture arises. This is particularly true of agrarian and rural communities highly dependent upon the land to meet their basic needs. However, cultural norms, myths and taboos do reflect back upon the environment in which the culture is situated and the culture itself. To strike a compromise between Harris and Berger, I must then consider both the particular environmental context or infrastructure as well as the relevant socio-cultural environment or objective social structure.

In short, no one single theory could fully encompass the diversity and complexity of development issues. Therefore, the constructive tension that arises from each of these three theories provides a breadth that covers both the material and social factors of development relevant to my subsequent research.

FIELD SITE DESCRIPTION

I did my ethnographic research in the rural Thai village of Melaoop, (Me-la-oop), in Chiang Mai province, roughly 5 hours outside of the largest northern Thai city, Chiang Mai. Melaoop is located in the greater area of the Musekii plateau, a unique geographic and ethnic region in the province. Musekii is of higher elevation than most of the surrounding province. It is known for its abundant tropic dry forests which are composed of large portions of conifers, a unique biological characteristic. The majority of land in the region is still covered by the distinctive forest. Geographically, Musekii is a land of seemingly endless hills and vast gullies. Most of the population and village development is located within these valleys rather than the hill tops. Melaoop is situated between two chains of hills within the Musekii plateau in a gently sloping and picturesque river valley. The village itself

is located on the side of the southern hills overlooking the rice paddies in the low lying river valley.

Melaoop village contains roughly seventy households, a wat (Buddhist temple), a church, three small in-house convenience stores, a mechanic, a primary school and hostel for children attending the school, and a small rural health center just outside the village up the main road. Electricity and running water are both available but sporadic periods of unavailability persist. There would be days when I would enjoy the slower process of making tea over an open fire. The main street is, at the time of my research, partially paved near the school and up the hillside. However, much of the village is unpaved dirt road. This is subject to change as recent Thai governmental construction programs and the establishment of a new district government seat are currently building roads and expanding infrastructure in the Musekii area. The road has, in many ways, become a symbol of external development with ambiguous meaning for the people most directly impacted.

Families meet basic needs by using mixed economic subsistence. The major means of subsistence is wet-rice cultivation in the adjacent rice paddies. Rice from these paddies is the main staple of the local diet. A large portion of my time with my host family was spent in the rice fields either preparing for the planting season or planting itself. Secondary to agriculture is wage earning jobs in connection with the major institutions of the school and hostel, the local health center, the church and an eco-lodge tourist venture in an adjacent village. Most wages go towards luxury foods such as meats, candies, teas and spices, children's education or home improvement. There is also widespread horticulture and hunting and gathering which make up smaller but equal parts of the average villagers diet. Pig husbandry is also common but mostly used for wedding dowries or special ritual occasions. Socio-economically, all but the trained health professionals at the rural clinic can be considered part of a peasant class.

Home construction needs are also met in a variety of ways. Most homes are cinderblock, cement, hardwood, bamboo or recycled woods and materials. Cinderblock and cement are purchased at supply stores in a village about a thirty minute drive away. Hardwood, of greater quality, is purchased in the nearest city, Pai, which is an hour and fifteen minutes drive away. Some woods are harvested locally in the forest along with bamboo. Additionally, most families have recyclable construction materials

from previous building projects which are stored and used as needed. Roofing and flooring also vary greatly between households. Some households are primarily bamboo or wooden flooring. The wealthier homes have tiling or cement floors. Roofing is almost unanimously tin sheet, due to its widespread availability and ease of use.

Ethnically, Melaoop is a Karen village. Karen are one of the largest ethnic groups in Thailand and are generally grouped into the "hilltribes" with other ethnically diverse groups by Thai people. However, there is much diversity amongst the Karen of Thailand. The particular Karen living in the Musekii area are part of the subgroup known as Pwakinyo. Throughout the rest of Thailand, there are also Sgaw, Po and the famous "Long Necked" Karen groups. Each of these subgroups has their own dialects which are not mutually intelligible. The vast majority of Karen people today are living in Burma but due to the recent history and continued social upheaval, thousands of Karen have become refugees in neighboring Thailand and internationally in Australia, the United States of America and Canada.

Religiously, Melaoop is approximately 35% Buddhist and 65% Christian. Karen are one of the most evangelized and Christianized minority groups in Thailand. Interestingly, Thai Karen were first evangelized by Burmese Christian Karen in 1867 (Hovemyr 1989, 113). Shared cultural ties and a lack of Western missionary involvement during the early evangelization tours undoubtedly were key reasons for the success of mass religious conversion amongst the Karen people.

During my research time in Melaoop, I did a home stay with a Pwakinyo family of four: Tanin (father), Naa (mother), Rit (first born, son) and Siua (second born, daughter). The family functioned as the *gatekeeper* to the broader village community. My host family lived on a compound with two other households that included extended relatives: Wit (maternal uncle), Pen (his wife) and Bubble (daughter) in one home and Poopoo (grandfather), Piipii (grandmother), Ann (maternal aunt) and occasionally Wasan (uncle) in the other home.

In order to properly understand the field site, I must briefly describe my key informants. Tanin works a salaried job with a local NGO that services children at the hostel. He is the head NGO manager for Melaoop village. He is also a chairman of the village church. In addition to this, he aids in agricultural production when needed. Naa is the main agricultural force in the

household. The rice paddies are jointly controlled by her and Piipii. In addition to this, she is a housekeeper: taking on the duties of child rearing, cooking, house cleaning, laundry and raising pigs. Furthermore, she is an active member of the church's women's group and children's school volunteer staff.

Wit is a farmer first and foremost. He supplements the family income by working additional wage labor jobs during the down agricultural seasons. Unlike Tanin he is not very involved in the church or the school. He was actively involved in local politics and was formerly the village headman. Regularly he will take upon himself household responsibilities like laundry, cleaning, cooking and home repair. Pen, like her husband, is also primarily a farmer. In addition to this, she works wage labor jobs, mostly at the rural health clinic. She also occupies the role of caregiver and cook for her family and many of the local neighboring children are constantly at her home. She is actively involved in the choir and teaches Sunday school. Wit and Pen regularly supplement their family's diet with gathered foods like ferns, bamboo shoots, snails, fish and wild fruits.

Melaoop, with its unique geographical, biological and socio-cultural factors proved to be a vibrant field site.

METHOD

Prior to any data collection, my research proposal was approved by Messiah College's Institutional Review Board. Once at my field site, I collected data between February 25, 2012 and July 13, 2012. Throughout the ethnographic study, I relied upon various methods of data collection. The most common and overarching data collection method was participant observation. My intention to do research was made known by explaining many ways and many times the reason for my presence in the community (Babbie 2008, 334-335). Within my host family's household, I was given my own room for sleeping and studies but all other social life was open to me as a guest and, eventually, fictive kin. While living with my host family, I joined the local choir, volunteered at the village church, aided in home construction, taught English language lessons, tended pigs, helped prepare and plant rice paddies and was an active member of wedding rituals: not to give an exhaustive list.

During periods of participant observation, I carried small notebooks around with me and jotted down notes concerning what I observed. This was in order to record the necessary

empirical observations and personal interpretations key to adequate data collection (Babbie 2008, 340). Each evening, I would fill in and flesh out my notes from the day. Most of this was done electronically in a password protected document. If not done electronically, I took notes by hand and kept them in a locked duffle bag.

To further inform my research, I employed spontaneous qualitative interviews. Commonly taking the form of conversation, spontaneous qualitative interviews were exclusively conducted in Thai. I recorded these interviews in the same notebooks I carried around with me mentioned above. These interviews, however, were kept within printed media rather than electronic media.

I also used planned interviews as another means of data collection. I conducted four planned interviews. Participants were asked for their consent and only after receiving consent did I interview the interviewees. My interview questions consisted of five broad themes detailing the interviewee's education, religious life and beliefs, role in family life, opinion on governmental development and their view of the environment. I recorded these interviews in print media.

Data were analyzed using either a naturalistic ethnographic approach or an ethnomethodological approach. Observations and interviews were analyzed with a naturalistic ethnographic approach in order to relate accurate descriptions of the objective social realities present within this case study (Babbie 2008, 321). Ethnomethodology was used to analyze, primarily the unplanned interviews to collect implicit social data (Babbie 2008, 322). In order to do this, I read and reread all ethnographic notes to highlight patterns and themes both explicitly stated and implicitly present. With this data, I further subcategorized it as what the Karen of Melaoop consciously said or did and what I as a researcher observed in daily life. My original inspiration for such a method, one in which I aim to dispassionately portray the voice of the Karen while also out rightly recognizing my own subjective observations comes from an ethnographic method used by Richard Katz¹. In Katz's ethnographic study, he takes particular care to distinguish between his voice and those of the Dobe Ju'hoansi he studied.

KAREN AND NEGOTIATED DEVELOPMENT: IMPLEMENTED CULTURAL CAPITAL

Development, I came to learn, is one of the most common discourses of Karen daily life. With the advent of the road and new governmental seat, the hot topic button of development is constantly pressed. How the people of Melaoop have come to articulate, understand and become agents in the dialogue of development is worth exploring because of the insight it can provide to the ongoing discussion of development. What the Karen themselves say and do about development is as important as my own outsider's interpretation.

The means by which Karen negotiate development in Melaoop can be understood in three broad ways: engaging the market and capitalizing on cultural products, protecting or conserving the resource rich environment and accepting and utilizing external development agencies and agendas. Important to note, these strategies for negotiating development are gendered and based in traditional Karen gender roles.

Engaging the Market and Capitalizing on Cultural Products

The first technique of negotiated development is the capitalization and commodification of cultural products. This is best seen in the garment and textile ventures undertaken by many women in Melaoop. Traditionally, garment production was exclusively the role of women and for the most part has remained that way in light of recent cultural and economic changes. Not once did I see a man weave or even sew fabric. As such, this first form of negotiated development is practiced by Karen women. Gei, the pastor's wife, is one of the foremost weavers of the village. She produces so much that she must take stock of her men's and women's shirts, blankets, traditional head-dresses, skirts, scarves and handbags. With the aid of a family friend she has been exporting her wares to Chiang Mai for retail. Nor is her economic venture unique. Pen and Buo Touh, Pen's closest friend, both irregularly produce textiles for sale in order to support their children's educational costs. This production, networking and marketing of goods is one way in which the Karen women transform their social capital into hard economic resources, particularly supplementary family income, especially during the traditional off season in the agricultural cycle.

Capitalizing on cultural products is not limited to what is manufactured in the home. In fact, there is even a market for

the traditional Karen *guest oriented* way of life. On the outskirts of Melaoop proper is a newly constructed eco-lodge and guest-house owned by a foreign man and Thai national. Supplied with modern conveniences like beer, ice and English leisure books, vacationers can enjoy an escape into nature and traditional tribal life at this guesthouse. Opinions about the guesthouse are decidedly mixed and ambiguous but the fact remains though, that many women are employed, and happily so, in the service of the guests. When I asked what travelers do here, Pen replied that they come to see the nature and the Karen people. The Karen who work at the guesthouse, in short, are commodifying their *guest ethic*, tribal status and natural resource management as a means of profiting from the opportunities development has brought.

Protecting the Resource Rich Natural Environment

The simple fact that this eco-lodge can market the Karen protected and tended natural resources is prime example of the intersection between two important development negotiating techniques: the commodification of cultural products and the preservation of nature (which is also a unique cultural product). Resource conservation and forest protection is grounded in the long standing Karen *environmental ethic*. Traditionally, Karen believed themselves to be residents and caretakers of the forest. According to myth, right relationship with the natural world is vital to the well-being of the Karen people. The importance of nature is seen particularly in their own understanding of humanness; as they have named themselves *Pwa' kinyo*, literally forest people. The importance of resource management is self-evident. This can best be interpreted in light of cultural materialism. If your basic needs are being met by forest products, naturally there will be powerful cultural taboos and norms to protect the status quo and continued fecundity of the infrastructure.

This negotiation technique, like the previous one, is also gendered. Conservation and resource protection is considered male domain. Hunting, fishing, material collection and ritual observation outside of the home were traditional Karen male roles. (Yoshimatsu 1989, 60) These gender roles have continued as the Karen relationship to their natural world has been renegotiated in light of development. While women certainly had an opinion about the proper relationship with the natural world², men that I talked to were the most vocal about the need for con-

servation. Tii, my neighbor, talked much with me about his love for the forest and the need to care for it. Wit's aspirations for his children to see the forest and enjoy the land further illuminate this. But the most vocal and opinionated was Wii Jii, another neighbor and fisherman, who talked about the spiritual necessity of caring for the land and the injustice of the wealthy who destroy it.

Additionally, all of these men have a high view of conservation NGOs. Both Wit and Wii Jii have worked with conservation NGOs. Wit, in particular sees NGO work as the best kind of work. Nearly every day he would mention the benefits to people and the land of working with conservation NGOs. This high view of NGOs is interesting especially when I consider the fact that he could not name a single conservation NGO when I asked. He could, however, direct to friends who had personal work experience with NGOs. When I mentioned my own interest in working with conservation or sustainability, both Wit and Wii Jii were openly supportive of my career hopes. They even suggested I come back and work in Melaoop.

Accepting and Utilizing External Development Agencies and Agendas

In addition to conservation NGOs, Melaoop has other NGO and governmental development initiatives present that cover a range of development issues like education and health. The most prominent development oriented institutions include: Compassion International, the government school and the rural health clinic. Compassion is an American run NGO that works primarily through local churches to educate and support children. In Melaoop, Compassion runs a hostile for children and infant care classes for young mothers. The school is governmentally run as is the rural health clinic. Both are part of the larger Thai government's goal to provide education and healthcare to its citizens. The head of Compassion, Tanin, school principle, Udom, and clinic coordinator, Na, are all ethnically Karen and residents of Melaoop. What is negotiated is how the external development goals are implemented by and in the community. When asked, Tanin said he works with Compassion because it is a way to help support the children. He, as the local Compassion manager, has a say in the implementation of development agenda and strategy. Tanin's comment is a prime example of negotiated development.

AN OUTSIDE THOUGHT ON NEGOTIATING DEVELOPMENT: LATENT CULTURAL CAPITAL

As previously mentioned, the Karen of Melaoop are already engaged in negotiating development. What precedes is what is *already* being done. However, there are other techniques and institutions that I have observed and consider worth highlighting. What I found was that beyond the three currently implemented strategies of negotiating development, three other institutions appeared to have latent potential in shaping the path of development in Melaoop: communality, gender and religion.

Communality

Communality is often seen in terms of communal property or production rights. While greater stratification has emerged within Karen society due to changes in agricultural production, exposure to globalization and new economic incentives, there has been a maintained understanding of communality (Hayami 1997, 559). I noticed this communality evidenced in the act of visiting and sharing. Being sociable and visiting people is common practice among Karen. It is seen as leisure and business. Tanin would often "go visiting" to the next village to socialize with his employees at Compassion and also discuss business. Whenever he needed advice or aid he would "go visiting" to respected members of the community like Aj Mountain. The community orientation becomes evident when considering the daily

occurrence of visiting and the social capital and communication it fosters.

The other indicator of communality amidst Karen that I noticed was the constant sharing of material goods and supplies. Food was shared between Grandma, Naa and Pen. Shoes, hats, and agricultural implements were also shared in kind between these households and even Mughá's household a short walk up the hill. Leisure artifacts like television, guitars and volleyballs were all also commonly used between the households. Even bathrooms, which each household had, could be used in common. Sharing is by far the biggest indicator of communality.

The implementation of communality amidst the Karen of Melaoop is a tool I see that can be used in many ways to negotiate development. Resource pooling and sharing is one way to ensure the wellbeing of the community. Karen communality is just such a practice that will safeguard against the vast wealth gaps that often occur with rapid modernization and capitalist market paradigms currently infiltrating traditional Karen land and culture.

Gender

Gender is one of the most commonly investigated social institutions and one of the most powerful in affecting social relationships. According to the World Bank, gender equality is a key indicator of lower levels of poverty and higher levels of sustained economic growth (World Bank Group 2013). Consider then the important fact that Karen culture was traditionally and still is matrilineal. With modernization, the previously female focused culture has become more egalitarian but still maintains many matrilineal practices and rituals. In the past, when a young couple was newlywed, the man had to relocate to his wife's household. This is no longer exclusively the norm, however, it is still the most common practice. Tanin, Wii Jii and Jopoh, the local pastor, all relocated from different villages to Melaoop when they married Melaoop women. Another example of Karen matrilineal culture is the fact that rice field inheritance is usually passed down from mother to daughter. Naa and Phiiphii are an example of how the rice fields were maintained in the family by female lineage.

Two other examples are worth highlighting here. The first is that ubiquitously, childcare is a woman's role. This has implications for education, health, identity and both ecological and cul-

tural conservation because when women are the primary caregivers, they are also the primary shaping factor upon the next generation. This caregiving relationship is one that I noticed as an area of further exploration in negotiating development.

While the assumption of caregiving roles often leads to a lower status for many women and a subsumed role in family and social discourse, that is not the case amidst the Christian Karen of Melaoop. Women are strong voices and social actors in the household and the community. For example, Phiiphii was vocally fighting against the installment of a Buddha room at the local school. While she could not vote on the issue, her opinion was known and was considered during the village council to decide upon the issue. What I see as a vital resource for future Karen is the extent to which not only male but also female voices are represented in public discourse. Greater sustained development will only occur in contexts in which gender equality is the norm. The Christian Karen of Melaoop have a latent potential to sustain greater gender equality already present in their matrilineal traditional practices.

Religion

The final institution I observed to have social clout is religion. In particular, the Christian Karen church. Melaoop church is part of the Karen Baptist Convention, an autonomous Karen church with loose historical ties to the American Baptist Church. However, those ties were severed late in the 19th century and the current indigenous led church emerged. Whatever the particular origins of the Karen Baptist Church, it is important to consider it now in light of the role it plays in the social construction of reality. The church, as a cultural construct, assumes an objective reality of its own and thus has the ability to impact individuals and other social structures. This process has particular importance in the context of Melaoop.

I see the Karen Baptist Church as a unique institution specially situated as a means of expressing and preserving ethnic identity. The church in Melaoop was the only social group teaching the Karen language to the younger generation. The practical rationale for this is that the Bible and hymnal is written in Karen, thus active church members must be literate in order to participate in worship. Worship itself often was comprised of hymns with nationalistic lyrics blended with escapism eschatology promising a better life after death. Furthermore, traditional

dress was worn weekly when attending church. These are just a few examples of the nearly inseparable connection between ethnic identity and faith that I observed.

A strong ethnic identity, present within the church, provides the social cohesion necessary for the creation of social capital that can easily be transformed into either human or material capital. Church members with a strong ethnic connection can mobilize their resources efficiently and effectively. The annual Karen Baptist Convention is a prime example of this. One village is tasked with hosting the convention and must provide food, entertainment and shelter for the entire Karen Baptist Church of Thailand. Amazingly, resources are consolidated and everyone's needs are met for the week long convention. Furthermore, the church is a cultural bank of sorts, resisting many incursions of modernity. These observations lead me to believe that the church can be a crucial player in the future negotiation of development, in particular, large scale social action or pan-Karen social movements.

CONCLUSION

Development is a multifaceted and powerful force in the Melaoop community. It has external and internal components, for example the outsider Thai government policies and the local desire for better infrastructure and assurance of utilities like electricity and water. Furthermore, it is fluid and constantly negotiated by the local community it directly impacts.

My research indicates that there are already multiple means of negotiating development currently being implemented in Melaoop. These means of negotiating development are implemented social capital that arises from both the particular environmental context of the Karen as well as the unique social reality as highlighted by the insights of cultural materialism and the social construction of reality. The engagement of the market and the commodification of cultural products, the protection of natural resources, and the engagement with development agencies and agendas are the three broad practices I observed during my ethnographic study. What this means is that the local community has cultural resources and social capital which they are utilizing to negotiate the direction of development within their own particular village context. The Karen of Melaoop are not passive actors but vibrant agents in active dialogue with development.

Beyond the already implemented negotiation processes, there is a great latent potential in the Karen institutions of communality, gender and religion. These three institutions, as I have termed them, provide a basis of social capital that could be readily used to foster greater social cohesion and directed change. Communality is a practice that acts as a social cohesive and glue. There can be no positive negotiation of development if the community is fractured. Gender is also vital to positive development because the role of women as care-giver and primary socializing agent of the next generation has far reaching implications for successive generations that subsequently will also negotiate development. What happens with this generation of mothers will have repercussions in the future. Finally, religion, the Karen Baptist Church in this particular context, is also a powerful institution with many physical and social resources at their disposal. The church in Melaoop is one of the best endowed institutions because of social commitment to its well-being. This latent store of both physical and cultural resources can be further implemented to engage the discourse of development.

My focus on these three institutions of communality, gender and religion is just that, my focus. Most discourse in Melaoop centered around the first three implemented processes of negotiating development, rather than the three institutions I consider to have latent potential. This proves to be a dilemma then in many ways. First, because I believe development should be endogenous, I must suspend what I believe to be potential

avenues for developing. My outsider position does not prevent me from engaging development discourse but rather establishes my voice as one of secondary or periphery importance to those directly impacted by development. Additionally, the question is raised, do the particular and unique ways in which the Karen of Melaoop already negotiate development have broader applications? These negotiation techniques are effective for this context and are local solutions. I would argue, however, that because these are local solutions they do in fact have broader implications. The very fact that endogenous development is happening in Melaoop proves that the rhetoric of endogenous action is not just lofty ideas and pleasant words, but rather is a tangible development process.

Future exploration of this topic could and should include comparative ethnographic studies. One of the greatest assets but also limiting factors of this study is the particularity of this study. The depth of knowledge learned through qualitative study of one particular community comes at a cost to the breadth of knowledge possible. I suggest then, that further study be conducted in communities representing various ethnic, religious and linguistic groups that are also in the process of negotiating development. A greater breadth of data can only aid in our understanding of the complexities of negotiated development for those most impacted by it.

¹ Katz, R., Biesele, M. & St. Denis, V. 1997. *Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy: Spirituality and Cultural Transformation Among the Kalahari Ju|'hoansi*. Rochester, Vermont: Inner Traditions.

² Naa was opinionated about the local fish poaching and artificial rain programs of the Thai government.

REFERENCES

- Babbie, E. 2008[2005]. *The Basics of Social Research*, 4th ed. Belmont, California: Thomson.
- Berger, P. 1990. *The Sacred Canopy*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Chaiken, M. S., Dixon, J. R., Powers, C., Wetzler, E. 2009 "Asking the Right Questions: Community-Based Strategies to Combat Hunger." *NAPA Bulletin* 32: 42-54.
- Coleman, J. S. 1988. "Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital." In *Readings in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism*, edited by James Farganis, 266-280. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies, 2008.
- DeTemple, J. 2008. "(Re)Production Zones: Mixing Religion, Development and Desire in Rural Ecuadorian Households." *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 13, no. 1: 115-140. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed September 17, 2012).
- Ekins, P. 1992. *A New World Order: Grassroots Movements for Global Change*. London: Routledge.
- Güven, A. B. 2012. "The IMF, the World Bank, and the Global Economic Crisis: Exploring Paradigm Continuity." *Development and Change* 43, no. 4: 869-898. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed December 1, 2012).
- Harris, M. 1979. *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture*. New York: Random House.
- Hayami, Y. 1997. "Internal and External Discourse of Communitarity, Tradition and Environment: Minority Claims on Forest in the Northern Hills of Thailand." *Tonan Ajia Kenkyu (Southeast Asian Studies)* 35, no. 3: 558-579.
- Hovemyr, A. P. 1989. "In Search of the Karen King: A Study in Karen Identity with Special Reference to 19th Century Karen Evangelism in Northern Thailand." PhD diss., University of Uppsala.
- Hunn, E. S. 1999. "Value of Subsistence for the Future of the World." In *Ethnoecology: Situated Knowledge/Located Lives*, edited by Virginia D. Nazarea, 23-36. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Kabuye, C.S. 1999 "Am I My Brother's Keeper?" In *Ethnoecology: Situated Knowledge/Located Lives*, edited by Virginia D. Nazarea, 263-271. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Katz, R., Biesele, M. & St. Denis, V. 1997. *Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy: Spirituality and Cultural Transformation Among the Kalahari Ju|'hoansi*. Rouchester, Vermont: Inner Traditions.

*This work is licensed
under a Creative
Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-
NoDerivs 3.0
Unported License.*


- Knauft, B. M. 2009. "Ritual form and Permutation in New Guinea: Implications for Symbolic Process for Socio-political Evolution." *American Ethnologist* 12, no. 2: 321-340. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed September 13, 2012).
- Paladino, S. 2011. "Tracking the Fault Lines of Pro-Poor Carbon Forestry." *Culture, Agriculture, Food and Environment* 33 no. 2: 117-132.
- Povinelli, E.A. 1995. "Do Rocks Listen? The Cultural Politics of Apprehending Australian Aboriginal Labor." *American Anthropologist* 97 no. 3: 505-518.
- Sachs, J. 2011. "A Pioneering Perspective." *Harvard International Review* 33, no. 1: 78-82. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed November 23, 2012).
- Samaddar, A. 2008. "Traditional and Posttraditional: A Study of Agricultural Rituals in to Technological Complexity among Rice Producers in Two Zones of West Bengal, India." *Culture and Agriculture* 28, no. 2: 108-121. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed September 14, 2012).
- Sivaramakrishnan, K. 2008. "Crafting the Public Sphere in the Forests of West Bengal: Democracy, Development, and Political Action." *American Ethnologist* 27, no. 2: 431-461. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed September 14, 2012).
- Torri, M. C. and Herrmann, T. M. 2011. "Spiritual Beliefs and Ecological Traditions in Indigenous Communities in India: Enhancing Community-Based Biodiversity Conservation." *Nature and Culture* 6 no. 2: 168-191.
- United Nations Development Programme. 2013. "Millennium Development Goals: Eight Goals for 2015." Last modified 2012. <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/mdgoverview.html>
- World Bank. 2013. "Why is Women's Economic Empowerment Important for Development?" http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTGENDER/Resources/womens_economic_empowerment.pdf
- Yoshimatsu, K. 1989. "The Karen World: The Cosmological and Ritual Belief System of the Sgaw Karen in Northwestern Chiang Mai Province." Final Research Report. Bangkok, National research Council of Thailand.

A Campaign of Intersections: Evaluating Perceptions of the Our City of Colours LGBTQ Posters in Metro Vancouver

Simon Lam

Simon Fraser University, scl23@sfu.ca

ABSTRACT

 ur City of Colours (OCC) is a Vancouver-based group looking to raise the visibility of, and address the issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people in various linguistic and cultural communities. In November 2011, the group released a series of 6 posters online featuring LGBTQ people who identified with a particular cultural background. This paper seeks to analyze the perceptions of these posters from the OCC team and people outside the team. Ultimately, this is an early evaluation of whether OCC can meet its mandate in conveying their message to linguistic and cultural communities. Through the use of participant observation, interviews, focus groups, archival data analysis, and content analysis, the OCC posters were found to have a relatively positive impact in increasing visibility of LGBTQ people and issues. However, participants noted that using more cultural references and having more romantic images to solidify the LGBTQ message could further strengthen the impact of the posters. There is also the need for the posters to be directed towards the older generation as many of the participants identify the older generation as a key demographic for receiving positive LGBTQ messages.

Keywords: ethnicity, homophobia, culture, awareness, LGBTQ

INTRODUCTION

The cries of concerned parents dominated the newspapers in Burnaby, British Columbia during the summer of 2011 when the school board debated the inclusion of an anti-homophobia policy in Burnaby schools (Moreau 2011a). This policy aimed to improve the education of sexual orientation and gender identity in classrooms. Eventually, the board decided to implement the policy, much to the dismay of a culturally diverse group of upset parents calling themselves the Parents' Voice. This group was worried that the policy would force children to question their sexuality and turn children into homosexuals or transgender people (Moreau 2011b). This lack of understanding of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) issues is concerning as it unfairly stereotypes a certain group (i.e., the LGBTQ communities) based on false information. The controversy over the anti-homophobia policy highlights the need to educate communities and people on LGBTQ issues through awareness projects and campaigns. A few months before the incident, a grassroots project called Our City of Colours (OCC) was created with a mission "to promote the visibility of, and address the issues facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people in a variety of linguistic and cultural communities" (Our City of Colours 2011). They proposed to accomplish this by distributing posters with positive images and messages featuring people who self-identify as LGBTQ and as part of a linguistic and/or cultural community. This study seeks to analyze perceptions of the OCC posters from October 2011 to November 2011.

OUR CITY OF COLOURS

The project grew from a gay men's workshop where participants were asked to propose projects addressing the needs of the gay men community. One of the participants came up with the idea to raise awareness of gay men in ethnic communities that deny or reject the existence of homosexuals. This participant, a 22 year-old Simon Fraser University (SFU) student, decided to initiate a project based on his idea, but expanded it to include LGBTQ people (not just gay men) and to broader communities (not just ethnic communities). In March 2011, he gathered individuals from the gay men's workshop, including myself, to be a part of a project called Our City of Colours. The name symbolizes the diversity of humans as well as our desire to connect cultures together regardless of a person's sexuality. At the time, the

OCC team comprised of ten gay men from a variety of different backgrounds including Chinese, Hispanic, Persian, and Punjabi. As mentioned, the team seeks to raise awareness and to promote positive images of LGBTQ individuals in a variety of linguistic and cultural communities. With this particular project, they raised awareness by distributing posters across Metro Vancouver. These posters feature people from a variety of ethnicities and backgrounds who identify as LGBTQ. During the time of the study, the posters were primarily released online through OCC's Facebook page.



Figure 1—Aaron & Spencer's poster

It is important to mention that during this time, I was deeply involved in the group and assisted in creating the images and messages of the posters. I have tried to remain unbiased for this study, but given the nature of qualitative research, my biases may have emerged in the findings. However, multiple methods were used to encourage the incorporation of various perspectives in the conclusions of the study. In addition, my role within the organization meant that I was the gatekeeper and it also allowed me to build rapport with the participants. This rapport contributed in creating a safe space for conversations regarding LGBTQ people and issues.

HOMOPHOBIA IN ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

The literature shows that some ethnic communities hold a negative perspective of homosexuality. I acknowledge that the term *ethnic* has various definitions. For the purpose of this study, ethnic communities will refer to non-White communities. A number of studies indicate that LGBTQ people in ethnic communities view their culture as less accepting towards homosexuality compared to Western European influenced communities in Canada and the United States. (Chung and Szymanski 2006, 67-93; Chan 1989, 16-20; Mireshghi and Matsumoto 2008, 372-376). According to Chung and Szymanski (2006, 67-93), Asian culture is seen to be more conservative and possess limited tolerance for LGBTQ individuals. As a result, LGBTQ Asians are less likely to come out to their parents because of the perception that Asian culture is less accepting of homosexuals.

Several studies reiterate this theme of a lack of support from ethnic communities for LGBTQ people (Hooghe et al. 2010, 384-400; Abraham 2009, 79-97; Boulden 2009, 134-150; Hooghe et al. 2010, 49-71). One reason for the lack of support is the perceived clash of different values between the two cultures, that being the ethnic culture and the LGBTQ culture. The emphasis on traditional values like focusing on family has resulted in a negative view of homosexuality as the ethnic community believes homosexuals cannot maintain a family (Boulden 2009, 134-150; Hooghe et al. 2010, 49-71; Han 2007, 51-67; Mao, McCormick, and Van 2002, 419-430). For Hmong in the United States, males are expected to fulfill their patriarchal role as the dominant individual in the household and make all the decisions. The inability for some gay Hmong to live up to this cultural role has resulted in rejection by the Hmong community

(Boulden 2009, 134-150).

With the lack of support for LGBTQ individuals, it is not surprising that some ethnic communities refuse to openly discuss sexuality and instead, opt to avoid the subject all together. Han (2007, 51-67) found that the Asian and Latino communities do not have any positive words for gay. On the other hand, there are several derogatory terms to describe LGBTQ individuals, including a term analogous to transvestite (62). Boulden (2009, 134-150) uncovered a similar phenomenon in the Hmong community where no word exists to describe an LGBTQ person. Muslims face the same problem according to participants in Abraham's (2009, 79-97) study of queer Muslims in Australia. One participant mentioned that his friends reacted with disbelief when the participant came out as gay; to his friends, a queer Muslim simply did not exist (88).

Given the lack of acknowledgement by some ethnic communities towards non-heterosexuals, some LGBTQ people feel isolated from their own ethnic culture. An online survey conducted by Lui et al. (2009, 247-266) on LGBTIQ (addition of I is intentional and stands for intersexual) South Asians in southern California discovered that participants felt more alienated in their own cultural community than the LGBTIQ community. In total, 70% of participants also experienced homo/trans/biphobia from the South Asian communities and 72% felt isolated or lonely (258). The lack of support by the ethnic community is further echoed by a study from Szymanski and Gupta (2009, 267-281) on Asians in the United States. Many of the participants felt a persistent sense of cultural heterosexism where heterosexist norms were upheld at the expense of support towards LGBQ (lack of T is intentional) people. Brian O'Neill (2011) found a prevalent influence of heterosexist values in his study of LGB (lack of T and Q is intentional) newcomers in Canada. He notes that participants experienced heterosexism in their communities which prevented them from accessing services like immigration assistance and support for their struggles with their sexuality. In addition, newcomers also experienced racism within LGB communities.

Furthermore, there is an emphasis on Muslims and Asians to follow the collective lifestyle of their community and de-emphasize the individualistic culture prevalent in Western countries. Hooghe, Claes, Harell, Quintelier, and Dejaeghere (2010, 49-71) discovered that Muslims are expected to care for the fam-

ily and their future generations. Thus, the LGBTQ identity does not simply impact the individual, but also plays a huge influence over the family and the community. A similar line of thinking is found within the Asian community (Han 2007, 51-67; Mao, McCormick, and Van 2002, 419-430).

However, some of the literature cautions against blaming ethnicity for homophobia. One study in Belgium looked at the extent to which attitudes toward homosexuals differ between young people of foreign origin and native-born Belgians (Hooghe et al. 2010, 384-400). They found that young people of foreign origin had significantly more negative attitudes toward homosexuals than Belgian youths. The authors also discovered that ethnicity was not directly related to sexual prejudice; instead, a feeling of hostility from social institutions contributed to homophobic attitudes (Toney and Subramanian 2010, 151-173). Another study also cautioned against generalizing homophobic attitudes to all immigrants. Nearly 10,000 youths from Belgium and Canada answered several questions regarding their beliefs about gay rights activists (Hooghe et al. 2010, 384-400). The authors found that youth born outside of Canada or Belgium were less supportive of gay rights activists compared to native-born youths. Again, the authors are careful to distinguish between inherent hostility by immigrants and specific characteristics of the immigrant community that can lead to homophobic attitudes. They posit that immigrant communities may be more religious, leading to hostile attitudes toward homosexuality. In addition, Gallor and Fassinger's (2010, 287-315) study on lesbians and gay men found that ethnic minority participants and Caucasian participants have a similar level of satisfaction regarding social support.

The literature clearly indicates that there are negative perspectives towards LGBTQ people in ethnic communities. LGBTQ people are often silenced and their voices are not heard by the community. With the traditional roles revolving around heterosexual norms, some LGBTQ people risk being ostracized due to a perceived inability to live up to these roles. As a result, many ethnic LGBTQ people feel isolated from their ethnic community. Thus, there needs to be more awareness and education of LGBTQ people and issues in various ethnic communities. It is also important to avoid labelling all ethnic communities as homophobic. Several studies found that it is not the culture that is homophobic but rather, specific characteristics that can be found in all cultures. The purpose of the OCC posters is to initi-

ate dialogue in various communities, including ethnic communities, as a way to improve understanding and to present positive messages and images of LGBTQ people.

POSTERS AND ACCULTURATION

Several studies have shown that poster campaigns can be effective in educating the public and raising awareness on various topics, like improving safety on shipyard scaffolds, preventing campus violence against women, and decreasing the amount of passive smoking (Etter and Laszlo 2005, 190-198; Saarela 1989, 177-185; Potter et al. 2009, 106-121). On the other hand, another study found that only a third of participants remembered content on a poster (Pulley et al. 2007, 233-241). The issue is how effective poster campaigns are in general, that is, do people acknowledge the messages within posters? An initial look at the effectiveness of OCC posters is important to determine whether more posters should be produced in the future. In addition, it is pertinent to determine whether these posters are capable of generating discussions of LGBTQ issues in linguistic and cultural communities. This study is an early evaluation of OCC's mission and to what extent they will be able to achieve their mandate. Specifically, it will look at whether the OCC posters can raise awareness of LGBTQ people and issues in linguistic and cultural communities, and as a result, encourage people in these communities to talk about these topics.

Ideally, the posters will be the first steps towards acculturation, a concept emanating from John W. Berry (2005, 697-712). This concept provides a framework of how LGBTQ communities and cultural communities can interact with each other. Although much of the work regarding acculturation is for ethnocultural communities, it could also be applied to LGBTQ communities as they have their own cultures. Berry maintains that acculturation, or the process by which two cultural groups integrate with each other, involves actions from both groups rather than a dependence on one to act. In this context, ethnocultural communities would adopt values of respecting LGBTQ people while LGBTQ communities will accommodate different cultural values and attitudes. Awareness would be the first step towards a goal of acculturation. Without awareness, there is no acknowledgement that acculturation should take place between LGBTQ communities and ethnocultural communities. OCC aims to initiate this first step through their posters.



Figure 2—Claire and Michelle's poster

Thus, this paper (and the first phase of a participatory action project) aims to determine whether the posters are a step in the right direction in raising awareness of LGBTQ people and issues. In order to evaluate whether OCC is able to achieve this, the paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How does the Our City of Colours team want their posters to be perceived by residents of Metro Vancouver?
2. What are some of the perceptions of the posters from people outside of the Our City of Colours team when the posters were initially released online in November 2011?
3. How do the reactions from people outside the Our City of Colours team relate to how the team want the posters to be perceived?

These questions look to gather perceptions and reactions from a diverse range of people to evaluate the effectiveness of the posters. As such, it is important to collect a variety of opinions regarding how the posters impact people's attitudes regarding LGBTQ people and issues. These opinions will dictate whether the posters are successful and by association, the success of the advocacy work found within the posters.

METHODS

The purpose of this study is to gauge perceptions of the OCC posters from people within the team and people outside the team. Thus, multiple methods were used to ensure that I was able to obtain data on how the posters were perceived by various groups. The use of multiple methods also helped balance my substantial involvement with OCC and provide unbiased feedback to the posters. Through the use of methods like participant observation, interviews, focus groups, and archival analysis, I was able to study in-depth discussions on important themes and topics. On the other hand, content analysis on online materials brought forth various uncensored reactions to the posters. Overall, this study tried to gather a wide array of opinions in forming an informative conclusion.

Each participant signed an informed consent form which meant the participant recognized the ethical issues involved and how I planned to protect their identity. Their names will be kept confidential as well as any other specific characteristics that could be used to identify them. Interviews were recorded, but were destroyed after the research was completed. However, it is important to note that the names of the individuals involved in OCC are visible on OCC's Facebook page and appeared in various news articles. This means that people may be able to identify certain OCC team members based on the data presented in my paper. With the amount of publicity, I asked certain OCC members if they wished to have their name listed or if they would prefer to remain anonymous. As such, Darren Ho, the founder of OCC, verbally agreed to have his real name used in the study. All the team members also allowed me to observe the meetings for my research and to analyze all email correspondence.

The study took place in the months of October and November of 2011. Participant observation primarily took place at the office of a local non-profit organization in Downtown Vancouver; this was the primary meeting place for the OCC team

who met every Sunday. During the time of the study, I was an active member of the OCC team and thus, I was already a participant and the observation was a natural fit for my research. Notes were written on what was said and the issues that were discussed, whether they directly related to my research or not. Each meeting would last between one to three hours depending on the agenda. Over the course of two months, all ten members of the OCC team were present at one time or another. The majority of the information here revolved around administrative issues rather than substantial themes relating to the posters. However, the observations gave me a glimpse of how the team planned to promote the posters in various communities and how they responded to people's reactions. I also attended a presentation from Ho at the 7th Annual Gay Men's Health Summit in Vancouver, BC. This presentation presented the goals of OCC's posters as well as its mission to raise awareness of LGBTQ people and issues to the general public. After the presentation, there was a question and answer period that provided further reactions to the posters for my research.

Archival data analysis was also utilized as I had access to all the email correspondence by the team. Google Groups was used for sending messages to each other and I analyzed over one hundred conversation threads to determine which messages were relevant to my topic. This method provided insight on how members of the team viewed various topics. There were also a number of debates amongst team members, which offered different perspectives for me to consider. It gave me a more concrete idea of how the team wanted their posters to be perceived as it provided a glimpse of what the team thought throughout the year, rather than at a specific time (compared to interviews). There were also instances when team members would change their opinions on a particular subject over the course of the year.

To gain more insight, I conducted a focus group with the OCC team to examine the rationale behind the team's decisions. This provided deep discussions surrounding the ideas behind the creation of the posters and the message that the team wanted to convey. There was also an opportunity for me to witness how the team reacted to the online materials regarding the posters. As OCC was a grassroots project at the time without a membership, the team represented the majority of people involved in creating the poster campaign. I also conducted a semi-structured interview with Ho, the leader of OCC. With this interview,

we discussed the issues that came up when the posters were being created and how he wanted the posters to be perceived by others. We also discussed why Ho created OCC and what he hoped to achieve with the posters.

To gauge the perception of the posters from people outside the OCC team, I conducted several interviews, hosted a focus group, and analyzed Facebook content and news articles. It is important to note that all the participants in the interviews and focus group are from a convenience sample; I personally knew each participant and had already built rapport and trust with them. The topic of LGBTQ issues can be quite sensitive for some people and it is important that this study elicits honest answers rather than answers that are politically correct. Given the short timeline of the study (i.e., two months), I did not feel that it would be fruitful for me to interview strangers as I do not believe the participant would disclose their opinion if the participant held anti-LGBTQ views. As a researcher, I would like to hear those anti-LGBTQ views and if the participant did not feel comfortable disclosing them, the interview would not be useful. In all my interviews, I made sure to ask about the community's attitudes rather than the participant's attitudes. This prevents the possibility that the participant becomes defensive about their own opinions. If they do hold anti-LGBTQ views, they can project their opinions on to the community as a way to avoid judgement. This also limited emotional harm for participants as the questions never referred to intimate, personal details about the participant. In addition, the use of convenience sampling offered a safe environment for me as it limited the likelihood of a violent or dangerous reaction to the questions. If participants felt any degree of harm after the interviews or focus groups, I let them know that I was available to talk about their feelings and offered contact information for organizations and support groups in the community.

The interviews were a mixture of structured, semi-structured, and photo-elicitation. I conducted a structured interview with a heterosexual, female SFU student regarding her community's attitudes toward LGBTQ people and issues, as well as her thoughts on the OCC posters. I also conducted two other semi-structured interviews: one with a 24 year-old, gay Persian male and one with a community leader in a Vancouver neighbourhood. These interviews had two main components: first I asked the participants to talk about their community's perception and

attitudes toward LGBTQ issues and people, and second, what they thought of the poster. One photo elicitation interview was also conducted with a 23-year-old, gay Filipino male. I presented each poster and asked him to vocalize what came to his mind. After, I asked several general questions about the posters and how he thinks the posters will be perceived. Photo elicitation was included in all my other interviews with participants outside of the OCC team as it gave me a sense of how people outside of OCC perceived the posters.

The focus group consisted of non-LGBTQ friends I knew in high school. My existing rapport with them, and with one another, allowed the focus group to discuss the sensitive topic of LGBTQ issues without awkwardness or hesitation. Participants were able to converse naturally as all of them were acquainted with each other before the focus group was conducted. The existing rapport assisted in creating safe space which allowed for honest discussion on LGBTQ topics and reduced the likelihood of harmful comments between participants.

Lastly, content analysis of materials, like news articles, Facebook posts and comments, radio interviews, and TV stories was conducted to further gain a sense of how people outside the team perceived the posters. This method provided additional critical perceptions of the posters as online media tends to contain many comments without having to interview individuals from all over the place. With the anonymity of the internet, commenters may feel more comfortable sharing their opinions. In addition, journalists tend to highlight what they think are the most important issues, which aided in identifying important themes. This method helped balance the interviews as it provided critical reactions to the posters that may not have emerged in a safe environment.

MODE OF ANALYSIS

I started the analysis by writing notes on all the data available. From these notes, I conducted open coding where I wrote down any codes that came to mind. After listing all the codes, I picked the ones that seemed to be the most important. Importance was measured both quantitatively and qualitatively. Codes that came up often in the data were seen to be significant. In addition, I also asked the participants what they felt were important themes and news articles also assisted in highlighting what the journalists thought were important issues. These selected

codes were then combined to form general themes. With these themes in mind, I went back to the data to ensure I gathered all the relevant evidence. I wrote several memos regarding the themes and lastly, incorporated them into a paper.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The focus on ethnic communities (as part of linguistic and cultural communities) with the OCC posters meant that the team had to have a clear definition of what exactly constitutes ethnicity. Ho, who identifies as Chinese, states that ethnic in the context of the posters refer to “the four cultural community groups we are targeting [i.e., Chinese, Korean, Persian, and Punjabi]” (OCC focus group, Nov. 6, 2011). The member meaning of ethnicity is very specific and caters to the needs of the team. However, during the one-on-one interview, Ho recognizes that the term ethnic is a rather vague term as “everyone is ethnic” (semi-structured interview, Oct. 28, 2011). It can refer to visible minorities, racialized groups, non-White communities, or other groups. The team eventually decided to stick with the term ethnic as it is the most efficient way to describe their target audience. In addition, it is a word that many people are familiar with and can understand.

Moreover, the OCC team mentioned in the focus group that ethnicity could refer to either people who are not White or people who identify as ethnic or visible minority. The other issue is whether ethnic communities can be easily distinguished from a White community. One participant, a 21-year-old Asian SFU student in the non-LGBTQ focus group, believes it is hard to separate between the two communities. She rationalizes this by noting how “it’s not like...I’m immersed in a completely ethnic community and then I walk over across the street and then I go and hang out with all the White people” (non-LGBTQ focus group, Nov. 12, 2011). As a multicultural country, Canada is home to numerous communities with a mixture of various ethnicities and cultures. This can make it hard to truly define what constitutes an ethnic community for this poster campaign. In the posters, all the models self-identified with the communities listed as OCC’s target audience for the posters (i.e., Chinese, Persian, and Punjabi; no Korean poster has been made so far).



Figure 3—Farhad’s poster

When talking about any community, it is hard not to talk about culture. The OCC team made a conscious effort to incorporate cultural references into their posters whether that be mentioning Googoosh, a cultural icon in Iran or the Chinese holiday, Mid-Autumn Lantern Festival (all names and phrases on the poster are fictional). Yet, Mirza¹ (a pseudonym), a 24-year-old Persian fashion model, believes “there’s nothing to relate to the culture except for maybe the fact that you’ve used their ethnic writing [language] on the posters” (semi-structured interview, Nov. 15, 2011). He suggested that models in the poster need to wear some sort of cultural dress or be immersed in a cultural background to further convey the point that the posters



Figure 4—Wesley's poster

are meant for certain ethnic communities.

However, Craig Takeuchi, a reporter with the Georgia Straight (a free weekly Vancouver newspaper), talked to Alex (Amar) Sangha, the founder of Sher Vancouver, a LGBT organization for South Asians. Sangha “points out that because Ajay isn’t wearing a turban, doesn’t have a beard, and isn’t in traditional costume, this image may moderate any controversy the image will have” (Takeuchi 2011a). This statement is in line with what OCC wants: they do not wish the posters to alienate ethnic communities by relying on stereotypes to describe a culture. Yet, Mirza insists his parents’ generation, which he sees as the target audience, already possess stereotypes of how

certain cultures should look. Furthermore, he argues that “immigrant parents...don’t want to lose their culture” and feel that their children are losing their culture when adopting Western values and clothes (semi-structured interview, Nov. 15, 2011). Because of this, Mirza believes that immigrant parents may not be able to identify with the models who are dressed in Western clothing; the inclusion of cultural dress and symbols could help alleviate this problem. Although none of the participants were confused as to the target audience being the ethnic community, the majority of the participants were under the age of 25. Only one participant, a community leader in Vancouver, was over the age of 25 and she has a gay son, which may influence how she



Figure 5—Ajay’s poster

perceived the posters.

Another issue that arose, mainly from Facebook comments, was the idea of Western society imposing values of tolerating, accepting, and respecting LGBTQ people onto ethnic communities. Jason Bryan, in two Facebook comments posted in response to a Georgia Straight article on OCC on November 2, 2011, plays devil’s advocate by posing the problem that if Canada is a multicultural country, then Canada should “accept people’s intolerance as part of their culture”. Bryan suggests that people may feel that if OCC is “doing these widespread campaigns to change social perceptions, then [OCC is] watering down the other cultures and bringing more commonality to [different] cultures”

which effectively leads to an “American melting pot”. The OCC team decided to not engage with Bryan’s comments as the consensus amongst the team was that OCC cannot be responsible to respond to every negative or critical comment about the campaign (OCC focus group, Nov. 6, 2011). It could discredit the group if they decided to wade into every debate brought forward to them. There is also the issue of whether negative reactions are directed towards the posters specifically or if they simply reiterate debates about LGBTQ people in general. The team wants to focus on feedback regarding their mandate of raising awareness and providing positive messages and images of LGBTQ people in linguistic and cultural communities. Although the question of cultural imposition is an interesting concept, the team has identified an issue (the lack of awareness of LGBTQ people and issues) in various linguistic and cultural communities, and it is an issue that needs to be addressed.

Bryan’s comments raise an excellent point of how criticisms against the OCC posters cannot be categorized as simply homophobic or racist; instead, the criticisms may take on several discriminatory attitudes at the same time. He suggest that some people may wonder if “the [Chinese] community does not want to accept certain lifestyles, should the [Western], white liberals force their beliefs of tolerating anything onto [the Chinese community]”? Ultimately, the OCC posters could be seen as “forcing [Western], white liberal culture of tolerance onto the Chinese conservative culture”. These questions and ideas contains elements of heterosexism and racism as it assumes and generalizes that another culture is homophobic and thus, should be left alone as it is part of their values. People that believe homosexuality is a lifestyle delegitimize LGBTQ people by viewing sexual orientation as a choice rather than a lived experience. In addition, the Chinese community cannot be generalized to be conservative as it does not acknowledge the wide range of ideological beliefs found within the Chinese community. The idea presented in Bryan’s comments contains homophobic views on top of a sweeping racist assumption that intersect to form the basis for the issue presented. With these posters, OCC challenges this intersection of multiple discriminatory attitudes fueling the hypothetical criticisms found in Bryan’s comments.

The last theme that came up in my research was the role language plays in how the posters are interpreted. In an interview with Craig Takeuchi, Ho explains that the word ‘gay’ is

never used in any of the posters because certain cultures have acquired negative connotations with the word ‘gay’ (Takeuchi 2011c). As a linguistic student, Ho understands the intricacies of how language evolves and changes throughout time, with certain derogatory words (e.x., like queer) requiring years to be reclaimed as positive words (email communication, Nov. 9 2011). One important goal for the OCC posters is to provide an opportunity for communities to begin to associate LGBTQ people with positive images and descriptions. Ho emphasizes this point at the 7th Annual Gay Men’s Health Summit, a conference focusing on gay men’s health. During a presentation and panel on young gay men’s health, Ho commented how he wanted the community to see the images on the posters first before automatically thinking of a word to describe the relationship. If the word appears first, then the reader may conjure stereotypical and negative thoughts before seeing the rest of the poster. By placing the LGBTQ tagline at the bottom, it limits the opportunity for the reader to come up with prejudices regarding LGBTQ people. In addition, all the posters describe the relationship rather than impose a label on them. The lack of labelling in the posters allow communities to hopefully come up with their own positive words to describe the relationship (Christopher 2011).



Figure 6—Ambre’s poster

However, by describing the relationships rather than labeling them, the posters may convey a weaker LGBTQ message than intended. Takeuchi, a supporter of OCC, notes that the Ambre poster’s use of ‘girlfriend’ is “less obvious that it implies an intimate same-sex lover” (Takeuchi 2011b). He suggests that viewers of the posters may have to visit OCC’s Facebook page in order to understand the LGBTQ message in the poster. Sarah⁴ (a pseudonym), a community leader in Vancouver who was born in Chile, believes the posters featuring a single person communicate a subtler LGBTQ message. Yet, she sees this as an asset as these posters could be a way to slowly introduce the topic into

the community. For future campaigns, Sarah thinks the posters could evolve into something more romantic (semi-structured interview, Nov. 26, 2011). Mirza completely disagrees with Sarah on this point. He is adamant that OCC, as a new group, must create shocking and passionate posters in order to stand out. Instead of having models holding hands, Mirza believes an extra step needs to be taken, like having the models kiss or be on an intimate date. He argues that the current posters featuring a couple could be interpreted as a friendship rather than a romantic relationship, especially when friends holding hands is common in Asian culture (semi-structured interview, Nov. 15, 2011). Thus, OCC may want to maintain a balance of conservative and more romantic posters to appeal to a diverse range of audiences.

LOOKING AHEAD

The purpose of the OCC posters is to raise awareness by providing positive messages and images of LGBTQ people and issues in a variety of linguistic and cultural communities. Ideally, linguistic communities, cultural communities, and LGBTQ communities will undergo the process of acculturation to understand and adapt to each other's needs. These posters are seen by the team as an initial attempt in changing anti-LGBTQ attitudes held by various communities through engaging community members in discussions on the topic.

In general, the OCC posters were viewed by the participants as something that had never existed before in Metro Vancouver. Described as a "taboo-busting" campaign (Takeuchi 2011d), nearly all the participants agreed that at the very least, the posters will catch the attention of people because it is a campaign that is unique by directing a sensitive subject to linguistic and cultural communities. However, more attention may be required to ensure that the LGBTQ message is conveyed. The team's decision to describe the relationship rather than impose labels is sensitive to cultural needs, but comes at the cost of having a clear, concise message, which could be balanced with a more romantic image. In addition, the OCC team may wish to incorporate more cultural references to appeal to the older generation. Many participants viewed older generations as the main audience since the younger generations tend to be more aware of LGBTQ people and issues. As such, the OCC team may want to direct future posters specific to older generations.

The poster campaign tackles an issue that goes beyond only heterosexism or racism; instead, it approaches the intersection of where heterosexism meets racism. It is a process involving the shifting of attitudes towards LGBTQ people in various communities and it will be a long, but important journey requiring considerations for various cultures. Our City of Colours is taking the first of many steps to create an understanding, respectful, and inclusive society for all cultures and communities.

REFERENCES

- Abraham, Ibrahim. 2009. "Out to get us': Queer muslims and the clash of sexual civilisations in australia." *Contemporary Islam* 3 (1): 79-97.
- Berry, John W. 2005. "Acculturation: Living successfully in two cultures." *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 29 (6): 697-712.
- Boulden, Walter T. 2009. "Gay hmong: A multifaceted clash of cultures." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* 21 (2-3): 134-50.
- Chan, Connie S. 1989. "Issues of identity development among asian-american lesbians and gay men." *Journal of Counseling & Development* 68 (1): 16-20, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=5334087&site=ehost-live>.
- Christopher, Nathaniel. 2011. "Gay posters for chinese, iranian and punjabi communities." *Xtra!*, November 10. http://www.xtra.ca/public/Vancouver/Gay_posters_for_Chinese_Iranian_and_Punjabi_communities-11061.aspx.
- Chung, Y. B., and Dawn M. Szymanski. 2006. "Racial and sexual identities of asian american gay men." *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling* 1 (2): 67-93, http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1300/J462v01n02_05.
- Etter, Jean-François, and Evelyne Laszlo. 2005. "Evaluation of a poster campaign against passive smoking for world no-tobacco day." *Patient Education and Counseling* 57 (2) (May): 190-8.
- Gallor, Susanna M., and Ruth E. Fassinger. 2010. "Social support, ethnic identity, and sexual identity of lesbians and gay men." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* 22 (3): 287-315, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10538720903426404>.
- Han, Chong-suk. 2007. "They don't want to cruise your type: Gay men of color and the racial politics of exclusion." *Social Identities* 13 (1): 51-67, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=24078221&site=ehost-live>.
- Hooghe, Marc, Ellen Claes, Allison Harell, Ellen Quintelier, and Yves Dejaeghere. 2010. "Anti-gay sentiment among adolescents in belgium and canada: A comparative investigation into the role of gender and religion." *Journal of Homosexuality* 57 (3): 384-400, <http://www.informaworld.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/10.1080/00918360903543071>.
- Hooghe, Marc, Yves Dejaeghere, Ellen Claes, and Ellen Quintelier. 2010. "Yes, but suppose everyone turned gay?: The structure of attitudes toward gay and lesbian rights among islamic youth in belgium." *Journal of LGBT Youth* 7 (1): 49-71, <http://www.informaworld.com.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/10.1080/19361650903507916>.

*This work is licensed
under a Creative
Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-
NoDerivs 3.0
Unported License.*

- Lui, Camillia, Salman Husainy, Rashmi Choksey, Joyti Chand, Prajna Paramita Choudhury, Sanjay Chhugani, Neetu S. Badhan, and Eric C. Wat. 2009. "Community alienation and its impact on help-seeking behavior among LGBTIQ south asians in southern california." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* 21 (2/3): 247-66.
- Mao, Limin, John McCormick, and de Ven Van. 2002. "Ethnic and gay identification: Gay asian men dealing with the divide." *Culture, Health & Sexuality* 4 (4): 419-30, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13691050110148342>.
- Mireshghi, Sholeh I, and David Matsumoto. 2008. "Perceived cultural attitudes toward homosexuality and their effects on iranian and american sexual minorities." *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology* 14 (4): 372-6.
- Moreau, Jennifer. 2011a. "Parents protest gay-positive policy." *Burnaby Now*, April 30. <http://www.burnabynow.com/news/Parents+protest+positive+policy/4703819/story.html>.
- . 2011b. "Anti-homophobia policy sparks parents' protest; group says board's stance infringes on morality." *The Province*, June 28. <http://www2.canada.com/theprovince/news/story.html?id=a958083e-55a9-476a-8f38-e8795bbe4cad>.
- O'Neill, Brian. 2011. "Diversity within diversity: Settlement experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual newcomers in BC." (presentation, National Metropolis Conference 2011, Vancouver, BC, March 23, 2011).
- Our City of Colours. 2011. "Our city of colours." Accessed October 1. <https://www.facebook.com/ourcityofcolours>.
- Potter, Sharyn J., Mary M. Moynihan, Jane G. Stapleton, and Victoria L. Banyard. 2009. "Empowering bystanders to prevent campus violence against women." *Violence Against Women* 15 (1): 106-21.
- Pulley, Jill, Margaret Brace, Gordon Bernard, and Dan Masys. 2007. "Evaluation of the effectiveness of posters to provide information to patients about a DNA database and their opportunity to opt out." *Cell and Tissue Banking* 8 (3): 233-41.
- Saarela, Kaija Leena. 1989. "A poster campaign for improving safety on shipyard scaffolds." *Journal of Safety Research* 20 (4): 177-85.
- Szymanski, Dawn M., and Arpana Gupta. 2009. "Examining the relationships between multiple oppressions and asian american sexual minority persons' psychological distress." *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* 21 (2-3): 267-81, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10538720902772212>.

- Takeuchi, Craig. 2011a. "Making LGBT people visible in the south asian community: Our city of colours, sher vancouver, and more." Straight.com Blogra, November 18. <http://www.straight.com/article-543951/vancouver/lgbt-presence-south-asian-community-our-city-colours-sher-vancouver-and-more>.
- . 2011b. "Our city of colours challenges lesbian invisibility in chinese canadian community." Straight.com Blogra, November 7. <http://www.straight.com/article-525041/vancouver/our-city-colours-challenges-lesbian-invisibility-chinese-canadian-community>
- . 2011c. "Our city of colours illuminates the LGBT rainbow in ethnic communities." Straight.com Blogra, August 31. <http://www.straight.com/article-443476/vancouver/outpost-our-city-colours-aims-illuminate-lgbt-rainbow-people-colour>.
- . 2011d. "Our city of colours shatters LGBT visibility barrier in chinese canadian community." Straight.com Blogra, November 1. <http://www.straight.com/article-518706/vancouver/our-city-colours-breaks-lgbt-visibility-barrier-chinese-canadian-community>
- Teney, Céline, and S. V. Subramanian. 2010. "Attitudes toward homosexuals among youth in multiethnic brussels." *Cross-Cultural Research* 44 (2): 151-73.



The Journal for Undergraduate Ethnography

Volume 4 | Issue 1

Expressing Criticism, Emotionality and Community In the Spanish Socioeconomic Crisis

Mayahuel Gomez-O'Cadiz

Saint Louis University Madrid Campus, mayahuelgo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the cultural ideologies underlying the pervasive critical social movement that has arisen from the contemporary socioeconomic crisis in Spain. Interviews and chat room responses to crisis related newspaper articles provided the material for a case study utilizing ethnographic methods.

The following research questions aim to unveil pervasive cultural ideologies: what are the particular meanings and functions of criticism and protest for Spanish people during a time of civil unrest and socioeconomic crisis? What role do new media/social media play in the facilitation or inhibition of this critical protest language in Spain?

Keywords: Socioeconomic crisis, Spain, cultural ideologies, crisis ideologies

INTRODUCTION

Spain is the fourth largest economy of the Euro zone, and after Greece, Spain is at the heart of the European financial crisis. There is a 26% unemployment rate and a 51.5% unemployment rate for people under the age of 25. The price of housing has dropped 25% since 2008 and Spain's major banks are deeply indebted (La crisis en España en Numeros 2012). Furthermore, 22% of Spanish households are below the international poverty level and 25% are at great risk of falling into poverty (Hidalgo 2012). For the past five years, Spanish society has witnessed and experienced an economic and social crisis and decline of general welfare. With the election of the conservative Popular Party in 2011, austerity measures were put into place in attempts to reduce the deficit and ameliorate the situation. The Spanish people have been hit the hardest by these measures with deep funding cuts to education and healthcare and a labor reform further limiting worker rights and compensation. Spanish citizens have demonstrated generalized unrest and dissatisfaction with the situation and particularly with the austerity measures. Tens of thousands of citizens marched in Madrid and Barcelona after Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy announced he would cut 150 billion Euros from the budget, mainly in health and education, over the course of three years (Kilkenny 2012). Austerity measures have given rise to several grass-roots movements that actively protest on an almost daily basis in the country's main cities. These protest groups encompass all branches of society from university professors and students to those who have lost homes due to foreclosure (Poggioli 2012). An overwhelming 77% of the population support protest activities (Kilkenny 2012).

This generalized dissatisfaction has been recently exacerbated by a series of scandals linking the Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy to cases of corruption and the embezzlement of public funds. Secret party documents were published showing Rajoy had received 25,000 Euros a year over the course of eleven years in kickbacks, along with other party leaders (Ortiz and Reinlen 2013). The Spanish public met this information with mass demonstrations in front of the Popular Party headquarters with calls for party leaders' resignation (Ortiz and Reinlen 2013). Over the past three years, a culture of protest has clearly emerged in Spain spearheaded by the 15M (a group that takes its name from the date their first unified demonstration took place) or Indignados (the indignant) protest movement in May of 2011. As such

strong responses to the crisis have emerged in Spanish society, it seems particularly relevant to look at them more closely in terms of their social significance and impact.

In a time of crisis and of deep social unrest, it is warranted to study how Spanish people are "taking it," how they are conceptualizing the situation they are living and how they are reacting towards the crisis on more personal levels. A deeper understanding of people's perceptions and participation in the pervasive crisis mindset may reveal implicit cultural ideologies that may explain the most effective ways of building a path towards a betterment of the situation and promote consciousness of the ameliorative paths for citizens and government officials. The understanding of social phenomena warrants an ethnographic study that will attempt to understand the particular system of meanings that has emerged within Spanish protest culture.

What are the particular meanings and functions of criticism and protest for Spanish people during a time of civil unrest and socioeconomic crisis? What role do new media/social media play in the facilitation or inhibition of this critical protest language in Spain?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Manuel Castells, the world is experiencing a shift towards the social order and dynamics of a globalized system in which critical issues for a nation's people and government are shaped by "globally interdependent processes" out of the control of sovereign state territories (Castells 2008, 78). Crises of efficiency, identity, equity and legitimacy are taking place globally. The crisis of legitimacy is perhaps the most pervasive and relevant to Spanish politics today and to citizens who are experiencing a growing distrust of political parties, politicians, and the institutions of representative democracy due to the practice of media politics and the politics of scandal (Castells 2008, 78). Because of this generalized mistrust in the capabilities of government to resolve pressing issues, the emergence of non-governmental groups function to give a voice to the needs of the people. This description of the dynamics of the emergence of critical voices fits the Spanish story and supports the argument that the critical movement is not only a reactive phenomenon but one deeply embedded in a larger process of global transformation of power structures, making the Spanish case—as soci-

ety facing a crisis in representation—extremely relevant in deepening our comprehension of our present reality on a global scale.

Some communication research suggests that governments are a type of organization easily prone to communicative “mistakes” when handling crisis events; “Errors such as denying and evading responsibility for the event without sufficient evidence, shifting the blame to some other entity without due cause, or lying about evidence surrounding the crisis appear with troubling regularity” (Ulmer 2010, 793). Taking these factors into consideration, Spain’s crisis is not only related to the tangible risk of Spanish people’s livelihoods and material well being, but it is an image crisis in which the Spanish government is unable to regain its trust from the public. In other words the Spanish government is going through a public relations crisis and inhibiting the establishment of proactive communication that will lead to ameliorative paths (Kent 2010). The Spanish government continues to deny its participation in corruption scandals and denies any negotiation with the Spanish people on slackening austerity measures (Ortiz 2013), worsening their image in the public eye. These insights may indicate that even though a Spanish person is not directly affected by the economic crisis, even though that person may not have lost their job or their home, they are likely to feel distrust towards the government, making participating critics even more numerous than those directly affected.

Media also participates in the criticism of the crisis situation and solidification of a critical social movement. Media audiences are “able to intervene in political stories with a degree of effectiveness that would have been unthinkable ten or twenty years ago,” due to the emergence and expansion of new media outlets (Gurevitch 2004). The Internet and social media have played an integral part unifying and voicing opinions about the economic crisis. Bloggers and independent journalists have emerged as a more accurate voice of the people and have given a name and a face to the *Indignado* movement: a movement or state of mind/attitude that has developed from strictly protest organizations to a more specific and active support system in which young and old are involved in dealing with the crisis.

In order to understand the nature of critical social movements, we must understand what triggers the phenomenon. One major reason people join in vocal outrage against a power structure is because they experience an emotional response towards a

“ the ability to focus blame is crucial to protest, and it differs according to the perceived ultimate causes and the direct embodiments of each threat or outrage”
– Jasper

grave offence (Jasper 1998). According to Jasper, “ ‘Moral shocks,’ often the first step toward recruitment into social movements, occur when an unexpected event or piece of information raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action” (Jasper 1998, 409). This “moral shock” can be traced time and time again throughout contemporary Spanish media with reports of corruption and political scandal and a sudden emergence of a new protest group denouncing the specific act. Furthermore, “the ability to focus blame is crucial to protest, and it differs according to the perceived ultimate causes and the direct embodiments of each threat or outrage” (Jasper 1998, 410). As the Spanish people have found such an embodiment and source of threat in their politicians and bankers, the unification of their voices has been relatively straightforward and focused on that particular group.

Once these common precepts are set to invoke outrage and indignation, protest groups form comradesly bonds and an ideology within. Common “feelings towards institutions, people and practices outside the movement and its constituent groups” (Jasper 1998, 405) are generated and identifiable. These common feelings are collective action frames, “action-oriented sets of beliefs and meanings that inspire and legitimate the activities and campaigns of a social movement organization” (Benford 2000, 611). Examples of these action-oriented sets of belief are vast within Spain’s current social climate and apparent in active protest movements such as 15M, Democracia Real Ya, and many others. Some of the core framing tasks of collective movements such as these include: identifying the issue that demands change, attributing who or what is the source of the problem and urging others to act in unison toward change (Benford 2000). Differ-

ent people may participate in social movements with varying degrees of involvement. One of the most pressing factors for a person to decide to participate in a social movement is the “perceived effectiveness of the action” in question (Passy and Giuni 2001). Many feel impotent, without power to change, and materially, they have been. It is in this grey area of what to do that the true social crisis emerges.

As we have seen, Spain’s situational narrative fits the criteria that delineate a socio-political crisis. A supposed crisis of legitimacy, communicative mishandling of the crisis, and the media’s role in solidifying social movement are all factors at the surface of the situation. However, to superficially brush the external causes and outcomes of the situation will not aid in confronting the crisis. In order to truly construct paths towards general advancement we must comprehend the motivations behind citizen’s actions and interpret their particular perceptions of the crisis. The cultural ideologies that lie at the heart of the social movement must be unearthed and made sense of if we are to construct a more nuanced understanding of the social dynamics at play and the possibilities for social transformation that it represents.

METHODOLOGY

In order to understand the functions of criticism and protest for Spanish people and their attitude towards media in the crisis context, participants’ only requirement for inclusion in this study was having Spanish nationality. I collected data from two main source groups. The first was a group of Spanish individuals ranging in age and occupations. I conducted one on one interviews with 10 individuals, via email correspondence. Interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions in order to promote discussion and to prevent limiting the participant in terms of their particular use of phrases or ideas. Open-ended questions were open to change and flexibility according to participant responses.

My second data set was retrieved from online chat discussions responding to two different articles about the crisis. Both articles were retrieved from the online edition of a prominent Spanish newspaper, *El País*. To comment on an online *El País* article, a user does not have to be a regular *El País* reader. Any person who wishes to comment on an article is redirected to a site in which a user generates a name with which to identify themselves and they are able to enter their comment. The advantage of looking at public chat forums like these is that participants are extremely open about their views. Additionally, these online commentaries are unsolicited and thus they constitute an invaluable form of naturally occurring data. Selecting particular articles limits the focus of the chat discussion to topics relevant to this case study. One of the articles I took reader comments from was entitled “*Movimiento 15M: los ciudadanos exigen reconstruir la democracia.*” (“15M Movement: citizens demand reconstruction of democracy”). It was published immediately after the May 15th protests across Spain in 2011 against unemployment and for government, economic and social policy change. The article received 42 comments. The second article I selected was entitled “*De la Gran Recesión a la Gran Desafección.*” (“From the Great Recession to the Great Disaffection”). It dealt with citizen’s perceptions of the crisis over a year later and delineated how in many ways the crisis had worsened and that Spanish democracy has not been able to take any ameliorative actions. This article had 84 comments.

ANALYTIC PROCEDURE

The purpose of this study is to understand what meanings and functions protest and criticism have for the Spanish people and how, if at all, media impacts their particular way of formulating criticisms of the socioeconomic crisis. In order to conceptualize the meanings Spanish people attribute to protest and criticism and to understand its functions within Spanish society, terms of definition and description must come from Spanish people themselves. Taking an emic point of view, we are able to see particular actions through the meanings that the members attribute to their own communicative acts and departing from member's meanings is the only way to morally understand cultural phenomenon (Lindolf and Taylor 2002). By using an ethnographic methodology, the Developmental Research Sequence as proposed by Spradley (1980), I will be able to categorize the meanings of participant's communicative practices using their own terms of understanding. After recording what people say and do in regards to criticism, protest and perceptions of media in their own terms, I must take a further step in order to uncover cultural meaning and meaningful communicative patterns. As Spradley states, "in order to move on and describe the cultural behavior, the cultural artifacts, and the cultural knowledge, you must discover the patterns that exist on your data" (Spradley 1980).

Starting from the notion that patterns exist among my data and that these patterns must be organized and labeled integrating emic terms of meaning, the Developmental Research Sequence will provide the ideal analytical structure for my purpose. The Developmental Research Sequence is used to understand semantic meanings or relationships. There are four steps of identification of components to fulfilling the purpose of analysis: domain (components of the cover term), taxonomic (categorization of the domain meanings), componential (different attributions given by the members), and theme analysis (identifying what the previous components say about culture).

After collecting participant's information and knowledge, I am able to categorize their meanings and interpretations of the crisis situation into a taxonomic analysis or smaller units of meaning that address particular ideas throughout the data. From a taxonomic analysis I am able to reach a domain analysis or cover term that will synthesize the many taxonomic components into more broad categories. Within each domain I will

attribute a different componential analysis in which taxonomic terms are given meaning based on qualitative contrasts between them. After these modalities are attributed I will be able to come to a theme analysis of the domains, here is where the underlying story or cultural theme of member's terms and meanings may be extracted. Themes can include core values, core symbols, worldviews and orientations (Baxter and Babbie 2004). Since I am attempting to understand how Spanish citizens perceive the crisis and to discover the meanings they attribute to denouncing the crisis, I am essentially searching for Spanish values and worldviews within the crisis mindset. Thus, the developmental research sequence will effectively lead to the formulation of a description of such values and views.

“ in order to move on and describe the cultural behavior, the cultural artifacts, and the cultural knowledge, you must discover the patterns that exist on your data” – Spradley

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After having identified patterns of expression in defining and talking about the crisis situation among chat discussion exchanges and interviews, four main domains arose out of the analyses. These four domains were quickly identifiable among the data and spoke to participant priorities in conceptualizing the crisis. These cultural themes/priorities are as follows: (a) talk about allocating blame for the crisis situation, (b) talk about finding solutions for the crisis situation, (c) expressing emotionality and community and (d) expressing positive and negative attitudes towards media within the crisis context.

Talk about whom to blame

One of the most common topics that arose out of participant discussion was the allocation of blame for the crisis. The first core-framing task of a social movement is to attribute and identify the source of the problem since “social movements seek to remedy or alter some problematic situation or issue” (Benford and Snow 2000). Participants had clear yet contradictory ideas on who was responsible for the crisis. Three main types of blame were identified, foreign structural/governmental blame, Spanish structural/governmental blame and Spanish societal blame.

The first is conceived as externally imposed on Spain by foreign governments, institutions, economic structures and policies. Structures such as de-regulated banks, multinational corporations, capitalism and globalization were among the most attributed with fault for the failing financial system. Policies like governmental austerity measures imposed by the European Union and Germany. Particular hostility was felt towards Germany as the foremost power in the E.U. and towards their Prime Minister Angela Merkel. Other attributions of fault were given to the housing market bubble, American financial rating systems and in one isolated case immigration was blamed for the precarious economic situation. These external placements of blame resonated with a sense of helplessness and injustice inflicted on the Spanish people and Spanish government.

The Spanish government, however, was far from being irreproachable. Participants fervently denounced Spanish government and policies as being exclusively culpable. Inept Spanish politicians, unethical internal corruption, and bank-government relationships were named as working in their own self-interest and not for the people. Both the Popular Party and PSOE were blamed for corruption and misspent funding alike. Prime Minister Rajoy was also named as Prime Minister Merkel’s crony who did her bidding without question, thus Rajoy was characterized as a weak traitor to the people’s welfare.

The third identified culpable group was perhaps the most surprising. Neither Spanish nor foreign government and institutions took as much heat from the Spanish people as the people themselves. Participants assumed responsibility at a socio-cultural level for the crisis. Participants described Spanish people as retrograde, “uncultured, hedonistic and lazy.” They accused citizens of being generally indifferent to bad governmental practices and not truly critical of themselves and of the power

structures in which they are complicit or of which they are complacently accepting. Some participants attributed these negative characteristics to being part of Spanish culture or the “Spanish way” of doing things: all talk and no action. The most pressing factor in this particular expression of critique is perhaps not the fact that Spanish people blame themselves for the situation, but the strong sense of guilt they feel knowing they are part of the problem and not being able to or not knowing what to do to ameliorate the crisis.

At the same time participants were defensive of the Spanish people and characterized themselves as the Spanish “pueblo” betrayed by Spanish government for their own benefit. This juxtaposition is crucial in understanding Spanish citizens deeply embedded “Us vs. Them” ideology in which one group tends to present themselves in positive terms and others in a negative light (Van Dijk 1993). As we have seen, the *us vs. them* dimension occurs on several different levels in the crisis context. At one level it is *us* (Spain) vs. *them* (foreign powers and institutions) and at another it is *us* (Spanish society) vs. *them* (Spanish government and politicians). According to Van Dijk, “such discourse structures usually have the social function of legitimating dominance or justifying concrete actions of power abuse by the elites” (1993, 22), suggesting this construct is not a fabrication of the Spanish people but rather a reaction to concrete injustices. Allocating blame or “pointing the finger” at those that are responsible is an outcry against some form of injustice, in this case Spaniard’s feelings of misrepresentation and betrayal by their government resulting in a severe decline in the people’s welfare. Thus talking about whom to blame functions as an ideologically unifying act and a way to confront and oppose those enacting injustices as well as a self critical act attempting to find solutions, which brings us to our next finding: talk about formulating solutions.

Talk about Finding Solutions

Faced with mounting issues of unemployment, loss of rights and benefits and corruption, it is no surprise that Spanish people are speaking of ways to fix the situation. In the face of blaming institutions, government and themselves for the crisis, Spaniards are also actively searching for ways out. The second core-framing task of social movements is Prognostic framing and “involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the

problem” (Benford and Snow 2000, 616). Articulations of solutions vary greatly yet through a componential analysis of participants opinions I was able to divide the domain “talk about finding solutions” into two subcategories: internal solutions and external solutions.

I understood external solutions to be those solutions outside of the direct power of the average citizen (i.e. the responsibility of government or powerful entities). These included changing established structures such as finding alternatives to capitalism and labor and legislative reform. Other external solutions concerned Spain’s relationship with the European union. Many felt that “standing up to the E.U.” would be a start. Abandoning the use of the Euro as Spain’s currency altogether was also a popular solution. Finally, participants saw the government as the main entity capable of change. Arguably, the government is in the hands of the vote of the people, but as earlier mentioned the people feel betrayed and misrepresented by their government, thus I understand the government as something outside of the will and power of the people. These responsibilities included reconstructing democracy to better fit the needs and priorities of the people and establishing good governance and transparency.

Internal solutions, or those dependent and in the hands of the people to carry out, were much more pervasive in participant’s proposed solutions. Many saw that true change had occurred within government and institutions, yet they lacked any hope or confidence that change would ever come on the institution’s own accord. Participants called upon social awakening, consciousness and revolution as the only paths to real positive change. When asked who she thought was most capable of solving the crisis, participant Ana, 34, said, “It is a problem of social ideology.” In other words the government had to solve the crisis but for that to happen Spanish mentality had to change. Participants attributed social movement as one of the main levers of change.

Many participants also had clear ideas on what was needed to ameliorate the situation: social awakening and government reform. They take on great responsibility for social action and movement (the only true path out of the crisis according to them). They recognize they are the solution but characterize themselves as asleep and in desperate need of a social awakening. Within the context of prognostic framing, the problems

of consensus, action mobilization and overall “what to do” are addressed in this stage of reacting to crisis situations yet there is often an inconsistency between problems and viable solutions (Benford and Snow 2000). Concerning this discrepancy between awareness and action, participants felt they were far from any real change and did not see a clear path to reach the so-called awakening of society. On the other hand, they did see value in social movements, yet such movements do not encompass all of society and their effects are seldom tangible in a crisis where tangible results (jobs, healthcare, education) are needed. Nonetheless, as participants themselves recognized, Spain’s crisis is not only a material one but also an ideological one.

Expressing emotionality and community

Participants expressed deep emotionality towards crisis events and solidarity with those affected by the crisis. Complementary to action framing theory is the emotional dimension of social movement. According to Jasper, “emotions accompany all social action, providing both motivation and goals” (1998, 397). Participants associated strong emotions with news about the crisis, how they were affected in their daily lives and expressed solidarity with those most disfavored by the situation. The domain and taxonomies here were divided into two main subgroups that qualified the emotions as either pessimistic or hopeful.

The only taxonomy categorized under the “hopeful” component analysis was the feeling of hope under the title “social movement gives hope.” The lack of expressions of hope speaks to the more pervasive negative emotions associated with the crisis and the remaining sixteen taxonomic components (categorized under pessimistic). Nonetheless, this one glimmer of hope is significant within this study. It aligns with the ideas expressed in the *talk about solutions* section in which participant’s hope for betterment is placed on social movement and consciousness, making the emotion relevant to and consistent with other findings.

Several different negative emotions were associated with the crisis: sadness, anger, misery, suffering, helplessness, demoralization, indignation and fear were among the most prevalent ones. Sadness and anger were often associated with news of *desahucios* or evictions of people who had to default on their mortgages and were forced out of their homes along with their families. This distinct practice seemed to deeply affect partici-

pants and on several occasions *desahucios* were a source of negative emotional reactions. News about the crisis in general proved to be demoralizing and frustrating. Many participants expressed nervousness and sensitivity towards the crisis, especially when speaking about it with others.

Carmen, aged forty-five and a journalist said, “I have a stable job so I shouldn’t really notice the effects of the crisis, but uncertainty is very contagious.” Uncertainty and insecurity were both emotions that seemed to plague participants no matter what their economic or occupational standing was. Another pervasive negative emotion was fear. Fifty-eight year-old participant Remedios concisely reported her emotions when asked how she was personally affected by the crisis, “With pain, with fear, with the knowledge that a new era has arrived: an era of the power of money over human beings, of the loss of civil rights and a return to a masked slavery, and to ignorance.”

In the face of adversity it is common for societies to band together in solidarity against said adversity. According to Schuyt, “solidarity as a social phenomenon means the sharing of feelings, interests, risks and responsibilities” (1998, 297). Participants shared common feelings about the affected by the crisis even though they were not directly impacted, signaling they are enacting solidarity perhaps as an emotional reaction. There is no social movement without emotion to motivate and/or justify it (Jasper 1998). The concept of solidarity amongst those affected by the crisis supports the “us vs. them” framework in which societal conceptions of the crisis can be understood. The “us” is further reinforced by negative emotions and by an emotional alliance against the government and powerful institutions.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS MEDIA

The final trend found in participant contributions was a distinct rift amongst conceptions of the role of media in the crisis context. On the one hand participants characterized media as serving the needs and interests of politicians. On the other hand, participants lauded social media for facilitating the consolidation of social movements. Before initiating this study, I had a clear idea that media was a strong proponent for social consciousness and protest activities. However, I had not taken into account the negatively perceived nature of more traditional media outlets like newspaper, radio and television in the crisis context. As a result of this dichotomy, the final domain of the study was divided into two major componential analyses: positively perceived social/new media and negatively perceived mainstream media.

Positively perceived media outlets include Internet media, more specifically social networks, blogs and chat and texting technology. Participants understood these to positively affect the crisis situation. Participants spoke of new media and technology as essential facilitators of protest gatherings and social movements. Many participants reacting to the article about the 15M protests mentioned new media had the power to make democracy accessible and “change the rules of the game” for citizens to have direct influence on policy. Many participants in this chat room session spoke of a direct democracy facilitated by social media and voting via the Internet. Commentator *uno_cu-alkiera87* spoke of this possibility being closer to reality than ever, “In this day and age it is not a utopia, it can be a reality!” Other participants mentioned they exclusively relied on social networks for news and information about the crisis because they felt mainstream media misrepresented it. Patricia, a 36 year-old journalist, said, “Since about two years ago, I have relied on social media to get to information (...) I hardly consume information from mainstream media, nor the press, nor radio, or television.” Overall new media seemed to be a vehicle for change, participation and freedom of expression.

Participants are moving away from a media they understand as subservient to power structures, mostly mainstream traditional media outlets. Most participants believed the media to be a propaganda machine, strictly aligning with the views of biased and powerful owners. Many participants felt that news stories misrepresented the crisis in a sensationalist manner, with

a controversial title and little depth or understanding of causes. One participant living outside of Spain said she received a very distorted view of the reality of the crisis, which made her abstain from television news and made her rely on alternative Internet sources. In addition, many mentioned the lack of quality of mainstream media as a direct result of the crisis. With major cutbacks in funding of public news sources and mass layoffs of experienced journalists, the remaining few professionals must take on the workload that was previously distributed amongst many, degenerating the quality of news reports and feeding the “press conference without questions” dynamic of retrieving news from a self-interested source.

“ Since about two years ago, I have relied on social media to get to information (...) I hardly consume information from mainstream media, nor the press, nor radio, or television.” – Patricia

Again we see an “us vs. them” ideological construct appearing within this domain. The Spanish people represented through and supported by new media against government owned and biased traditional media. Participants viscerally depicted the two medias: one as transparent and liberating and the other as dark and secretive. The idea that new media is a crucial factor in promoting social change aligns well with the proposed solutions section of this study. Social empowerment was viewed as one of the only legitimate ways of changing the crisis situation, yet there was a lack of direct proposals on how to reach a level of social consciousness that can lead to real social transformation. By linking participants understanding of new media as a facilitator of social movements to the idea that social awakening is necessary for change, viable and realistic paths towards change may be constructed.

Out of the four domains discussed, several themes emerged, uncovering distinct cultural ideologies: an us vs. them mentality,

a strong sense of community and emotionality and a deep sense self-criticism that calls upon social awakening and movement. Discovering these cultural ideologies were referred to earlier in this paper as necessary to the betterment of the crisis situation. A deconstruction of the social discourse allows for a process of reflection and action that can inform the reconstruction of the democratic life and social and economic conditions of Spanish society.

CONCLUSION

In the context of a socioeconomic crisis, Spanish people have been outspoken and critical. With a closer look at the modalities and meaning of said criticism we are able to better understand the function of this communicative act and create paths to confronting and ameliorating the situation.

From this study we have determined that the Spanish people have allocated blame in a complex and multi-layered fashion, determining who is to blame is a crucial and unifying step in social movements. Thus understanding this step in the Spanish context clarifies the nature of Spanish criticism. When determining who was to blame or who was at the source of the crisis, participants were divisive. They blamed external forces like the Spanish government, socioeconomic structures, foreign governments and institutions like the EU. They conceived of these entities as alienating and against the interests of a unified people, so we understand this conception within an *us vs. them* ideological framework. We also saw that Spanish people were self critical in attempts to find solutions to the problem.

The second step in creating a core frame in social movement was deciding on what exactly these solutions could be. As Spaniards spoke of finding solutions, we again identified a strong us vs. them sentiment, and again great responsibility in enacting solutions were taken on by the Spanish people. As they see their government unresponsive to their needs, many determined the solution to be in social movement and social organization for an overthrow of standard power systems. However they recognized that people have not reached this mobility and called on “social awakening” as something that must come in order for a true betterment of the situation. There is also a sense of self-deprecation as a people, they know what they need to do but are far from achieving it.

In understanding what motivates the Spanish people to

criticism and protest, a deep emotionality and the enactment of solidarity was recognized. Spanish participants felt they were a unified “pueblo” in the face of hopelessness and rights limitations. Fear, insecurity and helplessness were negative emotions that people identified themselves with and served the to come together in the face of adversity. This emotional response and resulting community further contributes to the *us vs. them* mentality.

In understanding how media facilitated or inhibited social movement and protest participants claimed that it did both and made a clear distinction between the functions of new media and traditional media. In the distinction, participant further contributed in formulating the us vs. them mindset. Us being the Spanish people liberated, unified and empowered by new media and them, a corrupt and self-interested government served by a biased mainstream media. Since participants proposed social movement and awakening as one of the main ways to positively change the Spanish crisis, recognizing new media as a proponent of this change revealed a viable and more realistic path towards said solutions.

In short, Spanish participants conceive the crisis in highly negative and emotional terms. They think of themselves as under attack from their own government and powerful institutions that dictate economic and social policy. Thus they have unified in the face of this threat and feel that the only way to overcome the crisis is through the consciousness and mobilization of society against an elite that does not serve their interests. They understood new and social media to be instrumental in said consciousness and mobilization. The socioeconomic crisis in Spain and the people’s reactive social movement must be understood in a dynamic and contemporary way, taking into not only the physical effect of the crisis on a vast majority of the population, but also the deep emotional and psychological effects that the crisis entails. The utmost importance of new media in the facilitation of the critical movement must also be considered. If governments and institutions truly wish to confront crisis in Spain, they must not stop short at an economic and quantitative consideration but tackle a crisis of government legitimacy and re-establish a democracy and a media system that will regain the trust of an entire nation.

FURTHER DIRECTIONS

This study is extremely limited in terms of the scope of views of the Spanish population. It does not consider the views of those who do not describe themselves as critical of the crisis. It attempts to understand the motives and meanings of those who are critical. Perhaps the study would benefit from the opposing view and a contrast with those citizens who defend government austerity measures or those who do not feel affected by the crisis and those whose perceptions of the causes might differ from those that emerged in the limited data set of this study. It would also be interesting to follow up this study with an understanding of the change in perceptions over the next few years according to changes in the crisis.

REFERENCES

- Baxter, Leslie A., Earl Babbie. 2004. *The Basics of Communication Research*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth Learning.
- Benford, Robert D., David Snow. 2000. "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment." *Annual Review of Sociology* 26: 611-639.
- Castells, Manuel. 2008. "The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616: 78-93.
- Gurevitch, Michael. 2004. "The End of Television? Its Impact on the World (So Far)." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 625: 64-181.
- Hancké, Bob. 2013. "Spain's labour reforms won't bring growth or reduce unemployment." *The Guardian*, February 17, 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/feb/17/spain-labour-reforms-wont-bring-growth>
- Hidalgo, Susana. 2012. "La pobreza en España, 'más crónica que nunca.'" *Publico*. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2013/feb/17/spain-labour-reforms-wont-bring-growth>
- Jasper, James Macdonald. 1998. "The Emotions of Protest: Affective and Reactive Emotions in and around Social Movements." *Sociological Forum* 13, No. 3: 397-424.
- Kent, Michael L. 2010. "What is a Public Relations "Crisis?" Refocusing Crisis Research." *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*: 705-712.
- Kilkenny, Allison. 2012. "Tens of thousands protest austerity in Spain, unions threaten national strike." *The Nation*, Oct. 8, 2012. <http://www.thenation.com/blog/170410/tens-thousands-protest-austerity-spain-unions-threaten-national-strike#>
- La crisis en España en numeros. 2012. *BBC Mundo* June 9, 2012. http://www.bbc.co.uk/mundo/noticias/2012/06/120608_espana_numeros_crisis_economia_pea.shtml
- Lindolf, Tom R., Bryan C. Taylor. 2002. *Qualitative communication research methods* (2 ed.). Ch. 5 Observing, learning, and reporting. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Passy, Florence, Marco Giugni. 2001. *Social Networks and Individual Perceptions: Explaining Differential Participation in Social Movements*. *Sociological Forum* 16, no.1: 123-153.

*This work is licensed
under a Creative
Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial-
NoDerivs 3.0
Unported License.*

- Peralta, Eyder. 2012. "Amid National Strike, Hundreds Of Thousands Protest In Spain." NPR, Mar. 29, 2012. <http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2012/03/29/149627946/amid-national-strike-hundreds-of-thousands-protest-in-spain>
- Poggioli, Sylvia. 2012. "Spain's Crisis Leads To Rise Of Grass-Roots Groups." NPR, Dec. 10, 2012. <http://www.npr.org/2012/12/10/166653449/spains-crisis-leads-to-rise-of-grass-roots-groups>
- Schuyt, Kees. 1998. The Sharing of Risks and the Risks of Sharing: Solidarity and Social Justice in the Welfare State. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 1, no. 3: 297-311
- Spradley, James P. 1980. Participant observation. New York, Holt: Rinehart and Winston, 1980.
- Ulmer, Robert R., Timothy L. Sellnow, and Mathew W. Seeger. 2010. "Considering the Future of Crisis Communication Research: Understanding the Opportunities Inherent to Crisis Events through the Discourse of Renewal." *The Handbook of Crisis Communication*: 791-797.
- Ortiz, Fiona, Iciar Reinlen. 2013. "Spain corruption scandal turns up heat on PM Rajoy." Reuters, Feb. 2, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/01/31/us-spain-corruption-idUSBRE90U0DD20130131>
- Van Dijk, Teun A. 1993. "Discourse Analysis as Ideology Analysis." *Language and Pace*. <http://www.discourses.org/OldArticles/Discourse%20analysis%20as%20ideology%20analysis.pdf>

EDITORIAL board

STUDENT EDITORIAL BOARD

Kelsey Borden
Charlotte Campbell
Jacqueline Faryniarz
Rachel Fatse
Charlyn Friedman
Paloma Hutton
Byron Lebron
Jamie Mauriello
Victoria Mordasky
Devin Powers
Jason Shepard
Benjamin Shipley
Kimberly Sundquist
Matthew Walsh

SENIOR EDITORIAL BOARD

Jason Patch, editor-in-chief
Peter Bebergal
Jeremy Campbell
Matthew Trevett-Smith

DESIGN TEAM

Samantha Edson