THE WOMEN OF AGABAGAYA: EDUCATION AND POST-DEVELOPMENT THEORY

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This article describes a snapshot ethnography conducted in Uganda with the Agabagaya Women's Group. The purpose of the study was to explore how women share knowledge among themselves to support their communities. Using post-development theory and Freire's critical theory as a lens, I argue that although international development is often focused on women's education, imposed development initiatives may actually hinder women's ability to share meaningful knowledge. I conclude with a discussion of key points and how they relate to education within a context of development and within post-development theory.

Key words: international development, post-development theory, women's education, snapshot ethnography

Cet article présente une brève étude ethnographique de l'Agabagaya Women's Group de l'Ouganda. L'auteure analyse comment les femmes mettent leurs connaissances en commun au profit de leurs communautés. Utilisant la théorie du postdéveloppement et la théorie critique de Freire, elle soutient que, même si le développement international est souvent axé sur l'éducation des femmes, les initiatives de développement imposé risquent d'entraver l'aptitude des femmes à partager des connaissances significatives. L'auteure termine en expliquant le lien entre ses résultats principaux et l'éducation dans le contexte du développement et à la lumière de la théorie du postdéveloppement.

Mots clés : développement international, théorie du postdéveloppement, éducation africaine, ethnographie.

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I had been a classroom teacher for almost a decade when I had the opportunity to volunteer with the Canadian Teachers' Federation to work alongside Ugandan teachers for a four-week summer project. During this experience, I observed how women influence education, both formally and informally. I noticed the tremendous burden on women in their many roles, such as mothers, teachers, health-care providers, activists, community supporters, and food producers. I noticed the incredible importance that women play in their communities and marveled at the immense responsibilities they hold. I questioned my own position as a white, middle-class, Canadian woman working in a developing country, and was intrigued by how my whiteness was perceived by some Ugandans. And, inevitably, I began to question the role of international development itself. What is meant by international development, who decides where and how development projects proceed? What are the implications of these projects for women? That is, do development projects support local women or do they undermine local initiatives and usurp local ways of knowing? These questions drove me back to university to pursue further studies and to consider issues such as gender, race, education, community, and global development.

What I offer here is a slice of the culminating research project that I completed for an interdisciplinary Master of Arts in Education and Women's Studies. Since this research journey began, and I continue to pursue further studies, I recognize how my thinking has changed about some of the issues and theories I grapple with here. I recognize that these are difficult ethical issues with few clear-cut answers, yet, I feel that this story is worthwhile and important to tell. I hope that it may contribute to the readers' understandings of the significance of women's knowings, the complexities and contradictions of education within a development context, and the benefits and limitations of post-development theory. Finally, it is important to mention the ethical dilemmas that I faced, including my position as a white, middle-class, Canadian researcher in a Ugandan community, and perceptions of whiteness (mine and others'), although thoroughly explored elsewhere (Janzen, 2005) are not included here. The focus of this article will remain on the research process itself, a discussion of the outcomes of the research, and a brief reflection on post-development theory.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

This snapshot ethnography took place with the Agabagaya Women's Group in Uganda in 2004 to explore how women share knowledge among themselves to support themselves and their communities. Primarily, I collaborated with the participants, recognized, and validated the knowings that the women possessed, and demonstrated to outsiders that, through sharing, the women were engaged in meaningful educational processes. By conducting this research in Uganda, I wanted to better understand education in the context of development and to consider how imposed education may support or interrupt the sharing of knowledge occurring among women. I suspected that women's education, through the sharing of knowledge, often went unacknowledged or undervalued, and therefore, was at risk of being interrupted by top-down educational impositions. In this research I investigated the sharing of knowledge that occurs among a small group of rural Ugandan women, the types of knowledge that is shared, and where this sharing occurs. In doing so, I wish to validate the knowings that these women possess and to underscore the importance of the valuing, pursuing, and sharing of knowledge in which women are engaged. Moreover, I argue that this sharing of knowledge that occurs among women is a valid form of education in its own right.

THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Post-Development Theory

Post-development theory criticizes the notions of development for upholding colonial ways of thinking and privileging those in power. I draw specifically on those feminist scholars whose work focuses on gender and development, Jane Parpart and Chandra Mohanty, as well as on Arturo Escobar.[1] Post-development theorists, such as Parpart (1995, 2002) criticize development discourse for maintaining colonial and hegemonic language. This discourse perpetuates views of Majority (Third) World[2] women as homogenous others and creates a sense that the superior Minority (First) World can save them by transmitting knowledge and technology to underdeveloped countries. From a post-development perspective, the discourse of development, the production

of the First/Third World, of poverty, of helping others, has attained a status of unquestionable truth in the West and has ". . . created an extremely efficient apparatus for producing knowledge about, and the exercise of power over, the Third World" (Escobar, 1995, p. 9). This hegemonic discourse of development is one way of upholding the Minority World's position of power over others.

Because of the privileged position from which many scholars write, the Minority World is criticized for being able to maintain domination not only by maintaining colonial discourse, but also by perpetuating its construction and hegemonic influence (Chowdhry, 1995; Mohanty, 2003; Parpart & Marchand, 1995; Razack, 1998). By representing Majority World women as traditional, poor, and uneducated others, Western women can then perceive or represent themselves as modern and educated (Mohanty, 2003), maintaining an assumption of superior identity. Western women also have been criticized for generalizing their own experiences to all women regardless of class, race, and culture and thus ignoring the realities of difference (Mohanty, 2003; Narayan, 1997; Parpart & Marchand, 1995).

Earlier movements to incorporate women and women's issues into the development milieu (including "Women in Development," "Women and Development," and "Gender and Development" initiatives), although recognized for addressing women in development, were criticized for homogenizing Majority World women as poor, illiterate, and backward (Chowdhry, 1995; Njiro, 1999; Nzomo, 1995; Parpart, 1995; Parpart & Marchand, 1995). That is, the approaches claimed that all women in developing countries were poor, had the same problems and needs, and were affected by the same historical, political, and social tensions, which could then be addressed by the same formula for improvement. Instead of homogenizing women of developing countries, post-development theorists argue the need to acknowledge women's class, race, and tribe and the cultural, political, and historical implications these factors have on women (Chowdhry, 1995; Njiro, 1999; Mohanty, 2003; Parpart, 1995; Parpart & Marchand, 1995).

Further, post-development theory challenges the notion of Minority World expertise exercised on the problems of undeveloped/under-developed Majority World countries. Parpart (1995) questions the dis-

semination of knowledge from the Minority World to the Majority World, which assumes the Minority World's position of power. This assumption reinforces the roles of Western development agencies and experts, and justifies the creation of Minority World policies and practices to be performed *on* developing nations, thus further perpetuating colonialist domination and undervaluing local and indigenous knowledge. Post-development theory advocates a recog-nition and respect for local and indigenous knowledge (Elabor-Idemu-dia, 2002; Nzomo, 1995), a need for Majority World women to become participants in (instead of recipients of) development (Chowdhry, 1995; Elabor-Idemudia, 2002), and an understanding that people have know-ledge and abilities to collaborate, to construct new knowings, and to participate in solving their own problems (Parpart, 1995).

Critical Theory

Post-development theory shares some similar principles with critical theorist, Paulo Freire (1970/2000) in the context of education, specifically his work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I draw on Freire here to demonstrate the similarities between post-development theory and the possibilities for emancipation through Freire's theories on education. Freire's theories of education are somewhat compatible with a post-development framework wherein he positions the learner as knower, considers education as a dialogical process between people, and theorizes education in a context of oppression. Freire criticizes the banking model of education and believes that a top-down flow of information from teacher to student perpetuates oppression. He argues that when students are expected to uncritically accept given information as truth, the students' opportunity for freedom is ultimately undermined. Freire, therefore, advocates a "problem-posing" approach to education where students and teachers work collaboratively to create knowledge through meaningful dialogue, leading to an awakening of critical consciousness and, thus, emancipation. Freire insists, and I agree, that teaching cannot be a top-down imposition and must be of relevance to the learner.

Freire (1970/2000) uses the term dialogical education in arguing for an educational process where individual thought is expressed, valued, and negotiated through communication. By valuing dialogue, education

fosters conversations between people instead of insisting on a one-way flow of information from teacher to student (Freire, 1970/2000; Shor & Freire, 1987). Further, within dialogue, educators must also recognize the knowledge and experiences that students bring as legitimate knowings (Freire, 1970/2000, 1994; hooks, 1994). Therefore, the teacher's role is to elicit this knowledge and encourage students to use this realized *conscientization* in an effort to create positive change. Because knowledge is socially constructed, students must be engaged and be a part of the meaning-making process, a process similar to post-development theory, in that both value and insist on recognition of local knowings (Nzomo, 1995; Parpart, 1995).

Although Freire's (1970/2000) work shares common elements with post-development theory, it does fall short in some areas. Most obvious is Freire's constant use of male referents throughout his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, completely negating the presence of women and their varied experiences compared to men. He does, however address these in his later work (see Freire, 1994). More troubling, however, is Freire's homogenous approach to the different needs of the various people whom he considers oppressed. By essentializing the portraits of the oppressed, he appears unaware of his own oppressive proclivities by completely ignoring gender differences, as well as differences of race, class, and experience (Rockhill, 1988; Weiler, 1991). However, scholars such as bell hooks (1994) insist that Freire's theories of education as the practice of freedom should not be overlooked. His work is influential, has been widely cited, and, although problematic on some levels, Freire's theories of pedagogy offer much insight and are still useful in informing educational practice. In this context Freire offers educational possibilities on post-development theory.

In my research context then, drawing on Freire and extending his theories into a post-development milieu, I consider education as an activity that takes into account and respects what women already know, values local knowings, and allows for spaces where these knowings can be extended and questioned in a non-hierarchical and non-coercive dialogue. Further, similar to Freire's theories, I argue that post-development theorists, such as Parpart (1995, 2002) and Kenyan scholar Maria Nzomo (1995) would propose that, instead of outside educators impos-

ing oppressive curricula to educate women, women's knowings be valued in their own right.

METHODOLOGY: A FEMINIST SNAPSHOT ETHNOGRAPHY

Feminist research, a form of critical social research, aims to eradicate oppressive conditions by examining the underlying structures that create inequalities between those who hold power and those who do not (Esterberg, 2002). Feminist research underscores the post-development belief that research needs to be interactive and based on the under-standing that people have the knowledge and capabilities to solve their problems (Parpart, 2002). I wanted to conduct a feminist ethnography to work *alongside* the researched, as a subjective knower "occupying mul-tiple fluid positions" (Lal, 1996, p. 186), blurring the boundaries between research and participant (Oakley, 1981). This feminist ethnographic study relied on women's knowings and experiences and yet emphasized that, as a researcher, I needed to be explicit and reflective in my position, acknowledging my past experiences, culture, and values (Code, 1995; Esterberg, 2002) while being mindful of how my position could taint my observations.

Because the ethnography that I conducted was shorter than that of an anthropologic ethnography, I have called this research a "snapshot ethnography."[3] In keeping with the feminist principles of research and the elements of an ethnographic methodology, I attempted to observe and absorb the culture of the group of women with whom I worked. While being critically aware of my own position of power, I aimed to establish positive relationships with the participants. As Oakley (1981) states, "… personal involvement is more than dangerous bias – *it is the condition under which people come to know each other* and to admit others into their lives" (p. 58, italics added). I was well aware that creating com-pletely non-hierarchical relationships would be challenging, or per-haps impossible, and that my positions of race, class, and gender would influence these relationships. I was also aware that unequal power dyna-mics within my relationships with others did not necessarily mean that it would be I who was in a position of greater power. Working honestly to establish positive relationships with the women participants, as well as with the people in the community in which we lived, was critical to me.

METHOD

The participants in this study were the adult women who were members of the group named Agabagaya. As a reflexive researcher/participant in this study, I was also interested in examining my own role within the relationships I developed and the sharing of knowledge in which I became engaged.[4] I worked with the women of Agabagaya for five weeks conducting the snapshot ethnography. My observations and reflections were handwritten into field notebooks and informal interviews with each member of the group were tape recorded. All notes and interviews were later transcribed.

Informed Consent

The women of Agabagaya, the village chief, and I had a long conversation about informed consent. The women, with support from the village chief, requested that their real names be used in this study. They believed that because of my status as a (white, Western) researcher, they would receive recognition from the local government for the work that they had been doing. I was hesitant to agree to this request, but after lengthy discussions, grew to understand that this would be a way that my research could be of benefit to women.[5] Therefore, it is at the women's request and with respect for their wishes that I have not used pseudonyms. I also received informed consent from the village chief and local government officials.

Description: The Agabagaya Women's Group

The Agabagaya Women's Group started out informally as five friends who often helped each other by pooling their resources. They live in Kihande village just outside of the town of Masindi in rural Uganda. Lois, a secondary teacher, encouraged the group of friends to form a more structured group. In 2001, with seven members, the Agabagaya Women's Group began to hold weekly meetings and started to contribute money to their cash co-operative on a regular basis. The group eventually elected an executive and created their own constitution. In an effort to "eradicate poverty" (as stated in their constitution), the group initiated and maintained income-generating projects. The group provided educational opportunities for their members and

conducted informal workshops with other women in the community to encourage and support the growth of other co-operative groups.

When I began my research in May 2004, the group consisted of twelve members who met every other Sunday. Six of these members made up the elected executive: Shakillah (Chairperson), Harriet (Vice-Chairperson), Lois (Secretary), Joy (Vice-Secretary), Dorcas (Treasurer), and Sally (Advisor). There were six other general members: Sarah, Mariam, Epiphania, Rosemary, Mary, and Jamiila. Aidah, a village elder, was considered an advisor and "one of us," but was not a contributing shareholder of the group. The women ranged in age from 25 to 67 years old, some were Christian, and at least two were Muslim. Eight women were married, one was a widow, and two did not disclose their marital status. All the women had children and some of the women also cared for orphaned children of their extended families. The women all spoke English (the official language of Uganda and the language used in school), as well as *Runyoro*, their local language.

The benefits of being a member of the Agabagaya Women's Group were numerous, but one of the central structures was that the group provided the women with access to lump sums of money. For example, the group established a cash co-operative to which all women donated a set amount of money at each meeting. Most of the sum was given to each woman on a rotating basis, while a small portion of the cash went to the group savings. The savings was used as a fund from which the women could borrow money and also enabled them to make group purchases with which they could generate additional income. (For example, they saved enough money to purchase 100 broiler chickens that they were raising to sell.) The money each woman received from the cash co-operative or through borrowing helped to pay for family expenses such as school fees, books, rent, or supplies for their shops. For example, Joy used borrowed money to buy used clothes in Kampala, which she then sold in her front yard to the villagers, and Harriet borrowed money to renovate her house. The group expected that any money borrowed was to be used to support themselves or their families.

Aside from financial support, the group also provided informal supports to one another. This included, but was not limited to, caring for each other's children, making meals for funerals, giving condolence

money to group and community members, and talking with each other to help solve family or personal problems. The women were generous and caring towards me as well. Their hospitality was evident from my first visit and their kindness continued to impress and surprise me. Almost daily, the women gave me eggs from their hens or produce such as tomatoes, greens, chilies, or bananas from their gardens. Their motivation to work with me was complex and definitely stemmed from their cultural traditions in receiving guests but was also influenced by economic, social, and political factors. There was no illusion on my part – or theirs; we all had something at stake and something to be gained from our relationship.

THE WOMEN OF AGABAGAYA AS KNOWERS

The women of Agabagaya's sharing of knowledge occurred in casual discussions, during meetings, while working together, while walking down the road, as well as while in more formal settings. The women were knowledgeable and they valued education, pursued knowledge, and shared knowledge formally and informally, and although this sharing did not occur in a specific educational centre, it was vital to their lives.

Valuing and Pursuing Knowledge

Having their own children in school was a priority for the women of Agabagaya and was an example of how the women valued education. Among the 12 women, they had 49 children. Of the 36 school-aged children, 35 children attended school from nursery to university levels (one had cognitive disabilities and did not attend school). This enrollment rate is extremely high compared to the national gross enrollment, which is 19 per cent in secondary school, while in tertiary school it is three per cent (World Bank, 2003). Having children in school is also a financial commitment. Primary levels (grade one to eight) are considered free (although there are often extra fees required) and all levels in secondary and post secondary require school fees each term. Although I did not ask, 10 out of the 12 women indicated during interviews that the money they received from the cash co-operative often helped to pay for their children's school fees. Of the two members who did not mention

school fees during their interviews, both had their school-aged children enrolled in school and, therefore, they too would have been paying school fees.

The women of Agabagaya also valued ongoing educational opportunities among and for themselves and clearly itemized these objectives in their group's constitution. Under the heading *Aims and Objectives*, the constitution lists "conducting education programs," "conducting seminars and perhaps debates to get more educated on some issues," and "eradicating illiteracy/ignorance" (Agabagaya Constitution, Article 3). Mary's dedication to education was an example of this objective. Mary was encouraged and supported by the group to pursue formal education by taking *Runyoro* classes. The group also paid for Mary to take a hair-styling course, which she did, and subsequently became an employee in the village hair salon. Aidah, a former teacher who was raising six of her orphaned grandchildren, demonstrated her commitment to educa-tion by running her own nursery school in a one-room brick building in the yard behind her house. Aidah also taught a small *Runyoro* literacy class on Saturdays to villagers who wanted to become literate in their local language.

The ways that the women pursued knowledge were vast and ranged from asking questions, inquiring about opportunities, attending workshops, inviting guest speakers to their meetings, watching or demonstrating skills (often in relation to farming), and connecting with other external organizations[6] (i.e., organizations that were not locally initiated and were often district supported or non-governmental organizations). During the interviews, the women spoke of obtaining knowledge and specific information from a variety of sources and external organizations, such as books, the district office, the district's Senior Community Development Officer and his assistant, "other groups," the Masindi Farmers' Association, the women's council, and non-government organ-izations like the Christian Children's Fund. The women pursued knowledge through external organizations and often paid for a member's or members' attendance to workshops offered by these organizations.

Sharing Knowledge

Although the women valued formal education for themselves, their children, and their communities, they also valued the knowledge that they elicited from each other and shared among themselves. The Agabagaya Constitution identifies "socializing with others to learn more skills" (Agabagaya Constitution, Article 3) under *Aims and Objectives*, which illustrates that the women formally recognize that knowings can be gained from each other. The group's very structure also values the knowledge that other women in their group had to offer. Two women in the group, Sally and Aidah, were designated as advisors to Agabagaya. The advisors were identified in the group's constitution, where it states that the advisors' roles are to "give advice" and to "meet committee members in case of any problem forwarded to him/her" (Agabagaya Constitution, Article 6, Section 5). When I asked where the women got knowledge from, Epiphania explained, "She [Aidah] is our advisor and we can easily seek advice from her" (interview transcripts, May 21, 2004).

The women relied on each other for a plethora of information. During the interviews, all 12 women spoke of sharing knowledge with and receiving knowledge from other women in the group. Lois explained, "When you don't know about something and you want to do it, you can acquire knowledge from these women here" (interview transcript, May 25, 2004). Mary, who was very quiet and did not speak out much at meetings, explained that she received knowledge by listening to the other women. She said, "When we sit all, all members of the group and then one person speaks out and then another one, so I get one point here and one point there …" (interview transcript, May 25, 2004). The women valued the time that they had to talk and share with each other and acknowledged this importance during the interviews.

The types of knowledge the women shared often focused on child rearing as well as planting and maintaining crops. Specific examples that were mentioned during the interviews included how to plant mushrooms, how to look after children, how to support children in school, how to handle money, how to plant and space crops, how to build a house, and how to cross-breed fruit. Aidah, although her official role was to advise the group, explained the knowings that she had learned from

the women. She said, "I am very proud. I have learned how to prepare mushrooms, how to look after my children, how to get money, small money – to educate my family – and how to talk with people. . . . When you stay at home, you can't know how to prepare everything" (interview transcripts, May 21, 2004). Lois also had a list of knowings that the women shared. She explained,

If they get problems, they can come to us and we can help them. Even the members themselves, family matters we discuss. You should handle your money like this; you should behave like this in your family. . . . We learn a lot from there. (interview transcript, May 25, 2004)

These examples indicate that the women recognize that they are valuable sources of knowings and support for each other and within their communities.

Many of the women, besides Lois, also talked about sharing personal problems with one another to seek advice. In eight out of the 12 interviews, the women indicated that the group helped to address family issues including dealing with husbands. Many women echoed Harriet's response when she stated that a benefit of being in the group was that the other women helped with family problems and that they discussed how to "handle the problems at home" (interview transcript, June 6, 2004). Dorcas explained, "We talk, we share ideas with them. Sometimes after the meetings we tell each other our problems at home. We share them together and sometimes we can give each other some ideas and we stay peaceful at home" (interview transcript, June 6, 2004).

Although the women valued the knowings they shared among themselves, they also recognized the importance of seeking knowledge from other women who were not necessarily members of Agabagaya. For example, six of the 12 women spoke of the importance of sharing knowledge with those who were not members of the group. Aidah said, "We want the group to bring more knowledge from other groups outside, to call other teachers from different places to teach us" (interview transcript, May 21, 2004). During Joy's interview, she explained, "We get knowledge for example, from you, from other people outside the group, they come and give us knowledge. . . . Each and everybody can give us knowledge" (interview transcript, May 26, 2004). Sharing

knowledge with group members and seeking knowledge from others was recognized as a valuable activity and permeated many facets of the women's lives.

Not only did the women talk about how they sought and shared knowledge with others, they actively looked for opportunities where this could happen. A prime example of this took place when the women engaged in an exchange with a women's group from another district. During the exchange, two members from the other group came to Masindi to teach the Agabagaya women how to make fuel-efficient clay stoves and then two representatives from Agabagaya went to visit the women's group from the other district to demonstrate how to make organic compost and a natural remedy to cure the banana wilt disease. Prior to the exchange, there were many discussions among the Agabagaya women about what they would share and ask the other women. During one such discussion Mariam said, ". . . we can talk about other things as they transpire" (field notes, May 31, 2004). This statement indicates that, although there was a set agenda during each visit, Mariam understood there would be plenty of learning and opportunities for sharing.

During a conversation after the exchange visit, the women acknowledged the importance of the sharing that occurred among the groups. When we discussed the stove-making session, the women made coments such as, "We were learning together" and "It was good to share our knowledge and skills" (field notes, June 9, 2004). The women then had a lengthy conversation about how they would collaboratively build stoves for each other and share this information with other women in the village. The exchange was rich with examples of natural opportunities for teaching and learning from each other.

Another example of the women sharing knowledge with other women occurred one Sunday after their group meeting. A large group of women had gathered on the grass in front of the school. They had come to learn about establishing their own cash co-operatives. These women, from the village and the surrounding countryside, were caring for their children and some for orphaned children, and some were single parents. These women wanted to use the cash co-operative system to purchase items like mattresses and metal roofing. The women of Agabagaya

listened to the gathered women's needs and explained their system. By the time the meeting ended, the gathered women organized themselves into smaller groups based on their needs, verbally organized their cash contribution plans, and decided to meet again the following Sunday.

DISCUSSION

Throughout the research, I observed countless ways in which the women of Agabagaya valued, pursued, and shared knowledge in their everyday lives. Through these ongoing and habitual opportunities of sharing, the women were engaged in meaningful education. The women appreciated the formal education opportunities that were available but also cherished the knowings of their group members. They lived in a way that recognized that "knowledge begins with the self and interaction with others" (Elabor-Idemudia, 2002, p. 230). The women actively solicited knowings from each other as well as from non-members and from other groups. The women's sharing, which has echoes of Freire's *dialogue*, in that it is "an act of creation" (Freire, 1970/2000, p. 89) occurred among the women, between the women, and with other women's groups.

However, in light of my experience with the Agabagaya women, I now find Freire's (1970/2000) discussion regarding dialogue somewhat troublesome. Freire implies that education leading to emancipation occurs in dialogue with a problem-posing teacher, thus positioning the women as passive learners. The women of Agabagaya possessed valuable knowings of their own and drew on relevant educational activities as they arose. The women relied on the knowings of others and shared knowings among themselves to pursue their goals. Further, Freire's notion of emancipation now seems somewhat simplistic. The women were seeking means to education and were working toward positive change within their families and communities. The women were not necessarily working towards Freire's path of emancipation; it seemed the women may have had their own path, one they may not have named emancipation.

Further, it seems that Freire's (1970/2000) theory enacts a single vision of education. Conversely, I found that education among the women of Agabagaya was a complex web of sharing among themselves, seeking out relevant education opportunities, attending workshops

offered by external organizations, and teaching each other what they knew. The women were actively seeking out education opportunities (e.g., workshops on farming or accounting, to name a few), and I wondered, given the great amount of emphasis given to the external opportunities by the women, if these external education activities actually interrupt or negatively influence the informal sharing of knowledge that occurs among the women. As Elabor-Idemudia (2002) argues, "there is a disturbing failure [on the part of external organiza-ions] to recognize that these peoples do theorize in their communities as part of their community life, and that they not only articulate but also are able to interpret their experience" (p. 227). I wonder, then, what local knowledge and theorizing is suppressed when external education initiaives are imposed in the communities and taken up by the women.

The group's constitution is an example of the influence of external knowledge. The constitution was a product of a workshop provided by an external organization, which one of the women attended on behalf of the group. After the member attended the workshops and shared the information with the group, they proceeded to create their own constitution. But is the creation of a constitution something the women's group wanted or needed? Will it or does it support the group funda-entlly? Is a constitution a product of Western thought and systems? Are there local, more appropriate ways to structure groups? As Nzomo (1995) states,

Development planners need to pay more attention to the concrete realities of Third World women's lives. They need to discover the real as opposed to the assumed goals and aspirations of these women, and to seek out indigenous women's knowledge as a basis for their policy formulation and practice. (p. 141)

The creating of a constitution appears to be one of these assumed goals, determined by an outsider as fundamentally important, and then taken up by the women of Agabagaya.

Interestingly, the women give much weight to the workshops offered by external organizations. For example, on the day Epiphania arrived to participate in an interview with me, she brought a number of certificates from various workshops she had attended over the past few years (such as bookkeeping) and proudly shared them with me. The underpinnings of development and the subsequent value placed on

education offered by external organizations appeared to have become so embedded in the women's understandings of progress and education that I believe it led to placing greater value on the certificates from outside agencies' workshops than on the work that the women did in their own communities. Were the workshops by the external groups inadvertently devaluing the women's knowings? Arguably, the greatest damage done by these (perhaps well-intentioned) external organizations is how they create and uphold a hierarchy of knowledge. Escobar (1992) explains that development in the Majority World has indeed established "forms of power through which individuals, government officials, and sometimes, whole communities recognized themselves as underdeveloped, as unfinished manifestations of a European ideal" (p. 413). The women of Agabagaya, therefore, become positioned as "not knowing" and the external organizations as the "knowers," thus maintaining and perpetuating the hegemony of development ideology.

I am not negating the value that may have been present in the offerings of these external organizations. Among them, the women had attended a plethora of workshops from how to manage small farms to becoming "change agents." The government and non-governmental organizations that provide these various workshops are most certainly influenced by the nation's development agenda, which, of course, is influenced by the will of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and other donors. Although at a cursory glance, there may have been some positive impact of development educational efforts, at what cost, no one can be sure. For example, were the first aid skills presented at the Red Cross training pre-empting traditional knowings of health and healing? Are the treatments presented by the Red Cross feasible in a community where gauze, for example, might not only be hard to find, but for most, unaffordable? And do the external development activities actualize positive change or do they simply "keep women in their place"? That is, by teaching women first aid, is the government attempting to download increasing health care responsibilities to women in an effort to compensate for the lack of access and prohibitive costs of health care? These are not easy questions to answer, but yet, important to consider.

The value that women placed on educational opportunities provided by external organizations surprised me. I began to realize the discourse of development was embedded within the women's own discourse. The women indicated that they believed they needed development. This maintained their position as lesser hierarchically and upheld the discourse of development itself. The line between external development agencies and the women's knowings became a very convoluted space. I began to recognize that, contrary to my understandings of post-development readings, development and this particular local community were not necessarily at odds with each other. Rather, development agencies' education agendas and the women's desires and actions regarding education became inextricably entangled. That is, development agencies were potential sources of money, resources, employment, status, and recognition. These trappings became taken up, integrated, transformed, or dismissed within the desires and context of the women's lives. Therefore, it was often difficult to tell which ideas, gains, or troubles were a result of the women's doings and which were products of the development agencies themselves. The women were motivated to obtain the offerings of the development agencies and these became so embedded in the local culture and society that it was difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between external development and community initiatives.

By critiquing education in the name of development, I am not suggesting that people should not explore educational opportunities through external organizations. I am concerned, however, when external organizations claim to know what it is that a particular group of women want or need to know. Further, I believe it is possible that by imposing knowings upon women, the multitude of sharings that are already occurring may be interrupted or devalued. I posit that a more productive, respectful approach to women's education would support women so they could have more time to share and pursue answers to the questions that they determine as important and relevant. As Elabor-Idemudia (2002) reminds us,

[Meaningful education] is possible only if the development agenda seeks to make indigenous knowledge systems critical in the search for solutions to human

problems. This means articulating an alternative conception and praxis of development, one that does not reproduce the existing total local dependency on 'expert advice.' Local input must be from the grassroots and should tap the diverse views, opinions and interests manifested in the communities. How we can help to tap such local knowledge to assist the development process is our challenge. (p. 241)

The women of Agabagaya are a practical example of Elabor-Idemudia's (2002) assertion. It was not the external development opportunities that really made a difference in the women's lives; it was the women them-selves, their initiatives, and the way they chose to interact with the exter-nal development agenda. The women and the choices they made about internal and external development had positive influences.

For these reasons and others already discussed, it is important that development organizations, as well as local governments work to under-stand and adopt a post-development stance to their approaches – one that truly values women's voices. External development organizations must become cognizant about how they are supporting structures of sharing that women may already have in place. If these organizations are offering education opportunities, consideration must be given to what types of education are being imposed, by whom, and to what end. Local knowledge and knowledge systems must be valued and carefully considered in any development initiative.

Rethinking Post-Development Theory

Although I found post-development theory helpful in approaching this project, I feel that it does create some difficulties. For example, I am concerned by the fact that much of the post-development literature creates a sense that external development is a large, single body of ideals that stems from colonial rule and continues to oppress others. Treating development as a homogenous monster and people as passive victims fails to acknowledge the individuals, the women who live in developing countries, who are already engaged in some form of grassroots develop-ment activities. Further, it appears to paint all development initiatives with the same brush, thus devaluing those who do work from a more local and respectful position. As mentioned earlier, the theory creates a sense of easily identifiable groups that represent either external develop-

ment initiatives or those that represent local efforts and actions. As this particular experience illustrates, the dichotomy is not nearly as tidy as the literature would have researchers believe. The lines between external development initiatives and local efforts and actions in this remote and rural area in Uganda become quite fuzzy. This false dichotomy tends to set up a good/evil paradigm that I find, not only simplistic, but unproductive.

Further, within post-development, Escobar (1995) explains there are arguments for a complete rejection of development, or what is termed alternatives to development. Calling for alternatives to development seems vague and lacking in direction. Again, these notions tend to construct development as one system to be dismantled. Post-development advocates support development that is responsive to peoples' needs, attentive to local culture, supportive of grassroots endeavors (Escobar, 1995), and often calls for empowerment of local people (Elabor-Idemudia, 2002). I now find these notions, although appealing, must be cautiously questioned. Like Freire's (1970/2000) emancipation, I now wonder how grand narratives of empowerment are truly possible. Words like inter-active, local participation, empowerment, and grounded approach may sound supportive, but what do they really mean? Who decides? And who benefits? Most importantly, how do we ensure that supplanting development with post-development terminology does not become another grand narrative? That is, is there a danger of replacing the old with the new while failing to change the essence of development and development discourse itself?

Finally, how can post-development theory allow for those in the West to take responsibility for the great imbalances that currently exist within the global community? The appeal of a theory that supports local knowledge and fosters grassroots initiatives remains bound within the structural, historical, and economic reality of global capitalism, which is further complicated by the webs of power and influence of organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, influential multinational corporations, and the United Nations, to name a few. Development will not simply be done away with. How can post-development theory be productive within these monstrous and complex systems? Or, do we need to consider the productivity of the theory at the

local level and in specific contexts? Can development be a true collabor-ation where relationships are reciprocal, where all parties benefit, and where inequities become rebalanced? Can this occur among committed individuals in specific communities by paying attention to the particu-lars, and by refusing to commodify and create hierarchies of knowledge? Perhaps the productivity of post-development theory is found when used as a lens to consider and critique the local knowledge but not the systemic contexts.

This snapshot ethnography merely skims the surface of these com-plex issues but has allowed me to illustrate the immense ability of a group of women to collaborate and share knowings among themselves. The women of Agabagaya are knowers of their world and have a strong understanding of their needs and goals. I hope their story gives others reason to pause and reconsider what education is and recognize that women have the knowings and the right to make decisions about their own education. It was the women of Agabagaya who helped me to understand the productivity, complexities, and cautions of post-develop-ment theory. The women's actions demonstrated what is meant by grass-roots development and the importance of local knowledge, and allowed me to see the difficulties embedded in external development initiatives. It is this space between the actions and desires of a local community and the initiatives of external development organizations where conversa-tions need to continue to occur, and where post-development theory may be most helpful.

NOTES

[1] Despite efforts to locate work by Ugandan scholars on gender and development, I found little was accessible, and of that, less which was relevant to this particular study. See Ugandan scholar, Deborah Kassente's (1998) work which outlines difficulties, such as inaccessibility, top-down methodologies, and relevance of research in Uganda.

[2] I will use the term *Majority World* to refer to less industrialized nations who make up the majority of the world's population and *Minority World* to refer to more industrialized nations who make up the minority (only about one-quarter) of the worlds' population. Using these terms is an attempt to upset the hierarchy implied in the terms First and Third Worlds. However, I recognize that the women in these groups are not a homogenous unit and that their experiences

vary. The term *West* refers specifically to North America and Europe. I recognize that all of these terms are ripe with inadequacies, inequities, and essentializations.

[3] There was much discussion among my committee members about conducting an ethnography that was not a full year in length. After much debate, the committee felt that it was worth proceeding. Due to space restrictions, the full discussion of the limitations and benefits of snapshot ethnography will not be addressed here. Also, I am indebted to Marcelle Falk for granting me permission to use this term that she so creatively coined.

[4] My role as a participant/observer and the ongoing reflexivity will not be the focus of this article.

[5] While I was there (and because I was there), various local and district government officials visited the group numerous times, as well as a reporter from the local radio station. Through these visits and increased recognition, the women were able to participate in an exchange with another women's group in a different district. This is an example of the increased recognition they received from district officials.

[6] I will use the term *external organizations* to identify government organizations (e.g. Masindi District Government) and non-government organizations (e.g. Masindi Farmers' Association, Red Cross, and other aid or development agencies). These organizations are external in the sense that they are not situated in the village, they are not run by nor do they employ people from the village, and are usually funded by sources outside of Uganda.

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