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FROM EFFECTIVE TO AFFECTIVE BROKERS: RETHINKING DEVELOPMENT BROKERS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN INDONESIA

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The end of Indonesia’s authoritarian New Order regime in 1998 marked a new era of democratisation and decentralised governance. This process was parallel with development interventions from international donor agencies such as the World Bank that introduced new development approach as community-driven development (CDD). This shift in development and mode of governance allowed for the proliferation of new social actors who situated themselves at the interface between village communities, state, and donor agencies. These new social actors have been recognised by scholars within the discipline of anthropology and development studies as development brokers. In such accounts, the brokers’ role is described as either distorting the system or enabling the system to work but somehow overlook actor’s subjectivity regarding their involvement in development. Using the case study from the implementation of community development in Manggarai village, this paper will discuss the role of development brokers such as project facilitators, interface bureaucrats, and village development cadres within current development scheme. In doing so, I will pay attention to actors’ subjectivity as an important locus to understand complexities of social practices in development, power relations, and potential for social transformation.

Keywords: community-driven development; development brokers; subjectivity
Preceded by a decade experience of the implementation of community-driven development (CDD) program supported by the World Bank, Indonesian government enacted the new Village Law (Law 6/2014) which granted relative autonomy and a generous portion of resources to all 75,000 Indonesian villages to manage their own designed development projects. Through the enactment of this new law, participatory approach in the development introduced by CDD programs is institutionalized into village government routines, such as the introduction of village assembly as a mechanism to bring people’s aspiration into village development planning. Development buzzwords popularized throughout the implementation of CDD programs in Indonesia since the late 1990s such as ‘community empowerment’ and ‘good governance’ (transparency and accountability) continue to circulate within current policy landscape and become critical discourses surrounding social practices of development in the village.

Moreover, some critical studies have described the use of participatory approaches in development as not merely a mechanism for resource allocation but also a peculiar enterprise in knowledge production and representation (Mosse, 2001). That is, participatory development purifies messy knowledge and experience into a clean and structured representation (Kothari, 2001) and renders social life apolitical while overemphasizing technical problems (Ferguson, 1990; Li, 2007). Tania Murray Li (2007:7) famously describes development programs as ‘rendering technical’ that she defined as “...a whole set of practices concerned with representing ‘the domain to be governed as an intelligible field with specifiable limits and particular characteristic... defining boundaries, rendering that within them visible, assembling information about that which is included and devising techniques to mobilize the forces and entities thus revealed’.” When I started my fieldwork in May 2019 observing village development programs in Manggarai District, East Nusa Tenggara Province, I was immediately overwhelmed with technical and bureaucratic terms used by my interlocutors in their explanations about the implementation of development projects in the villages. In this regard, the practice of rendering technical—particularly administrative-centered activities—appeared as a dominant feature in the implementation of village development programs under the new Village Law.

Normatively, the new law supposed to grant all villages with relative autonomy to decide activities or development projects based on their needs. However, as noted by Vel and Zakaria (2017) village autonomy granted in Law 6/2014 was reduced significantly due to competing regulations issued by the two ministries responsible for village development, i.e., Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Village, Development of Disadvantaged Regions, and Transmigration. This situation has created confusion both for the district and village governments, particularly regarding how village funds can be spent. Moreover, in addition to regulations from ministries in Jakarta, village government have to hold activities and projects in accordance with the implementing regulations issued by province and district government. With abundant regulations issued by supra village government institutions to control the use of village funds and the design of village development projects, participatory approach used within current village development policy tend to serve outsider agendas by producing representation ‘to legitimize action, to explain, to justify, validate higher policy goals, or mobilize political support’ (Mosse, 2001:27).

It is not my intention, however, to disclose contradictions in the intentional development by contrasting it to the implementation realities. Instead, in this presentation, I am more interested in diving into the subjective experiences of locally situated actors involved in development practices in the village. It is partly because subjectivity is often overlooked in some literature within the discipline of development studies and anthropology of development. But mainly
because recently, as we have observed in the implementation of Law 6/2014, the state’s efforts to improve the population’s welfare through development are delegated to governance institutions closer to the targeted population. In such situations, development projects are now managed by groups of actors from within the communities working on behalf of the state, such as village head and his/her staffs, village development cadres, and village facilitators. In many ways, considering their ‘in-betweeness,’ these locally situated actors can be categorized as development brokers: “connective agents who actively bring together the different elements of development assemblages they operate in and are targeted by” (Koster & van Leynseele, 2018).

In this regard, I contend that by paying close attention to the subjectivity of actors involved in development practices can bring us into a more nuanced description concerning the intricate process of social (de)constructions. Following Ortner (2005), subjectivity refers to “ensemble mode of perception, affect, thought, desire, fear, and so forth that animate acting subject” (31). In contrast to the ‘unconscious’ governmentality subject (see Li, 2007), Ortner (2005:34) see actors as “partially ‘knowing subject[s]’” in a sense that “they have some degree of reflexivity about themselves and their desires, and that they have some ‘penetration’ into the ways in which they are formed by their circumstances.” In this sense, subjects never fully internalize social norms imposed upon them, nor do they passively subjugate themselves to power because they always partially reflect upon the circumstances where they find themselves. The critical issue at hand in this formulation is the intimate relationship between subjectivity and power: by considering the subject’s reflexive capability, the constitution of the subject by disciplinary power, therefore, must be seen as a contingent and provisional mechanism.

Ethnographic exemplars that I will provide in this presentation are derived from semi-structured interviews with village government officials and village facilitators in Manggarai District, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province. Also, I had opportunity to do some participant observation in several important events related to the management of village development such as workshops held by district government for village government officials, monitoring of village development projects by village facilitators, and an annual village-to-village survey activity undertook by village facilitators to measure village development status. As expected, most activities that I observed revolved around the production and circulation of inscriptions, such as village development planning documents, budget design, financial reports, etc. From my experience, observation of these activities is essential not only to understand how documents are produced but also how document production was subjectively experienced by people involved (Hull, 2012). My initial findings suggest that people’s engagement in the production of documents involving not only administrative procedures in village development but also shaped by and influenced local politics within the village level and beyond. Additionally, as documents became a paramount element in the evaluation of village governance, they also play an essential part in the constitutions of development subject.

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**ISLAMIC DIFFERENCE AND PUBLIC RELIGION IN THE BUREAUCRATIC ERA**  
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In the 1970s, Indonesia’s Ministry of Religious Affairs announced that more post-graduate students of Islam were to be sent for post-graduate study to western universities, as opposed to the centres of Islamic learning such as Egypt’s Al-Azhar. The motivation behind this was to create Muslim graduates with ‘modern and critical attitudes’. The paper reflects on this decision, drawing on discussions with graduates about their study trajectories, and also on our reading of the (currently flourishing) genre of ‘Islamic study-travel literature’.

The Minister’s decision was a salient moment in the process whereby Indonesia’s Muslim sphere acquired the categories of public and counter-public. Graduates of western universities return, we find, prepared with ‘modern, critical attitudes’ shaped in high quality research centres dedicated to enhancing the individual’s potential as researcher. The paradigmatic career path for such graduates is that of researcher (university, survey company). Al-Azhar graduates return with the goal of giving service in the routines of everyday Islamic practice. The paradigmatic career path is preacher (Middle-East graduates far exceed western graduates in the ranks of successful preachers). The minister’s decision is useful, we argue, for understanding how the former religious subjectivity (‘modern and critical’) came to acquire such public approval, while the latter is frequently represented as retrograde and even subversive.

There is a substantial critique of the policy turn under examination here, produced through critical writings by academics affiliated with the *Nahdlatul Ulama*. Reflecting on the tension between the religious concepts preserved within NU settings and the purified notions of subjectivity shared by the state and Islamic modernists, NU scholars have been sensitive to the cultural specificity of the subjectivity the Minister was trying to create with this decision. For some NU thinkers, their rejection of the supremacy of the ‘modern and critical subject’ was sufficient reason to argue that religion should not become a normative basis of political participation in the Indonesian state.