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An Alternative Model for Development?
Promise and politics in the projecthonduras network

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Projecthonduras is an online network of mostly voluntary organisations working in development in Honduras. It aims to be practical, positive and apolitical, and to create an ‘alternative model’ for development based on mobilising people using information and communication technology (ICT). In the context of ongoing debates regarding the problems with conventional development aid and the search for new approaches, the projecthonduras rhetoric appears to hold much promise. Indeed its early inception and more than a decade of operation make it stand out in a world of failed Internet start-ups, and its positive and constructive approach finds resonance with recent, more hopeful post-development literature.

However after three years of research this thesis outlines a much more complex picture of projecthonduras. This is one with very quiet online forums but a growing political voice, particularly following the 2009 coup d’état in Honduras. The thesis addresses this apparent paradox, unpacking the structure and discourse of projecthonduras, and identifying the underlying assumptions and understandings that underpin both the ‘alternative’ development rhetoric and the political activity.

Researched and written as an ethnography, this thesis positions projecthonduras within the development studies literature and within the particular context of contemporary Honduras. Using on and offline interviews and participant observation, and making extensive use of Internet-based data, this study shows that the projecthonduras development model is based on a paternalistic and modernising model of development, one that is connected to a liberal, capitalist politics.

The emergence of political themes in this research is reflective of the messy realities of development intervention, and of geo-political, economic and cultural power and privilege within Honduras. However as indicated by the title of this thesis, the concept of politics stands alongside that of promise, the potential held by the idea of ICT and social networking. This intersection of promise and politics highlights the contours of the structural and discursive boundaries in which projecthonduras operates, and emphasises the complexity inherent in the search for development alternatives.
Dedication

In loving memory of

Evelyn May Smithers

And

Leonard James McLennan

Grandparents who passed on during the course of my candidature.

You may not see this final product but I hope I made you proud.
"The post-development period will distinguish itself from the preceding one if it is able to bring about the 'good, the compassionate and the authoritative' - if the jen (good people) everywhere cultivate new relationships of friendship, and thereby discover themselves and each other, and learn the arts of listening and being attentive (i.e. to attend) to each other." (Rahnema, 1997, p.392)

This quote from Rahnema is one well-used in the text of this thesis, but I am going to take the liberty of using it again here, as I acknowledge the ‘jen’ who have been there for me over the past four years. Indeed, without the support of some very good, compassionate and authoritative people, many of whom spent hours listening to me in one way or another, this post-thesis moment would never have come.

First and foremost I must give my heartfelt gratitude to Marco and the projecthonduras network. Without Marco’s openness to the idea of a study of projecthonduras, his assistance with making contacts and his willingness to answer questions this thesis would not now exist. I am also deeply grateful for the freedom he gave me to explore the network and to draw my own conclusions. I am also thankful for the many projecthonduras participants who willingly and cheerfully answered my questions via email or in person, particularly those who opened their homes and workplaces for me to visit. In particular I would like to acknowledge Dr. David, John D., Leopoldo and Michel, whose (often prolonged) email and in person conversations provided deep and fascinating insight both into the projecthonduras network, and into the Honduran context. Thank you. Your input has been invaluable, although I take full responsibility for the conclusions drawn here.

I’d also like to thank Sydney, Gaby, Gia, Tony and Steve, and the community of Macuelizo. Thank you for sharing your slice of Honduran paradise with us for nine months. I knew from the first time I visited it would be a beautiful, quiet place to live and work, but it became far more than that, it became a home. Your friendship meant a lot to my little family and still does. We will be back.
I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to my supervisors Prof. Regina Scheyvens and Dr. Robyn Andrews. Your listening ears, careful attention to the numerous drafts and re-drafts of these chapters, and your encouragement of my developing ideas and writing was invaluable. Regina’s office has been a safe space for laughter and tears, as well as for challenging and inspiring conversation. Your trust and support as I explored some crazy methodological ideas and struggled with issues of balance and representation has also been vital to the development of this thesis. I am deeply grateful.

I would also like to thank a wonderful group of ‘PhD Mums’ whose encouragement and support has been very important to me. Trisia, Polly, Rochelle and Kelly you are inspirations. Balancing PhD study with motherhood and family is not an easy task and it was good to know there were others around who understood. Whether it was coffee at Wharerata, venting in the office or just a short note by email or Facebook, it all helped along the way. Thank you.

I’d also like to briefly thank the PEP anthropology study group for including a development studies interloper, and for your encouragement and constructive feedback. You fresh perspectives and on-going interest in my research was very much appreciated.

I also need to acknowledge and thank the financial support provided by the Ryoichi Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (SYLFF) and the Massey University PEP Graduate Research Fund. In particular, the financial support provided by SYLFF enabled me not only to complete a PhD as full time student, but to travel from New Zealand to Honduras twice, and to attend two overseas conferences over the period of my candidature. This is an enormous privilege and I am very grateful.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my family. To my sisters Deborah, Joanna and Ruth – thanks for your interest and understanding. I’d especially like to thank Ruth for having a knack for knowing when I needed a break for cocktails or wine, and for travelling all the way to Honduras to hang out with us… and for being especially understanding about that little problem with the airport in San Pedro Sula.

To Mum and Dad. Although I’m sure you have sighed over many of my crazy life decisions and worried as I chose yet another unconventional and perhaps unexpected path, you have always been there for me. I am incredibly blessed to have you as parents.
Thank you for your love, prayers and encouragement (and also for babysitting services, cash loans, advice and for leaving your comfort zone to visit us in Honduras!). I love you.

Finally, most importantly, Luis and Maya. There is no way to thank you enough for all that you have done for me, and endured with me, over the past four years. Luis, your love, attention and un-ending belief in me has sustained me throughout this process. Your insights into Honduran culture and your unique perspective on the research has been enormously helpful, as has been your willingness to take on far more than your fair share of housekeeping and childcare responsibilities. I am profoundly grateful. Muchísimas gracias mi amor, eres una persona increíble y muy especial. Te amo.

Maya, thank you for your hugs, kisses and I love yous... I love you so much too. Thank you for being patient while I finished this ‘book’. Thank you for inviting me to play games with you and keeping me entertained. Your laughter is the most precious sound in the world and I look forward to hearing far more of it in the future.
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AECI  Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (Agency for International Cooperation – Spain)

AFL-CIO  The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations

AI  Appreciative Inquiry

AoIR  Association of Internet Researchers

ASONOG  Asociación de Organismos No Gubernamentales de Honduras (Association of Honduran Non-Governmental Organisations)

CA  Central America

CA-4  Central America-4 Border Control Agreement

CABEI  Central American Bank for Economic Integration

CAFTA  Central American Free Trade Agreement

CARE  Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere

CIDA  Canadian International Development Agency

CODEH  Comisionado de Derechos Humanos de Honduras (Honduran Human Rights Commission)

CRS  Catholic Relief Services

ECLA  Economic Commission for Latin America

EU  European Union

FOPRIDEH  Foro de Organizaciones Privadas de Desarrollo de Honduras (Forum of Private Development Organisations of Honduras)

GTZ  Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (Society for Technical Cooperation – Germany)

HIPC  Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICT4D</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology for Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDB</td>
<td>Inter-American Development Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INE</td>
<td>Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas (Honduran National Institute of Statistics)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JICA</td>
<td>Japanese International Cooperation Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JTF-B</td>
<td>Joint Task Force Bravo, SOUTHCOM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEDEL</td>
<td>Medical Element of JTF-B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OAS</td>
<td>Organisation of American States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ODA</td>
<td>Official Development Assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAHO</td>
<td>Pan American Health Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PO</td>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRSP</td>
<td>Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHH</td>
<td>Students Helping Honduras</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMF</td>
<td>Special Missions Foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOUTHCOM</td>
<td>US Southern Command (of the US Defence Force)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UFCO</td>
<td>United Fruit Company</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>Web2forDev</td>
<td>Web 2.0 for Development</td>
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