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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 on-going 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.

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"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.

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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 Desarollo de Honduras (Forum of Private Development Organisations of Honduras)

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

HIPC Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative

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