"Your Report is Completely Wrong!" (aapkii report ek dum galat hai!): Locating Spaces Inside NGOs for Feedback and Dissemination

Kathleen O'Reilly and Richa Dhanju

This paper explores separate, but similar, confrontations that occurred at the end of two research studies conducted with two different Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Rajasthan, India. Although our goals included explaining our questions and methods during the research period, when we returned to the field for feedback and dissemination, in both cases, the research participants were upset by our findings. The similarity of the experiences caused us to reflect on: (1) power and its spaces inside NGOs and (2) the possibilities for social change through the process of feedback and dissemination. The tensions between NGOs' interests in controlling project narratives of success and counter-narratives was revealed through researcher-led feedback and dissemination. Drawing on feminist ethnography and organizational theory, we find that dissemination becomes a counter-narrative among the many narratives of an organization. Dissemination highlights already existing narratives and the tensions they produce, besides enabling dialogue that enables new narratives to emerge. We conclude by suggesting that tensions need not be resolved for dissemination to be considered successful—enabling spaces for dialogue leads to insights for both researcher and researched.

Key words: organizations, NGOs, power, dissemination, feedback, space

Introduction

"Mai aapko bataana chaahata hun ki aapkii report ek dam galat hai!
(I want to tell you that your report is completely wrong!)"

With these words, the Director of a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) we had been studying summarized our final report and dismissed our findings. While we had been thinking about the ethics and "benefits" of returning to the field[1] to disseminate results, he had been thinking that our six months of research amounted to a completely inaccurate analysis. Clearly, revisiting the field to discuss research results with informants was not the straightforward project we had imagined it to be. While we had not been expecting to be greeted as returning heroes, the Director's total dismissal was hardly expected either.

The idea for this paper germinated in 2001 when Kathleen went back to the field of a drinking water supply project that she had studied over a period of four years to give a presentation of her dissertation research findings. The presentation was a disaster, and in its aftermath, she reflected at length in her field journal on what went wrong and why. Six years later, in 2007, upon returning to a different NGO that Kathleen and Richa had studied over a period of two years, an almost identical reaction occurred during the presentation of research findings. We realized that by exploring the two events from our two separate perspectives[2] we might learn something about successfully negotiating power dynamics inside organizations in order to disseminate research findings. The similarity of the two feedback experiences caused us to reflect on: (1) power and its spaces inside NGOs and

(2) the possibilities for social change through the process of feedback and dissemination.

It should be said up front that what the two events have in common is that they were both confrontations with NGO workers (both management and fieldworkers) that erupted when Kathleen returned to the field to present and discuss written work, first a dissertation and, second a final report.[3] While both incidents could be dismissed (like the Director's dismissal of the final report) as the fault of the principal investigator or as the fault of NGO leadership, we argue that the events cannot be reduced to a personality flaw or a hostile adversary. The research was begun and carried out with ethical intentions and practices, and although there were occasional tense times in the field—not uncommon during ethnographic research (Drybread 2006:33-52; Huisman 2008:379; Nagar 1997:213)—most of the time, the research was carried out in a relaxed, congenial setting. Keith (1992:554) argues that individual researchers are "inevitably duplicitous" and ethnography is an inevitable betrayal. His point, in part, is that even with good intentions, the research and writing process can go terribly wrong in terms of ethics and the researcher's political commitments. In our case, these were feminist commitments to question relations of power and patriarchy, and they led us to raise the sensitive issues of sexual harassment and caste discrimination. This paper takes as its starting point that ethnographic researchers intend to do the right thing ethically and take steps to do it. However, since the purpose of analytical writing is to produce an authoritative account (usually by a single author, the ethnographer him- or herself) as a representation of a collective experience, inevitably the representation will amount to a misrepresentation (Mosse 2005).

There has been considerable reflection given to the *process* of ethnographic fieldwork within the social sciences, particularly anthropology and geography: gaining access to informants (Lal 1996); self-positioning and reflexivity (Nast 1994; Pasquini and Olayinan 2004); recognizing power relations within and beyond the researcher (Hsiung 1996); and failed projects (England 1994). There has been considerably less research that concerns itself with what happens when researchers leave the field and later return for feedback and dissemination of results (Polzer 2007:4). There are many reasons for revisiting the field, but most often it is done to return findings to the research participants for the purpose of cross-verification ("feedback") and for "dissemination"—an exercise in sharing results with policymakers and local audiences in the hope that the research will be useful at multiple scales (van Blerk and Ansell 2007).

Donor organizations like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), the United States Department of Labor, the United Kingdom Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID) expect funding recipients to conduct feedback and dissemination with the beneficiary groups and incorporate alternative interpretations of the material

in their reports. Despite the potential value of feedback and dissemination, United States-based social science research funding (e.g., Fulbright-Hays, National Science Foundation [NSF], Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and Social Science Research Council [SSRC]) have no requirements or guidelines on returning to the field for feedback and dissemination. Dissemination for most of these programs entails sharing research findings with the government and academic community through published papers and conferences. For example, NSF's (2007:2) criterion on broader impacts include that the researcher should disseminate results "broadly to enhance scientific and technological understanding," but the guidelines do not require or suggest feedback and dissemination processes in the places where the research was undertaken. Polzer (2007) finds that in the social sciences, there is no funding allocated specifically for dissemination purposes.

Feedback and dissemination are not prioritized within academic institutions either. Rewards go for peer-reviewed publications (i.e., there is no "pay-off" for time spent disseminating results) while "practical" research is suspect as atheoretical (Polzer 2007). Given the low academic priority to this exercise, few researchers publish their experiences and results with the feedback and dissemination phase of their project. Corbridge et al.'s book, *Seeing the State* (2005), is an exception to this generalization. The authors conducted extensive fieldwork in rural eastern India in 2000-2002. Upon the completion of data collection, they applied to DFID India for funds to undertake feedback and dissemination with multiple stakeholders and participants in select fieldsites. The authors reveal that it took time and logical argument before the donors agreed to approve funds for dissemination. Feedback and dissemination are often treated as ugly stepchildren in the research process—only if time and funds permit can the researcher share findings and seek verification of information collected.

In one of the few scholarly pieces on feedback and dissemination, van Blerk and Ansell (2007) do not report any conflicts with the process besides some problems they faced locating the research's original participants and finding ways to incorporate children's voices into the dissemination process. Polzer (2007) says that dissemination should be a required activity but also acknowledges that dissemination experiences are not always without obstacles. Mosse (2005) and Nagar (2006) worked with development NGOs in India and faced denial of their findings by NGO management and some employees. Both authors reflect on their response to the backlash that accompanied their findings, in Mosse's case against himself, and in Nagar's case against those who collaborated in the research. Similarly, our experience was not a wholly positive one. The backlash reinforced for us that we were embedded in hierarchical, organizational power dynamics that acted to stymie our efforts to disseminate research findings with any positive effect within the organization.

In this paper, we explore the tensions between politically-motivated research dissemination and development

organizations' interests in controlling project narratives that emerge from that research. Based on van Blerk and Ansell's definitions (see above), we returned to the field to receive "feedback," but we also hoped for "dissemination"—that our findings would improve some of the practices of the two organizations. However, the research participants were dismayed to find that our analysis included, besides praise and neutral statements, criticism of their work. We raised highly sensitive issues of sexual harassment and caste bias. The objections of management and fieldworkers to our results nearly squelched any chance our results had of being disseminated, raising the question: What are the ways that feedback can be given, objections can be raised, and dissemination enabled so that research benefits those who agreed to participate in it? We pose this question in the knowledge that organizations are fraught with relations of unequal power, so any singular understanding of "benefit" is contested. We expect criticism and denial when research participants are confronted with negative statements about their employing NGO or their own behavior, but we also want to reflect on how barriers to effective feedback and dissemination can be addressed as a critical research practice. Moreover, Mosse (2005) suggests that objections to research findings are inevitable, but that they also open up additional analytical possibilities into scholarship of organizations.

We drew on feminist ethnography as a method during the research to sensitize us to unequal power relations in NGOs and because of our overarching goal to seek to change them. Here, we dig deeper into feminist ethnography and organizational theory for what they offer about how research findings can be brought back to the field in ways that might assist development actors in the field. We suggest that feminist ethnography provides some answers to questions for organizational researchers about making research more useful to those individuals and groups being studied. Few scholarly articles by feminists focus on the need for returning to the field, and as such, the process of dissemination and feedback as a feminist project has yet to be analyzed in great depth, least of all to determine if the outward goal of making results available locally does anyone "local" any good (Fonow and Cook 2005). Our work is ethnographic, so below we provide excerpts from fieldnotes that tell the story of each return to the field, followed by a discussion section that analyzes the experiences. We conclude by suggesting that tensions need not be resolved for dissemination to be considered successful—enabling spaces for dialogue leads to insights for both researcher and researched.

Organizations, Research, and Control

Recent research on organizations theorizes development organizations as political systems "for the production and control of information" (Mosse 2001:159). They are organized to facilitate the production of a narrative of success about their own work, which occurs "in a nexus of information, and valuation, and external funding" (Mosse 2001:176).

The fact that they work at this nexus makes it imperative that development NGOs achieve their own unique systems of control for the filtering and flow of information (Mosse 2001), so that the story an organization wants told *is* the story that gets told. Information is tightly controlled and access to information serves to distinguish between members of the organization. NGOs are often hierarchical, with those at the top having significant access to information compared to those at the bottom and, of course, actors restricting or facilitating flows of information in order to maintain or improve their position in the hierarchy. Research conducted inside development organizations encounters these information networks, and if management is able to maintain control of them, the research is likely to serve existing perceptions, assumptions, and prevailing models of development ideology and practice (Mosse 2001).

The arrival of a researcher may disrupt an organization's information system by operating outside it and facilitating new networks through which information may travel. Should co-opting gestures fail when a researcher tries to separate information flows from management's control, the common experience is for management to employ techniques of resistance to the research including: attacking the legitimacy of the research, non-cooperation, lowering the status or legitimacy of the researcher, denying access to meetings or documents, intimidating the researcher, and/or restricting the areas where they can work (Mosse 2001). For example, Drybread (2006:35), during ethnographic fieldwork with incarcerated adolescent boys at a state juvenile prison in Brazil, discovered that her motives, qualifications, and methods were subject to constant scrutiny and reproach by prison officials fearful of damage to their reputation. Her ethnographic methods, unusual by Brazilian social science standards, drew heavy criticism and reprimand from prison staff. Concerned about her access to uncensored information through interaction with inmates, prison officials abruptly restricted her access to prison inmates and began strip searches in hopes she would give up the project. In a similar vein, Lewis (1998) as cited in Mosse (2005), when returning feedback from an institutional ethnography of a Bangladeshi multi-agency partnership, found that returning results that addressed sensitive areas led to the legitimacy of the research being called into question, and ultimately, the research project was closed prematurely.

Feminist ethnographers doing research on organizations have noted similar difficulties in fieldwork and dissemination. Nagar (2006) and Keith (1992) explain how organizations are reluctant to deal with dissemination that could be critical of their work and work ethics. Researchers can, and should, effectively counter the practices that groups adopt to criticize or ignore study findings. In the collaborative feminist work, *Playing with Fire*, Nagar (2006) explores two aspects of dissemination: (1) resulting criticisms of sensitive information that exposed both individuals and their organization and (2) constructive countering of such criticisms. Nagar's colleagues experienced backlash from their employing NGO in response to their published words in the Hindi book,

Sangtin Yatra (Anupamlata et. al. 2004). In response to this backlash, Nagar (2006) organized local and international support for her collaborators by publishing a special section detailing and analyzing the backlash in an English translation of this book. Nagar jumped scale (Smith 1993) by moving dissemination of the women workers' experiences from the local scale to the global scale, thus "…paving the way for new trans/national solidarities on the politics of NGOization and knowledge production" (Singh and Nagar 2006:309). The strategy of jumping scale challenged the employing NGO's accusations and halted reprisals against those employees who collaborated. Unlike Nagar and her collaborators, we do not write to challenge the organization's backlash directed at us. Although occasionally researchers find that backlash follows them home (Mosse 2005), our concern remains at the scale of the field with those who participated in the research. We seek to acknowledge the roadblocks to dissemination arising within development organizations, and also to move beyond them to affect change, if possible.

It is at the nexus of feminist ethnography and organizational studies that this paper is situated. The core of feminist theorizing has been not only an understanding of social and structural relations, but also an ideological imperative to change them (Stacey 1988; Thomas and Davies 2005). However, Stacey (1988) critiques feminist ethnography for disconnecting fieldwork practice from the final written product because of the dominance of the researcher's purposes, interpretation, and voice—even if modified or influenced by the informants. Both writing up and dissemination involve negotiating the power dynamics surrounding the contributions of various informants differently positioned in the organization. For example, information sharing is often segregated by gender since "women's work" may have women serving men at meetings instead of participating in those meetings (O'Reilly 2006). During the research process, organizational power dynamics will enable some voices and discourage others. Skillful researchers may solicit input by creating spaces where the voices of those on the margins may emerge (Gibson-Graham 1994). At the stage of dissemination then, the needed space is one where multiple voices besides the dominant organizational narrative can be heard. Dissemination must avoid getting mired in the same relations of power that the research challenges.

It is useful to remember that a development project comprises a group of actors vying for influence and authority of their particular perspective (Mosse 2001). Although a project might represent itself as a bounded entity "formed around consensual goals and ideas" (Mosse 2001:159), development projects are not unified. Neither are NGOs (O'Reilly 2007). Furthermore, individuals have a stake in the identity of an organization as a collective, but they also have a stake as individuals (Mosse 2001), since their jobs depend on the success of their work and the narrative that success creates (O'Reilly 2004). With this in mind, relationships within development NGOs are best studied for when and where there are disagreements, silences, and inconsistencies (Mosse

2001). Citing Appadurai (1989), Mosse (2001) suggests that interview-based techniques offer access to some data, but other important data may be learned by observing the quality of interactions, the relationships they suggest, the hopes and expectations of staff, and the outcomes of exchanges and projects. Coupled with creating space, such methods enable new and existing counter-narratives to emerge.Narratives of success dominate within organizations, but there are other narratives that run parallel to dominant narratives (O'Reilly 2007). Some of these are counter-narratives that create disruption; other narratives do not. Their impact depends on the threat they pose to authorized accounts. Although organizations aim to produce a unified front, long-term participant observation and an ear for counter-narratives and contradictions lead to a fuller understanding of the multiple interests and perceptions within NGOs. O'Reilly (2007) shows that counter-narratives can produce new spaces that may lead to openings for discussion of topics and views not typically given voice. During the process of dissemination, we found that the difficult issues we raised for NGO employees were debated in an atmosphere of respect and interest when fieldworkers read the final report in small groups in the field. Debates on the report brought forward multiple narratives that: (1) aligned with authorized accounts of the organizations' work and ideology, (2) countered the authorized account, (3) displayed a matter-of-fact awareness towards the findings, and (4) showed disinterest in the report. In addition, events and experiences in the field that occurred between our research trips enabled new discourses on NGO success, limitations, and staff politics to emerge. These changes directly contributed to emerging multiple narratives and may have added fuel for disagreement over the report. Despite diverse viewpoints among the fieldworkers themselves, it was only in a large group meeting attended by the Director that we faced a condescending, even threatening, backlash. By analyzing our experiences of dissemination in a framework that considers the connection between space and power, it became clear that research not only can enable a variety of stories to be told to the researcher, but for the researcher to tell them *back* to the organization. Dissemination confirms for individuals, wherever their position in organizational hierarchies, that counter-narratives are inevitable and originate from different locations *within* the organization rather than being initiated by outsiders. As such, dissemination highlights already existing counter-narratives besides enabling a dialogue that recognizes new or hidden ones. Like those counter-narratives, research findings thrive or wither in particular times and spaces within organizations.

Failed Attempts at Feedback and Dissemination

Our first experience with returning results to the field began when Kathleen returned to Our Water to give a research presentation six months after completing her dissertation and a year after finishing all her fieldwork. The NGO, Our Water, employed approximately 50 fieldworkers who

promoted community participation in drinking water supply management in rural villages. By that time, nearly two years of ethnographic fieldwork had gone into the doctoral thesis. What follows is written in the first person singular—a more formal version of Kathleen's fieldnotes from 2001:

> The presentation contained two gender-related criticisms: (1) contradictions in the women's participation component of the project and (2) sexual harassment within the organization. I knew that I was taking a chance by including sexual harassment in my presentation, but it was something that struck me forcefully as incompatible with the project's women's participation goals, went against my own feminist principles, and, therefore, needed to be said aloud. The ensuing attacks, questions, and accusations were horribly unpleasant. I was accused of not knowing what research was, attacked on methodological grounds, and told flatly that sexual harassment was not happening in the organization. I had taken a chance by speaking truth to power, and I was devastated that years of effort seemed so completely obliterated by members of management. Only one person expressed an understanding that the problems with women's participation that I wrote about were universal problems, i.e., similar problems with women's participation are faced by other organizations as well. The Director acknowledged that I had worked hard to write the dissertation.

Our second experience returning results to the field occurred in December 2007, when Kathleen, Richa, and Monika Gaud (local field assistant) returned to the working area of Rural Power, an NGO, where Kathleen had been carrying out extensive interviews over the past two years with fieldworkers and their clients in villages. Rural Power employed approximately 20 fieldworkers who worked on poverty alleviation and health. Learning from Kathleen's dissemination experience with the drinking water supply project six years ago, we decided to discuss a preliminary final report with individual informants in small groups rather than give a findings presentation to management. What follows is written in the first person plural—a more formal version of Richa's fieldnotes:

> During this last trip, we planned to present a report of research findings to staff, receive their feedback, and say goodbye. This report focused on the personal and professional relationship dynamics of the fieldworkers within the organization and with their clients. Some of the issues criticized in the report were: (1) failure to retain women fieldworkers, (2) the changing goals of Rural Power from social work to contract work (O'Reilly 2010), and (3) the perception of Rural Power by some clients and staff as a caste-specific organization.
> We made visits to multiple villages to meet with fieldworkers at their home or work place. In most cases, fieldworkers seemed happy to meet us until they read the report. Then their behavior changed from cordial to hostile and defensive, often evolving into heated defenses from either side. Most fieldworkers expressed discomfort with the suggestion that their organization was gradually becoming known for hiring and serving *Meghwals*—an untouchable caste. One male fieldworker charged that the report was too harsh and did not meet his expectations. He

threatened, "We will talk to our Director about this report." After meeting as many fieldworkers as we could in the field, we requested a final meeting for one evening with all remaining fieldworkers. Instead of meeting in the NGO's common room as we had expected, this meeting was held outside a furniture warehouse, where we three waited for staff to arrive before they were to travel out of town to another meeting. Upon arriving, nine staff, including the Director, formed a semi-circle with the only female member among them standing towards one end. We three stood by each other facing them. The Director began by raising his voice, "*Mai aapko bataana chaahata hun ki aapkii report eekdam galat hai!* (I want to tell you that your report is completely wrong!)" For the next 15 minutes, he shredded apart each point in the report by questioning: (1) Kathleen's inability to understand Hindi well, (2) Kathleen's overdependence on Monika who was possibly providing her incorrect information for some unstated reason, (3) Kathleen's ignorance about how to do research, and (4) Kathleen's abuse of the Director's trust when he gave complete access to fieldworkers and resources.

We gave the Director a copy of the one-page report (in Hindi) when we arrived in the project area, before going out to meet fieldworkers in the villages where they lived and worked. Although we handed him a paper copy and encouraged him to read it, he slipped the report under a stack of papers with little more than a cursory skim. Given the eagerness with which management of Our Water read sections of Kathleen's dissertation in 2001, we were surprised that he displayed no interest in the final report. However, the Director's reluctance to read the report suggests that he felt no unease about its potential contents or that he did not consider it important enough to give immediate attention. We felt disappointed that he did not wish to discuss it with us, but neither was he reacting to it in such a way that prevented us from sharing it with fieldworkers outside of the office. We knew from past experience that management might thwart dissemination; however, if the Director paid no heed to our report, then we could proceed unimpeded with our goal of disseminating the report across the organization's hierarchy.

In villages, fieldworkers of Rural Power expressed agreement, disagreement, and disappointment with the report. Their criticisms included: (1) we underpraised the hard work they had done; (2) we misplaced blame on them for onerous reporting procedures that burdened village participants; and (3) we misjudged the reasons for gender inequality in the organization. However, the main point of contention was a statement that read, "…*gaanv waale kaaryakartaaon ko yeh kehatein hai ki yeh sansthaa ek meghwaal sansthaa hai aur adhiktar kaarya meghwaalon ke liiye hii kartii hai* (villagers say to fieldworkers that the NGO is Meghwal and works primarily with Meghwal communities)." Recent turnover in the NGO had led to the hiring of new fieldworkers who belonged to the Meghwal (*dalit* or untouchable) caste, as did the Director. A senior fieldworker observed that people did see Rural Power as a Meghwal organization, but also added that "*chaap to kaam kii hotii hai* (it is the work that matters

after all).” He went on to say that beyond caste, villagers identify fieldworkers by the benefits they bring (e.g., those who bring dairy cattle) (O’Reilly 2010). He was supported by another fieldworker, a new hire, who said that fieldworkers earn a good name or a bad name with villagers based on work they do. During a group discussion with four recently-hired, young male fieldworkers, three of them vehemently disagreed with the caste point by arguing that villagers do not know all the fieldworkers in the NGO as they work in separate villages. Therefore, they would not know that most are from the same caste. However, the fourth fieldworker disagreed saying, “Yes, villagers can know the caste of others in the NGO because with this new project, we go together in groups to visit different villages.” Among fieldworkers themselves were disagreements about our findings.

While there were severe criticisms of the report, fieldworkers did not attack us personally or professionally. Through occasionally heated dialogue, we talked through our points of disagreement about the report, clarified, and sought more information. For example, a male fieldworker strongly disagreed with a statement that if women fieldworkers could be retained by Rural Power, perhaps male fieldworkers would come to understand the work of women fieldworkers as equal to their own. He argued that the problem was women’s families, not practices of women’s co-workers: “Women leave Rural Power because of their personal problems, not because of any problems from the staff.” We countered that NGO staff could support women by telling their families about women’s double burden (working at home and in the field) and reminding them of women’s importance to the NGO’s success. He agreed with this point, realizing that the report was not placing blame and had scope for discussion. Often, fieldworkers concurred with the research findings, once nuance and explanation were added to the bold statements of the report. Discussion sometimes ended in disagreement, but without loss of respect on either side.

The Director’s outburst is in keeping with Mosse’s suggestion that organizations produce and control information, and when they cannot, the research or the researcher is delegitimized. Since our report was not in line with his expectations, we were accused of exaggerating, not knowing the ground realities of development work in rural India, and failing to read project documents. The Director not only declared the entire report “completely wrong,” but also denigrated our capabilities and methods. The Director’s accusations signal two things: (1) Kathleen was incompetent to carrying out her research; and (2) Monika was not to be trusted. Richa was too fleeting a visitor to be warranted a contributor to the research; she was neither criticized nor allowed to claim responsibility for her efforts on the final report. In combination, we formed a threat to the Director’s control of information, i.e., if Kathleen knows something she should not know, then it must be Monika who told her. He threatened us in return, saying that if we wrote such reports, no future NGO would allow us to work with them (“…*aur koi sansthaa andar nahiin barne degii*”). According to the Director, we did not know what

we were talking about and no NGO was going to stand for such ill-informed research. His angry performance reminded staff and researchers that there was only one authority on the organization and only one organizational narrative—a story of hard-working professionals who achieved their project goals.

Analysis: Spaces of Opportunity

Our initial reaction to fieldworkers’ criticism of the report was suspicion that we had failed to include them sufficiently in the research process. Further, the empathetic environment over long-term fieldwork left research participants expecting an equally empathetic set of findings. They assumed that the relationship of trust and mutual respect between researchers and NGO would automatically translate into a positive evaluation of their work. Fieldworkers and management rejected the idea that their responses to our interview questions could amount to a final report like the one we wrote. Similarly, management of the rural water supply project that Kathleen revisited in 2001 expected that the dissertation would be a report of statistical information like numbers of latrines built and women’s groups made. The ethnography had deceived those who informed it (Keith 1992). A peculiar encounter brought this omission home. One fieldworker politely explained that a previous report we had returned to him was accurate—unlike the final report—because it had a detailed account of all that he had told us. The “report” that he was referring to was, in fact, his transcribed interview that we returned earlier for his approval. In spite of transparency about our research objectives and process, we eventually realized that when explaining ethnography to people with no exposure to academic research, the essence of research as “critical analysis” may be lost. Neither organization was expecting a critical analysis to emerge from the research.

Although the Director’s outburst rattled us, we recalled that his was not the only response to the report; there were multiple responses in multiple locations. Individual and small group interactions with fieldworkers in their homes and workspaces enabled them to express a variety of opinions and experiences. Fieldworkers’ responses to the report can be categorized as: (1) rejection, (2) confirmation of what they took for granted, (3) enthusiasm and promotion of its ideas, though controversial, and (4) disinterest in the report or the debates surrounding it. During various field visits for dissemination, specific incidents pointed to the diverse voices of the fieldworkers. Two young, recent hires, Rajesh and Suresh, who were both Meghwal, not only denied that Rural Power was becoming Meghwal, but brought that particular finding to the notice of fieldworkers who did not originally take offense upon reading the report. As stated above, Kabeer, a senior fieldworker, gave no special attention to the Meghwal point except to agree publicly that it was an inevitable reality and to state that caste is not the main element that drives their work and relationships in the field. Kamal, another senior fieldworker who was disgruntled with the NGO’s policies, encouraged us by saying in private that he agreed with the

report. He told us that he pointed out to the Director before the final meeting that if he read the text surrounding the statement "the NGO is Meghwal," he would see that it was not we who came up with the idea, but that others had reported it to us, i.e., "…villagers say to fieldworkers that the NGO is Meghwal." Although Kamal was reticent in most private interactions with us, he spoke up to defend and clarify the report because it reflected his understanding of changes in the organization.

Seema was the only female fieldworker who was present during the final meeting. She had been recently promoted from fieldworker to project coordinator. A day before the final meeting, we sought her views on the report. A male fieldworker interrupted our conversation to point out that he had read the report and disagreed with our comments about caste. Seema paid minimal attention to the report or to the interruption about caste and showed minimal interest in discussing it further with us. The next day, when we sought her input in front of the angry Director, she said, "I had told you yesterday that I don't agree with the caste point."

The voices of Kabeer and Kamal subverted existing NGO power structures by relating narratives that diverged from a single story of success and unity. The voices of Rajesh and Suresh remind us that fieldworkers have vested interests in denying subversive counter-narratives and in sustaining the authorized version. Seema's initial disinterest in the report and her later criticism of it showcases how some fieldworkers had little opinion about the report or kept their opinions to themselves until called upon to have an opinion.

During each visit with fieldworkers, we told them that we wanted to hear from them to learn their reaction to our understandings of their interview responses and work. Their diverse reactions and their mobilization of specific networks resulted from the alternative lines of communication we exposed through the process of feedback and dissemination. Through our actions, an alternate power dynamic revealed itself: we acted to subvert existing channels of power by soliciting individual voices and small group discussions away from the Director and the main office. We did not realize at the time we traveled to fieldworkers' homes and villages that we were retracing our steps through the subversive networks we had already built in the field over two years of fieldwork. Our goal was simply to give a copy of the final report and their transcribed interview to all fieldworkers who had participated in the research and were still working for Rural Power. But because all fieldworkers were busy in villages, we traveled to individual households and field offices—spaces where many felt free to speak their minds. Since we did not know that we would face a major confrontation on the final day of our visit to Rural Power, we did not consider our actions subversive at the time.

Others did, which explains the flow of information back to the Director. As fieldworkers have few tools of the powerful at their disposal, individual control of information—important during research (Mosse 2001)—becomes a critical part of the feedback and dissemination process. The response of some fieldworkers to go to the Director for support and to use the final meeting as a platform to vent their anger, demonstrates both a reaction to our use of subversive channels and an appeal to a higher or final authority. Fieldworkers upset with the report believed that telling the Director would influence us or our findings. The Director's condemnation of the report was supposed to be the final word on our fieldwork and findings—a reinforcement of project narratives of success and organizational solidarity, even if some fieldworkers confirmed our findings and others ignored them.

Mosse (2005) suggests that management mobilizes available channels within the organization to object to the findings of ethnographies that run counter to authorized accounts. The mobilization of these channels should itself be regarded as a key development intervention (Mosse 2005). In our case, fieldworkers, not management, mobilized their networks to raise objections to our report and perhaps to their colleagues' positive responses. If a male fieldworker had not gotten so riled that he threatened to tell the Director (and most likely did tell), it is possible the Director would have never read the report at all. If the Director had not read the report, our final meeting would have been cordial, and we would have considered our experience with dissemination as a minor learning experience. Instead, the upsetting report set in motion communication networks that we had suspected between Meghwal fieldworkers but had not witnessed until that time (O'Reilly n.d.b). Fieldworkers played the role previously reported by Mosse (2005) and Nagar (2006) as that of management. Their response indicates the importance of fieldworkers in supporting dominant, internal understandings of NGOs and the techniques they use to exercise what power they have in the organization during the research process. In addition to Mosse's (2001) conclusion that individuals can act as nodes where information stops in order to thwart research, we found that they also act to facilitate flows for the same purpose.

We knew, and fieldworkers also knew, that during our field visits they could respond to the report with relative freedom. Similar to Gibson-Graham's (1994) and Hemment's (2007) participatory action research, our process of feedback and dissemination created a discursive space (Hyatt and Lyon-Callo 2003) for new and different ideas about NGO work to emerge from employees themselves (see also O'Reilly 2007). Away from the Director and most colleagues, fieldworkers wanted to debate with us and each other when we met with them in the field. Those we met individually, outside the NGO "community," spoke most freely (Gibson-Graham 1994). The research process in those spaces helped fieldworkers produce counter-narratives which were circulated, with equal measures of success and backlash, through their own, and the researchers' networks inside the organization. Until a fieldworker informed him about our report, the Director did not suspect our research project of producing a counter-narrative. He recognized how far these discursive spaces had slipped his arena of control only upon reading the counter-narrative that they produced. This explains why he chastised us for taking

advantage of his generous "gift" of free field access to us during the research period. His rebuke signals his awareness of the control mechanism entailed in enabling or restricting access to space (Mosse 2001).

In the final meeting, the Director enacted a performance to all attending of an authoritative monologue that delivered the message that the only acceptable interpretation of Rural Power's work was his own. We also witnessed during the final meeting that staff displayed a new-found solidarity, in contrast to their multiple responses in the field.[4] Fieldworkers may have talked openly with us in those spaces, but during the final conversation, the Director held center stage. He presumed to speak for all, and the silence of the other fieldworkers seemed to indicate their agreement with his assessment. The only two fieldworkers who did speak up joined the Director in making loud arguments against Rural Power turning into a Meghwal organization and its responsibility for burdensome reporting procedures. One of them demanded, "Tell us the name of those fieldworkers who informed you about the NGO becoming a Meghwal organization." We refused, of course.

Anthropologists and ethnographers across disciplines have recognized that there are multiple perspectives on one situation, and, therefore, there is no one truth that can be told (Gibson-Graham 1994; Keith 1992). While fieldworkers commented on the change in the caste character of the organization, they remarked in their interviews about caste-based prejudice in villages. Nonetheless, fieldworkers never accused us of writing a false report; they complained that our claims were too bold. What was problematic, especially for the Director as chief controller of information, was that we used the data on staff to tell a story about an NGO becoming Meghwal. As stated above, information is tightly controlled inside development organizations to produce a narrative that neatly links reality to work that the organization is already doing (Mosse 2001). For example, the Director himself acknowledged that the majority of fieldworkers were Meghwal because being lower caste themselves and having experienced poverty, they could better identify with the needs of Rural Power clients who are also lower caste and poor. He acknowledged that the organization was hiring more Meghwal workers, but he justified it as hiring the proper people for the job (O'Reilly, forthcoming). Our recognition of a majority Meghwal staff touched a nerve because of how it called into question the organization's neutrality and professionalism. The organization prided itself on fairness and avoiding corruption. A suggested lack of neutrality meant unprofessionalism; it hinted that the organization was more interested in the benefit of its "own" people than the empowerment of their constituents.

The seamless, authorized narrative within an organization is disrupted when a researcher returns to the field to engage in a continuous dialogue which those in power want to discontinue or avoid. Processes of feedback and dissemination remind the participants and the researcher that a report is not a "finished" document. Continuing to hear from staff, to debate openly, to take notes, to enable explanation on both sides, serves both to undermine singular

project narratives and to remind project actors that they have power to withhold or share information (Sutherland 2004). Our dissemination process was able to subvert regular channels of information exchange and demonstrated that multiple voices—contradictory and otherwise—could be heard. Before everyone left the final meeting, Kathleen reminded the fieldworkers that she returned in order to hear their opinions about the report. She asked, "Why would I come back to give you copies of the report if my intention was to malign the organization or its staff?" Staff nodded in agreement as the Director encouraged them to get into vehicles and head to their next destination. They may not have accepted our findings, but they could not deny that we had returned and sought their opinions. In contrast to the Director's desire to silence us, her appeal reminded those present that authorized narratives are powerful, but are only one of the multiple narratives within an organization. Continuing dialogue was important not only for furnishing ethical findings but also for providing informants the opportunity to use these findings at their own discretion.

Conclusions

Feminist scholars have deliberated extensively on the researcher's unequal, power-laden position vis-á-vis the research subject, and, therefore, have sought to change the nature of investigators' *relationship to* their subject matter in order to enable greater equality in the research process (Strathern 1987 original italics). As England (1994) finds, both the researcher and the researched structure the research process through their words and actions. Many researchers may enter the field aware of their own position of power, but gradually recognize fieldwork as a process in which the researcher is also under the control of the researched (see Sutherland 2004). For many politically-motivated ethnographers, speaking "truth" (defined as informants' statements about their organization and work *and* the researcher's own analysis) to power is a primary element of fieldwork; therefore, when dissemination occurs, there is going to be a backlash. As noted above, these tensions are inevitable, but they can be managed by demonstrating by example that there is room for disagreement and dialogue. A critical analysis of an organization's response to the researcher's findings is conscious of the power dynamic between the researcher and the researched that informs the exchange, both during research and during dissemination.

This paper contributes to a small body of literature on the importance and difficulty of feedback and dissemination processes. In our case, the process of feedback and dissemination created spaces of opportunity where thoughts about practices and problems within the NGO could be exchanged. As Bebbington (2000) encourages, our findings contribute to development theorizing by revealing where and when in institutions there is space to operate beyond discursive and practical constraints. The decision to meet fieldworkers in small groups outside of the main office allowed a variety

of views to be aired. Dialogue may lead both researchers and project staff to gain new insights and self-awareness into project processes and organizational power dynamics. While there will always be those who resist dialogue in favor of monologue, overall, NGO staff are keen to learn and open to alternative perspectives on their work. Furthermore, emphasizing open-ended dialogue over monologue subverts hierarchies of information and power in NGOs, since audible counter-narratives run contrary to most organizations' way of functioning. Dissemination presents the possibility to find spaces where multiple perspectives on the dominant organizational narrative can be returned and heard by NGO staff. As feminist ethnographers have offered, it is not necessary to resolve contradictions and tensions because these tensions can be productive of new ways of thinking about the self, organization, and work.

While the backlash initially indicated that our goals (clarity, sharing, and collaboration) as feminist ethnographers had failed, we were encouraged by the individual and group interactions we also had. We realized our goal of dissemination by contributing to open-ended discussions within both NGOs—discussions that included already existing counter-narratives and that revealed new ones. We acknowledge the roadblocks to dissemination, but find that the process enabled greater insights into the work of development NGOs for both the researcher and the researched.

Epilogue

In July 2008, Kathleen and Monika revisited Rural Power to meet staff and to receive feedback on a revised final report that was sent to the organization after the dissemination process. The revised report included points of disagreement raised by staff and added nuance to findings. On that day, Madhu, one of the two founders of the organization, was present at the office. She told Kathleen that she had read the original report and heard about what happened during our meeting with staff the previous December. She said she agreed with every point in the report, including the one about Rural Power becoming a Meghwal organization, and stated that she felt nothing in the report was provocative or offensive. She saw the report as factual, depicting the changing face of the organization and its staff. She criticized the staff, including the Director, her colleague and friend of several years, for dismissing it as nonsense.

Notes

[1]The feminist geographic notion of the "field" is not a place or a people but a social terrain constructed through everyday experiences, bodies, and problems (Nast 1994).

[2]We offer different perspectives because Kathleen is a white American woman, a feminist, and a geography professor who has worked in Rajasthan for over 12 years, and Richa is an Indian woman of Punjabi descent, a feminist, and an anthropology Ph.D. student who visited Rajasthan for the first time in December 2007.

[3]Personal bias influenced decisions about where field staff were posted, how they were treated, etc. There was no policy of equal treatment of fieldworkers by management, nor did fieldworkers expect it. We were aware of this when writing, and exercised extreme caution not to reveal anything that could cause fieldworkers harm. No one came to harm as far as we know. Our writing did not put anyone in danger of losing his/her job, nor was the dissertation or final report likely to affect a closure of the project (Ferguson 1990).

[4]Certainly, discussions in field offices were influenced by hierarchies there, but no one was present who could dismiss anyone from the organization. However, no one was able to voice an opposing opinion to the Director's own during the final altercation in his presence.

References

Anupamlata, Ramsheela, Reshma Ansari, Vibha Bajpayee, Shashibala, Shashi Vaish, Subala, Richa Singh, and Richa Nagar
2004 Sangtin Yatra: Sat Zindagiyon Mein Lipta Nari Vimarsh. Sitapur, India: Sangtin.

Bebbington, Anthony
2000 Reencountering Development: Livelihood Transitions and Place Transformations in the Andes. Annals of the Association of American Geographers 90(3):495-520.

Corbridge, Stuart, Glyn Williams, Manoj Srivastava, and René Véron
2005 Seeing the State: Governance and Governmentality in India. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Drybread, Kristen
2006 Sleeping with One Eye Open: The Perils of Fieldwork in a Brazilian Juvenile Prison. *In* Dispatches from the Field: Neophyte Ethnographers in a Changing World. Andrew Gardner and David M. Hoffman, eds. Pp. 33-52. Long Grove, Ill.: Waveland Press Inc.

England, Kim
1994 Getting Personal: Reflexivity, Positionality, and Feminist Research. Professional Geographer 46(1):80-89.

Ferguson, James
1990 The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.

Fonow, Mary M., and Judith A. Cook
2005 Feminist Methodology: New Applications in the Academy and Public Policy. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 30(4):2212-2236.

Gibson-Graham, Julie Katherine
1994 "Stuffed If I Know!": Reflections on Post-modern Feminist Social Research. Gender, Place, and Culture 1(2):205-224.

Hemment, Julie
2007 Public Anthropology and the Paradoxes of Participation: Participatory Action Research and Critical Ethnography in Provincial Russia. Human Organization 66(3):301-314.

Hsiung, Ping-chun.
1996 Between Bosses and Workers: The Dilemma of a Keen Observer and a Vocal Feminist. *In* Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork. Diane Wolf, ed. Pp. 122-137. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Huisman, Kimberly
2008   "Does This Mean You're Not Going to Come Visit Me Anymore?": An Inquiry into an Ethics of Reciprocity and Positionality in Feminist Ethnographic Research. Sociological Inquiry 78(3):372-396.

Hyatt, Susan, and Vincent Lyon-Callo
2003   Introduction: Anthropology and Political Engagement. Urban Anthropology 32(2):133-146.

Keith, Michael
1992   Angry Writing: (Re)presenting the Unethical World of the Ethnographer. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 10(5):551-568.

Lal, Jayati
1996   Situating Locations: The Politics of Self, Identity, and "Other" in Living and Writing the Text. In Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork. Diane Wolf, ed. Pp. 185-214. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Lewis, David
1998   Partnership as Process: Building an Institutional Ethnography of an Inter-Agency Aquaculture Project in Bangladesh. In Development as Process: Concepts and Methods for Working with Complexity. David Mosse, John Farrington, and Alan Rew, eds. Pp. 94-110. London: Routledge.

Mosse, David
2001   Social Research in Rural Development Projects. In Inside Organizations: Anthropologists at Work. David N. Gellner and Eric Hirsch, eds. Pp. 157-182. Oxford, United Kingdom: Berg.
2005   Cultivating Development: An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice. London: Pluto Press.

Nagar, Richa
1997   Exploring Methodological Borderlands Through Oral Narratives. In Thresholds in Feminist Geography: Difference, Methodology, Representation. John Paul Jones, Heidi J. Nast, and Susan M. Roberts, eds. Pp. 203-224. New York: Rowman and Littlefield.
2006   Postscript: NGOs, Global Feminisms, and Collaborative Border-crossings. In Playing with Fire: Feminist Thought and Activism through Seven Lives in India. Sangtin Writers, ed. Pp. 169-197. New Delhi, India: Zubaan.

Nast, Heidi J.
1994   Women in the Field: Feminist Methodologies and Theoretical Perspectives. Professional Geographer 46(1):54-66.

National Science Foundation
2007   Merit Review Broader Impacts Criterion: Representative Activities. URL:<http://www.nsf.gov/pubs/gpg/broaderimpacts.pdf> (December 21, 2008). (December 21, 2008).

O'Reilly, Kathleen
2004   Developing Contradictions: Women's Participation as a Site of Struggle Within an Indian NGO. The Professional Geographer 56(2):174-184.

2006   Women Fieldworkers and the Politics of Participation. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 31(4):1075-1098.
2007   Where the Knots of Narrative are Tied and Untied: The Dialogic Production of Gendered Development Spaces in Rajasthan, India. Annals of the Association of American Geographers 97(3):613-634.
2010   Now is the Time for the Smart: Adapting and Adopting Neoliberal Development. Antipode. In press.
forthcoming   "We Are Not Contractors": Professionalizing the Interactive Service Work of NGOs in Rajasthan, India. Economic Geography. In press.

Pasquini, Margaret, and Oluwashola Olayinan
2004   The Researcher and the Field Assistant: A Cross-disciplinary, Cross-cultural Viewing of Positionality. Interdisciplinary Science Reviews 29(1):24-36.

Polzer, Tara
2007   Disseminating Research Findings in Migration Studies: Methodological Considerations. Forced Migration Studies Programme Methodological Working Paper Series No. 6. Johannesburg, South Africa: University of the Witwatersrand.

Singh, Richa, and Richa Nagar
2006   In the Aftermath of Critique: The Journey After Sangtin Yatra. In Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies of India. Saraswati Raju, M. Satish Kumar, and Stuart Corbridge, eds. Pp. 298-319. London: Sage.

Smith, Neil
1993   Homeless/Global: Scaling Places. In Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change. Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, George Robertson, and Lisa Tuckner, eds. Pp. 87-119. London: Routledge.

Stacey, Judith
1988   Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography? Women's Studies International Forum 11(1):21-27.

Strathern, Marilyn
1987   An Awkward Relationship: The Case of Feminism and Anthropology. Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 12(2):21-27.

Sutherland, Elissa
2004   In-the-Field Politics: Multiple Voices of Outworkers and Researcher. Australian Geographer 35(2):161-168.

Thomas, Robyn, and Annette Davies
2005   What Have the Feminists Done for Us? Feminist Theory and Organizational Resistance. Organization 12(5):711-740.

van Blerk, Lorraine, and Nicola Ansell
2007   Participatory Feedback and Dissemination With and For Children: Reflections From Research With Young Migrants in Southern Africa. Children's Geographies 5(3):313-324.