

IIAS announcements

Winner of the 2015 IIAS National Master's Thesis Prize in Asian Studies

NORA WILDENAUER is a Visual Anthropologist and documentary filmmaker, who shot her first film on Flores, Indonesia. On 16 December 2015, IIAS awarded Wildenauer the 2015 IIAS National Master's Thesis Prize in Asian Studies for her multi-media thesis: 'Development brokers in a relocation project in Flores. A multi-media thesis about translations, interpretations and contestation' (supervisors: Metje Postma and (late) Steef Meyknecht, Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology, Leiden University). An integral part of Wildenauer's thesis is the documentary film 'Fighting for Nothing to Happen' for which she also received the award 'Best Graduate Student Film' (American Society for Visual Anthropology, AAA). For more information about Nora Wildenauer's work, see: www.visualdevelopment.eu.



Michel Foucault's discourse analysis. Further, the combination of audio-visual methods with other modes of anthropological knowledge production allowed an understanding of brokerage that did not refuse contradictions, complexities and multiplicities.¹ The use and analysis of audio-visual material also revealed that, whereas scholars might be able to distinguish rationales behind certain realms into dichotomous categories which then unfortunately are studied separately – such as development and religion – practices overlap and categories merge.² Consequently, by mapping various entry and exit points to my research through the insertion of sequences of the documentary film, additional clips, photographs, maps and emails in the text of the multimedia-PDF, I allow the user of my thesis to make circular, layered connections between multiple interpretations of the film, the topics, and historic and socio-political contexts and thus pay attention to points of connection and heterogeneity in the discursive arena of *relokasi*.

The careful analysis of my material revealed important findings about brokerage in particular and development in general. My research showed that ambivalence between discourse and social 'reality' produces political actors who cannot claim fixed positions. Instead, positions are constantly fought over, ascribed and denied.³ In his roles – broker and priest – my main informant and protagonist was able to tie together many diversely positioned actors, himself serving as an example for the capacity of brokers to operate between shifting, unset categories. The position of brokers is thus a tenuous and fluctuating one, and brokerage and translation processes do not entail a "coherent set of practices but a set of practices that produces coherence".⁴ Constrained by external, even global, discourses such as 'good governance', all actors – and not only brokers – within the development encounter are able to evade these constraints through a series of different translations, strategies and shifting identities. In other words, the agency of actors within networks is shaped by discourses but simultaneously reshapes these discourses by transforming them so that they fit their own objectives. Since development brokers are operating on the boundary between the grand discourses of governments or international agencies and the realities of life on the ground, focusing on their central role can provide some major insights into development. The good reception of my thesis proves that following an empirical pathway that recognizes and responds to the complex situations and positions brokers are entangled in, combined with audio-visual methods, provides a legitimate way to do so.

Researching brokerage with visual methods – turning development into a category of practice

Nora Wildenauer

WHEN THE VOLCANO Gunung Rokatenda on the island Pulau Palu'e in eastern Indonesia erupted and caused five deaths in August 2013, some islanders were given shelter in temporary refugee camps in the district capital Maumere on Flores. The government of Sikka and local NGOs wanted to permanently relocate the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) to other places in the region. One of these relocation projects was planned on the neighbouring island Pulau Besar, supported by a local Christian NGO.

I entered this field to investigate how development brokers translate interests between different actors, entities and scales, and how these translations influence the brokers' positioning towards the government. I included audio-visual methods in my research design to gain additional insights about relocation practices and performative translations. Since I had been in contact with the Christian NGO before my departure, my expectations and research proposal were based on the understanding that government and non-government organizations collaborated under clearly assigned responsibilities, and that the IDPs were about to be relocated to the island of Pulau Besar. However, when I arrived with my camera in Flores,

I soon discovered that this information was a reflection of global development discourses such as 'good governance', but not an appraisal of the actual situation. Instead, the relocation was heavily contested and constituted an area of conflict. There was little coordination within government departments, between different levels of government or between government and non-government actors. Moreover, farmers of the host-community on Pulau Besar claimed the land to be theirs while the regional Forest Ministry declared that the site was situated within a conservation area and therefore belonged to the state. Furthermore, government money seemed to have disappeared and monitoring of the project was difficult. In short: the project was stagnating, and frustrated IDPs waited for the clearing of the land under bad conditions in temporary shelters. In this contested setting, my main informant, a Catholic priest and employee of the Christian NGO, negotiated the politics of relocation by creating networks out of heterogeneous actors, and by unifying supporters to push the project forward.

Methodology

Choosing an actor-centred and non-normative approach that used audio-visual methods to focus on relocation practices and acts of translation turned out to be a wise decision: I was able to connect with and understand the agendas of various important actors within the discursive arena of *relokasi* without constructing and reinforcing homogeneous discursive categories. To acknowledge the individual agency of my informants within networks, while showing that those networks are connected with external power structures such as the discourse of 'good governance', I combined the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT) promoted by Bruno Latour with

Nora Wildenauer

(www.visualdevelopment.eu)

References

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- Li, T.M. 2007. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development, and the Practice of Politics*, Durham: Duke University Press, pp.157.
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IIAS National Master's Thesis Prize 2016

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IIAS offers an annual award for the best national master's thesis in the field of Asian Studies, in the Netherlands

THE AWARD

- The honorary title of 'Best Master's Thesis' in Asian studies
- A maximum three month stipend to work at IIAS, in order to write a PhD project proposal or a research article

CRITERIA

- The master's thesis should be in the broad field of Asian Studies, in the humanities or social sciences
- The thesis must have been written at a Dutch university
- Only master's theses which have been graded with an 8 or higher are eligible
- The thesis must have been evaluated in the period 1 October 2015 – 30 September 2016
- Both students and their supervisors can apply

SUBMISSION

Please submit four hard copies of the master's thesis and a cover letter including the grade awarded and your contact details

DEADLINE

1 October 2016, 9.00 am
Submissions should be sent to:
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