

Hermeneutical Justice in Energy Research

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- Does the provision of ‘modern energy services’ risk devaluing and neglecting ‘other ways’ of understanding energy flows, needs and capacities?
- Is there a danger of misrepresenting local livelihood values and cultural practices of informal resilience systems when technically skewed projects arrive in places that expert outsiders perceive as infrastructural *terra nullius*?

- insights from attention to non-Western ontologies of agency and change in the energy underpinnings of livelihoods that are increasingly characterized by crises in local environmental sustainability, and tensions in institutions that have been affected by the power of fossil fuel industry and infrastructures,
- (Plan for article about) translations that are actively being made between old and new forms of energy knowledges in both rural and urban contexts

The early usage of "hermeneutics" places it within the boundaries of the sacred. A divine message must be received with implicit uncertainty regarding its truth. This ambiguity is an irrationality; it is a sort of madness that is inflicted upon the receiver of the message. Only one who possesses a rational method of interpretation (i.e., a hermeneutic) could determine the truth or falsity of the message.



Overcoming Cognitive Marginalisation

- James Scott calls the “simplifying state” – ‘matching brief, common phrases in vernacular tongues with brief, common phrases in economic jargon or its own bureaucratese ‘ (Cornerhouse 2013:79)
- ***Disadvantaged groups are often unable to press for translations that would advance their interests or rights.***
- ‘When bureaucrats or NGOs interpret energy justice as fair distribution of lumps of big-E Energy, they can expect opposition from communities insisting on a conflicting meaning of justice. If they concede that under some interpretations of “justice”, the further development of big-E Energy itself, with all its exploitative dynamics, is unjust, but draw the conclusion that the alternative is an “unchanging traditional culture”, they can count on deep resistance to that interpretation, too.’ (p.79)

- Miranda Fricker - “unequal hermeneutical participation”,(Miranda Fricker, 2010. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Oxford University Press, Oxford)
- ‘disadvantaged groups are “hermeneutically marginalized” – unable to press for interpretations or translations that would best nurture and defend their livelihoods and evolving interests, and whose recognition in the public arena would also enrich the “collective understanding”’ (p.80)
- Indigenous or peasant communities, for example, may well have terms that they feel to be equal to what they mean when speaking among themselves about “energy”, yet risk loss of credibility in a public space whose politics of translation militates against them. This will be the case whether they are indigenous groups fighting to make it understood that their conceptions of “energy” diverge from that of governments and private corporations; commoners nursing an inchoate sense that there are alternative small-e “energies” that are incompatible with the big-E Energy around which most “alternatives” discussions revolve

- common among mainstream NGOs to believe ‘that languages are interchangeable screens that come between humans and an undistorted external reality – that vernacular or indigenous “energies”, if they are to be given their due, can and must be translated into the language of capital under the conditions of translation politics in force in public spaces’ (p.80)
- Boaventura de Sousa at World Social Forum
- “Translation is not a mere technique. Even its obvious technical components and the way in which they are applied in the course of the translation process must be the object of democratic deliberation. Translation is a dialogical and political work . . . global social justice is not possible without global cognitive justice.”

- ‘hegemony of the subtly discriminatory divide that underlies most energy alternatives discussions, according to which scarcity, supply, demand and technology are tough analytical issues for brainy people to talk about in support of more emotional (though admittedly politically effective) characters who tend to get obsessed with squishier questions of colonialism, racism and oppression.’ (p.83-4)
- persistent problem of structural disrespect that pervasively hampers analysis and communication across the “energy alternatives” debate worldwide...
- (re- UK Govt advisor David MacKay) ‘talking about different energy alternatives is fine, but only as long as they all “add up” according to criteria laid down by an aggressive regime of scarcity and capital accumulation.’
- ‘Breaking out of the cage in which the industrial practices identified as “energy” have tended to confine the debate, and understanding these practices as being constituted by a process of crisis’

Nepal research on biogas in an indigenous community in Nepal

- Main problems are to do with historic structures of development injustice, a reluctance to treat the environment as connected to civic and human rights, and the control of government agencies and NGO energy sector by members of dominant groups who do not perceive energy inequalities among non-indigenous as normal.

How to apply these ideas of small 'e' energies to ethnographies of livelihoods, and the lived realities of the people we are intending to help benefit from SE4All?

- Issues of how to recognize and interpret agency and empowerment
- Sahu, Jeffery and Nakkeeran 2016 ('Contextualising Women's Agency')
"the relationship between education and use of resistance agency is not so straightforward"
- "The majority of participants (22) used *complicit* agency in their marital negotiations, because of normative restrictions, lack of resources, emotional/family circumstances, fear, or coercion. Many, including those who were educated, remained silent during the marriage negotiations and did not challenge the status quo."
(2016:11)

Sascha Fuller 'Work, Gender, and Generational Change: An ethnography of human-environment relations in a Bahun village, Nepal'

- Sita Ram's buffalo – the four-legged energy force without which her life loses rhythm and purpose, and which provides the motor to daily life, to caring for the land and environment, and feeding health food and drink to her household. Her husband and sons (gone to Australia for PhDs) try to persuade her to abandon this symbol of a peasant livelihood.
- their mother says “When we are in trouble whom do we call...there is no-one who can do the work...I am worried about how we can stay here. I don't worry about anything else...We have to ask others to cut grass, we even have to ask others to fetch water...That has become hard. That is all I can say about the environment” (Fuller 2016:132).
- Besnier and Narotsky 'Crisis, Value and Hope' *Current Anthropology* 2014.