

Linje Manyozo, **Communicating Development With Communities**, Abingdon, UK, and New York, NY: Routledge, 2017, 166 pp., \$150.00 (hardcover), \$39.95 (paperback), \$35.96 (eBook).

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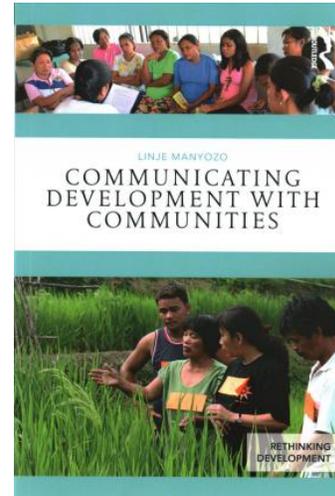
Unlike Linje Manyozo's (2012a, 2012b) previous books, **Communicating Development With Communities** brings to the foreground the author's exploration of his theoretical orientation and critique of the dominant development paradigm. Readers find these articulations only in the introduction or in the postscript of his previous books. Writing this latest work, according to Manyozo, has been a journey of searching for his subjective voice that was once "captured by and smothered under dominant discourses and epistemologies of development theory and practice" (p. 26).

Published at a time when a resurgence of authoritarianism and populism undermines democratic institutions across the world and curtails the basic rights of those at the margins, *Communicating Development With Communities* is a timely piece intended for educators, students, and practitioners of communication for development, especially those who make decisions in local and international development organizations and in higher education institutions.

The title of the book is nowhere near as defiant as its content. Replete with obscene words and metaphors, *Communicating Development With Communities* is Manyozo's confession of complicity with the institutionalization of oppression within the discourse and practice of communication for development. The aim is magnanimous: Carve spaces for a transformative communication, which he calls "deliberative development," through a critical examination of repressive worldviews, knowledge systems, language, and sociopolitical relations embedded in institutional arrangements and policies of development.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1 discusses the author's theoretical standpoint, which borrows heavily from the works of Latin American political thinkers Paulo Freire, Gustavo Gutierrez, and Arturo Escobar, as well as from the more recent, reflexive works of Robert Chambers, and from other notable critical thinkers from the Global South. Although Manyozo's approach to dismantling development is similar to Escobar's (1995) Foucauldian analysis of development, the author accomplishes this disenchantment project through Pierre Bourdieu's notions of field and symbolic power and through his idiosyncratic theoretical orientation rooted in his personal narratives. He also talks about the symbolic making of an oppressor and an oppressive system through normative and institutionalized mechanisms in development organization settings. Of notable importance here is the autoethnographic account illustrating how the same politico-institutional structure reproduces a type of oppressor that Manyozo calls the "internal expert."

In Part 2, the author assembles his ideas about the methods of engaging with the oppressed. Critical to this reconstruction is Gayatri Spivak (1988) and her seminal work in subaltern studies. He also



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brings back a familiar articulation of communication for development's evolution, theoretical approaches, and schools of thought (Manyozo, 2006, 2007, 2012a). What is noticeable in this latest work is how Manyozo criticizes academic institutions within the "development communication model" as instrumental to the promotion of Western neoliberal models of communication for development. For instance, the University of the Philippines Los Baños, which in his earlier writings (Manyozo 2006, 2012a) was considered as a school of thought that promotes an integrative framework of communication for development, is now being described in the new book as highly influenced by the evolution of Western development theory (p. 99).

Toward the end of the book, the author ratchets up his analysis by using fiction and literary genre in an attempt to reveal the invisibility of poverty and the epistemological barriers that prevent scholars and practitioners from understanding local communities in their own terms. In the last chapter, "Pedagogy of Listening," he proposes three types of pedagogical listening. The first type is "listening to evidence." According to him, an evidence-based and holistic approach to designing, implementing, and evaluating a development project can reduce experts' bias toward ready-made solutions and default assumptions about a development issue and toward the people affected by the problem. The second type is "listening to ourselves," which refers to a change agent's constant self-reflection that allows others, particularly the oppressed and the powerless, to critique widely accepted knowledge and the so-called expert opinion. The third type is confusing, as it resembles the second: Manyozo labels it as "listening as a form of speaking." "Speaking," in this sense, implies the capacity of facilitators to know where they stand and to affirm their commitment to a set of beliefs and ideals while they engage with others in a transformative, dialogical form of communication.

What did the book accomplish? At best, Manyozo's latest work opens up a discussion of the ethics of communication for development work. It invites scholars and practitioners of this field to engage in the same "epistemological vigilance" (Bourdieu 2004, p. 91) that the author has subjected himself to and to examine the ethos that makes human communication inseparable from a transformative and emancipatory development. At this time when the field of communication for development is marked by theoretical disjunctures (Thomas, 2014, p. 8), the values of finding communion with communities that are to benefit from development pursuits could be a unifying force for scholars and practitioners, especially when the times call for a more coherent voice.

In addition, by interrogating the institutional politics and organizational culture within the network of international development organizations and by confronting his own personal struggles as a self-confessed accomplice of this oppressive system, Manyozo builds a scaffold of methodological perspectives and strategies that departs from the instrumentalist, strategic approaches that continue to dominate communication for development practice.

Consistent with his critical stance, Manyozo proposes a communication for development research and practice grounded on people's history, culture, and experience. He painstakingly tries to construct the "pedagogy of listening," a framework that consists of a phenomenological introspection of one's standpoint, unobtrusive methods of getting closer to subalterns' interpretive lenses, and emancipatory methods that amplify people's sense of agency in their quest to (re)claim their place in the world. Bearing in mind the broader sociocultural and political contexts in which such research or practice takes place, Manyozo cautions

specialists in the field to guard against a myopic view of the community, to take a critical realist view and listen to empirical evidence, and to understand the institutional mechanisms of mainstreaming subalterns' voices so as to better advance people's interests.

Is this a relevant extension of a conversation with Freire, Gutierrez, Escobar, Spivak, and Chambers or merely a reiteration of familiar concepts in critical approaches to communication for development? It seems paradoxical that the strength of the book, in terms of its core message of fostering reflexivity and praxis to deconstruct and recreate a more transformative and empowering communication for development, is also its weakness. The book falls short in criticizing its own worldview, as it fails to adequately respond to commonplace beliefs (1) that people's participation has been coopted to legitimize structures of oppression, and (2) that critical scholars often fail to transform theories into policy and practice. His suggestion, for instance, of accommodating subalterns' voices in formal, vertical planning processes where such an act only gives the oppressed a "feeling of being listened to" (p. 137) is simply weak in translating the rhetoric of people's participation and empowerment to transformative action. He labels his proposed alternative regime "deliberative development," but the meaning of the term remains unclear in the attempt to radicalize theorizing in the field. The author, for instance, could have clarified the similarities of his theoretical ideas to deliberative democracy, the culture-centered approach (Dutta 2011), and citizen perspective that are currently shaping communication for development discourse (cf. Tufte 2017).

In Manyozo's defense, the use of autoethnographic writing and literary genre in reclaiming his subaltern voice is commendable; it is in those autoethnographic narratives where Manyozo's original thinking is most distinct. However, I must say that he could have pushed the autoethnographic writing even further by confronting the painful and often unspoken moments of oppression and liminality that he himself experienced as a scholar of communication for development from the Global South. Such critical autoethnography would allow Manyozo to continue his journey of finding his theoretical standpoint with much clarity.

In spite of these weaknesses, what is clear to me is that *Communicating Development With Communities* contributes, not insignificantly, by securing the place of reflexivity in communication for development theory and practice.

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