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In and out of focus

ABSTRACT

In this article, I trace the history of focus groups as a method and consider how they produce and filter knowledge, interaction, and engagement; their nature as communicative settings; and their political–ideological associations. I analyze focus groups conducted for a primary health care project in Kenya that involved health officials, Washington, DC- and Nairobi-based staff, a U.S. photographer, a U.S. anthropologist, and local women from the project area. This case provides insights into knowledge production in the context of the transnational development industry, how anthropological methods are incorporated and represented in the process, and the epistemological grounds of ethnographic methods. [*research methods, knowledge production, focus groups, development, Kenya*]

When I die, I want to come back with real power. I want to come back as a member of a focus group.

> —Roger Ailes, head of Fox News, former political consultant for Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and George H. W. Bush

Focus groups are the crack cocaine of market research. You get hooked on them, and you're afraid to make a move without them.

> —Dev Patnaik, founder of Jump Associates research firm

What makes focus groups addictive, and how do they produce what a media mogul regards as "real power"? Both Ailes and Patnaik, quoted above, comment from the realm of market research, but focus groups are a widely used research method with roots in the social sciences. They are seen as a source of information to help interpret and explain quantitative surveys, a means of eliciting statements and narratives about personal experiences and attitudes, and a discovery procedure to identify recurrent themes and idioms relevant to a research topic. Part of the battery of "rapid methods" for evaluation and assessment, focus groups are both faster to implement and less expensive than ethnography, though some ask whether they serve mainly to validate the concepts of those commissioning them (Gross 2003:2; McFarland 2001:6).

Focus groups have yet to become prevalent in cultural anthropology, bastion of ethnographic research, though some anthropology textbooks and courses on research methods discuss them (Bernard 2000:207–211, 2002:224–230, 2006:232–239). They have become more standard in medical anthropology, applied anthropology, and some work on media and cultural consumption (e.g., Dávila 2001:181–215), and anthropologists employed in development, advertising, and elsewhere outside the academy also use focus groups in research. Focus groups and ethnographic research alike are grounded epistemologically in communication and social interaction—they produce knowledge through various kinds of discursive engagement and other modes of communication.

"The general consensus in anthropology nowadays is that a fieldworker creates knowledge in interaction with the people in the field: not objectivity, nor pure subjectivity, but intersubjectivity is what an anthropologist should strive for" (Knibbe and Versteeg 2008:52).[1] Yet some procedures and assumptions defining focus groups seem at odds with, if not antithetical to, the ethnographic enterprise.

Focus groups are, by definition, artificially created settings for interaction, ideally among strangers, and in some cases are even observed through one-way mirrors.[2] Patnaik describes focus groups as "'a customer terrarium, with people behind glass,' much the same way plants and lizards are taken out of their natural surroundings and observed for scientific purposes" (Wellner 2003:29). Looking beyond focus groups in this strict sense, however, many researchers have found group interviews and discussions or group listening or viewing sessions to be effective in ethnographic and historical research—whether group sessions are planned or more impromptu and improvised. Like participant-observation and life-history interviews, group discussions can resemble and be part of more natural daily settings and interactions.

Ethnographic knowledge production entails shifts of understanding. Different topics, categories, questions, and relations come in and out of focus as ethnographers develop understanding, experience, and shared histories over time through interaction and discussion with their interlocutors. Concomitantly, researchers may become more aware of the social and cultural filters that shape different expectations, understandings, and patterns of attention. Research methods outline ways to create particular kinds of communicative situations that work with these foci and filters, but they are commonly treated as a toolkit of techniques, almost as algorithms. Rarely is explicit attention paid to the communicative constitution and epistemological foundations that shape the knowledge they can produce.[3] The so-called reflexive turn in 1970s–80s anthropology brought attention to political asymmetries and power relations in research and to rhetorical style and representation in ethnographic writing, producing new writing styles that used dialogic or polyvocal forms, personal narrative, memoir, and other techniques to try to show the relationships and collaborative work involved in ethnographic research. But critical attention at the time seldom extended to reexamining communicative structures and processes embedded in basic methods and the ways they might shape knowledge production. Regarding research methods simply as ready-made tools belies the uncertainty and openness intrinsic to qualitative research and to the production of ethnographic knowledge through communicative interaction. As Michael Jackson observes, an anthropology that makes intersubjectivity central describes "a forcefield of human interaction in which contending needs, modes of consciousness, and values are forever being adjusted, one to the other, without any final resolution. Accordingly, a negative capability has to be built into our ways of thinking" (1998:14). The concept of "negative capability" involves acceptance of uncertainty and intentional open-mindedness. It comes from John Keats, who defined it as a state in which one is "capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact & reason" (Poetry Foundation 2010).

Focus groups seek both to capitalize on the ways that cultural categories, values, and social relations become apparent through conversation and interaction and to control that knowledge production by maintaining a central topical focus and defining a foreshortened period for discussion. To what extent do they accommodate the open-ended "negative capability" Jackson emphasizes, when the moderator is seen as "in control of the session and . . . responsible for the direction that the focus group takes" (Dawson et al. 1992:44), as "an authority figure that can direct the flow of the discussion to ensure . . . the most productive use of time" (Greenbaum 2001:2), and as requiring "the combined skills of an ethnographer, a survey researcher, and a therapist" (Bernard 2000:210)? Are focus groups settings in which people reflect on their experience or performative occasions that may spark insight (Fabian 1990:6–7)? What role do they have in ethnography?

The seeming tensions inherent in the focus group form raise questions about how standard descriptions in the methodological literature relate to focus groups in practice and suggest that considering actual focus groups as communicative situations may also highlight significant aspects of ethnographic knowledge production. What kinds of knowledge are emphasized and identified as focus group outcomes, and how do they relate to different participants? In this article, I consider these questions by, first, reviewing the history and development of focus groups as a research method, to trace their epistemological roots, and, then, examining how the methodological literature defines the focus group as a communicative situation. To relate these questions to focus groups in practice, I then discuss my own experience in the late 1980s as an observer and moderator in focus groups conducted for a primary health care project in Kenya called "Afya ya Jamii" (Kiswahili, family health). The project's immediate goal was to develop educational photo flip-charts for training sessions run by and for women in Machakos District. My involvement in the project came after extended ethnographic research elsewhere in Kenya (Kratz 1994, 2002).

Research methods are not discipline specific, though the varied ways that different disciplines and fields incorporate particular methods are seldom examined (Greenhalgh 1997; Stewart et al. 2007:1, 113). Given the current ubiquity of focus groups beyond the academy—in shaping political campaigns and policy; health services and policy research; business, marketing, and consumer culture; the

development industry; and various other domains—and given increasing reliance on them as a primary research method in some arenas, examining the underpinnings of focus groups offers a revealing glimpse into broader political economies and representations of knowledge production (Helitzer-Allen et al. 1994:75; Luntz 1994a; Saulwick and Muller 2007; Stewart et al. 2007:1; Sullivan 1999; Traulsen et al. 2004; Wellner 2003). Considering focus groups in an international development project offers one such view, a glimpse at how they work on the ground in one corner of a multibillion-dollar worldwide enterprise.[4] The development project is a site and process that mediates among different organizational levels while working toward specific development goals and outcomes. It thus provides an effective locus for considering how focus groups figure in the production, management, and representation of knowledge.

Development projects involve constant mediation and translation among different constituencies, agendas, and priorities and across organizational spheres and scales (e.g., supranational, governmental, NGOs, and public; headquarters and field staff; capital and village; and different groups within communities), mapping and constituting part of the development industry's political economy of knowledge (cf. Cornwall and Brock 2005:1051). This activity entails negotiating diverse communicative conventions—different languages, technical written versus popular visual and verbal presentations, different understandings about appropriate participation, and so forth. The mediations and translations inherent in development practice are always set within particular power dynamics, dynamics that may enhance potential for miscommunication, intimidation, and waste or, alternatively, invite creative and effective engagement. Each translation further involves notions that participants hold about one another, notions that may shape and become embedded in documents and other products of development practice. In the Kenyan case, for instance, implicit models of personhood and of communication that circulate in development ideologies (Karp 2002) supported a distinction between technical knowledge and cultural knowledge that emerged in the development agency's response to focus group reports and defined changes that could be made to the educational product.[5]

The mediations, translations, and power dynamics entailed in development projects have parallels in ethnographic research, though the phases and timing may differ and relations between researcher and academic "headquarters" are often less direct. Nonetheless, production of ethnographic knowledge also involves working with different constituencies, agendas, priorities, and responsibilities that are part of academia's political economy of knowledge (cf. Brenneis 1994, 1999, 2006).[6] For looking more closely at focus group structures and processes of knowledge production in the Kenyan project, ethnographic research can be

an instructive comparative foil. Focus groups become part of the politics of knowledge through the ways they are represented as well. A considerable literature describes them alternatively as scientific method or phenomenological exploration, and they have been invoked in protean claims about grassroots involvement, community ownership, and tapping into emotions, values, and preferences. For tracing their historical and epistemological roots and communicative model, that literature is a good starting place.

Focus group genealogies

As A. F. Robertson notes, "projects, cooperatives, committees—these are arenas in which the complex encounters between state and people take place" (1984:141). These institutionalized arenas include both internal settings devoted to planning and discussion and situations designed to extend outward to gather or disseminate information or to foster communication. Focus groups have become one principal means and setting for such communicative extension, though development literature typically represents them as a qualitative research method, a ready and replicable structural formula for creating contexts for communication and information gathering. Now used extensively in development projects, the focus group is both method and concept, part of development's midlevel realm of implementation. Focus groups are used at various points in actual projects—as exploratory sessions to help local planning and adaptation, to test materials and plans as they are developed, and as part of ongoing intervention evaluation. However, from the perspective of the development enterprise as a whole, they are among the local activities that implement wider policies.

Before adoption in development projects, focus groups effloresced in marketing research as a method for learning about consumers and their motivations, preferences, and choices.[7] Used sporadically in the late 1950s and early 1960s, "the technique began to be used regularly only in the late 1960s and early 1970s and . . . has grown in popularity every year since" (Greenbaum 1993:141). An elaborate industry with career professionals has grown up around focus groups, one that is supported by significant business expenditures on qualitative research ($1.1 billion in 2001) (Stewart et al. 2007:1; Wellner 2003:30). Focus groups have enjoyed a similar burgeoning in the social sciences since the 1980s (Morgan 2002:141–142). Precursors and genealogies that led to this broad focus group boom entwine developments and approaches from sociology, psychology, psychotherapy, and marketing.

While they were still becoming standard practice, focus groups were known by several names—group interviews, group depth interviews, intensive group interviews, focused group interviews, and focus group interviews—until, finally, they were simply called "focus groups"

(Higginbotham and Cox 1979). Articles on focus groups from the early and mid-1970s share several refrains: their new and growing popularity in marketing research, the lack of established guidelines and training in their use, and their potential uses and abuses (Higginbotham and Cox 1979). Articles identified focus group interviews as emerging from three related sources. One was sociologist Robert Merton, often credited with inventing the focus group in his 1940s research on radio audience response.[8] The second was group therapy, as developed in psychotherapy (Bellenger et al. 1976:13; Caruso 1976:55; Goldman 1962:41; Wells 1974:13; Yoell 1974:119). Motivation research prominent in social psychology in the 1940s and 1950s was the final source mentioned. The therapy line of descent later dropped out of some marketing articles, but recent writing pays greater attention to these historical genealogies and interactions, also noting earlier sources from the 1920s and 1930s in psychology and marketing, group therapy, and group interviews in sociology (Stewart et al. 2007).

Whereas focus group use grew steadily in marketing research after 1970, it waxed and waned within sociology. After flourishing in the late 1940s–50s, focus groups fell into disuse as trends emphasized quantitative and experimental methods. The 1980s saw a revival as qualitative methods and phenomenological approaches gained prominence, interest rose in sociocultural difference and diversity, and textbooks presented the method again (Stewart et al. 2007:6). David Morgan argues that, ironically, despite their earlier importance in sociology, the "current use of focus groups in the social sciences arose through contacts with marketing" (2002:142–143), where their popularity had been continuous and where they had been more prevalent in applied work than in academic market research. As marketers had, quantitative social scientists adopted focus groups as a way to develop and refine survey instruments, bringing the method into politics, political science, and other areas by the late 1980s. "By and large, however, established researchers with expertise in qualitative methodology have simply ignored focus groups ... The movement of focus groups into the social sciences thus presents a contrast between rapid acceptance in a variety of applied fields and a more tepid reception from established qualitative researchers" (Stewart et al. 2002:145). This pattern seems to be replicated in cultural anthropology, where focus groups are less common in ethnographic research generally than in medical and applied anthropology.

The goals and assumptions of sociological group interviews and therapy groups fused when they were adopted in marketing research. The former aimed to gather information on a given research topic and defined participants through dimensions relevant to that topic. The goal of the latter was to effect curative changes, with participants defined in part by pathology. Marketing research sought information relevant to consumer needs, preferences, and choices but—like therapy—also sought ways to influence and change behavior. Much literature on focus groups during the 1970s and 1980s provided introductions to the method, offering fairly standardized descriptions and discussions of potential practical problems. Bobby Calder (1977), however, recognized that varied uses and practices had developed. He distinguished exploratory, clinical, and phenomenological applications, each with distinctive emphases, requirements, and relations to scientific models of knowledge. For the most part, however, these were conflated in the basic manual-like approaches that predominated. Since the late 1990s, reflecting over a decade of wider use and popularity, articles about improving or analyzing particular aspects of focus groups have increased, including both more elaborate pedagogical sources and some sustained critical consideration (Fern 2001; Kitzinger 1994; Morgan 1997; Morgan et al. 1998; Traulsen et al. 2004).

Focus groups entered development spheres with the social marketing approach to public health that gained popularity in the early to mid-1970s. Social marketing is "a process, a strategy for persuading adoption of an idea, a practice, a product, or all three ... a strategy [adopted from methodologies of commercial marketing] for translating scientific findings about health and nutrition into education and action programs" (Manoff 1985:35–36).[9] Models defining stages of behavioral change later added considerable nuance to the early social marketing campaigns (Prochaska and Velicer 1997). Development focus groups, then, share marketing's double goal, information and change or, more accurately, information for change. When articles on focus groups in development began appearing, they cited origins in marketing and social science. The name applied to the method also underwent a further permutation, sometimes appearing as "focus group discussions."

The double genealogy and generic understanding allowed focus groups to have two faces, connecting with different rhetorics, ideologies, and representations in development. Roots in sociology and social psychology helped represent focus groups in terms of scientific and experimental models, with associated claims of exactness and disinterested involvement. This face spoke particularly to donors, governmental ministries, and concern with showing clear results and the "economic accountability and efficiency of social programs" (Glenzer 2007:6). Development project proposals espoused scientific models of knowledge far more than humanistic ones emphasizing historical and cultural contingencies. When situations and solutions could be described in terms of interacting variables, the thinking went, results could be predicted, promised with assuring certainty, and replicated. Some development methodology articles on focus groups even retained the vocabulary of experimental psychology (e.g., *external stimuli, reactions to stimuli,* and *behavior change*), sometimes

mixed with marketing terms (e.g., *consumers*) (Folch-Lyon and Trost 1981). As Kent Glenzer notes, program evaluation relied heavily on notions of scientific methods through the 1950s–60s, becoming widely accepted in the 1970s and incorporated into a new Logical Framework Approach to project design. Recognizing shortcomings in overreliance on these modes of evaluation, development workers in the 1980s took a new interest in qualitative methods in project design and evaluation (Glenzer 2007:5–6).[10]

In development arenas, focus groups bridged these trends. The scientific face could be evoked in their early adoptions and descriptions as qualitative method, but the slight name change—from focus group *interviews* to focus group *discussions*—foregrounds another face more aligned with participatory methods and other representations of development practice that came to the fore in the 1980s–90s. This face spoke to concerns with power and process in development projects as well as the need to take account of local concerns, social relations, and histories to achieve sustainable results. *Popular participation* became a buzzword, and some saw focus groups as one means for bringing local input into development practice.

When focus groups and social marketing were being incorporated more widely into development practice, populist philosophies of development were enjoying renewed popularity. Popular participation became a necessary project ingredient for moral, economic, and political reasons, not to mention the belief that it would make development efforts more effective (Rahnema 1990). Such participation could be taken as a sign that interventions were welcomed and relevant, at times even arising from local initiatives. To the existing development enterprise, this trend was a challenge either to reinvent itself, to find better ways to incorporate local involvement and ideas, or at least to look as if it were doing so—a challenge repeated in recent years by shifts toward rights-based frameworks. Indeed, to accommodate the outcry for popular participation, planners had to create it in project sites where it did not yet exist.[11] Focus groups helped them adapt to this new imperative.

Regardless of where and how decisions to do a project were made, focus groups—visible discussions with a range of concerned participants—could be planned into project schedules. Focus group topics were safely circumscribed, but discussion could provide reactions to plans, identify local constraints and incentives that should modify them, and elicit local vocabulary and categories needed to effectively translate project goals and activities. Focus groups could both demonstrate local engagement and guarantee meetings that could be represented as popular participation or community consultation. Further, they were a method suited to situations in which time and resources were limited (McFarland 2001; Suzuki et al. 2007:310). Projects were, no doubt, responsive to focus group discussions, but in ways bounded by the topics raised and the judgments of those who convened the focus groups. Focus groups could help the development enterprise and its practitioners accommodate populist demands without profound structural shifts or changes in the way projects were allocated and planned. This is not to say there were no instances of profound change or cases in which populist ideology led to important shifts in planning and implementation, but to recognize that there were cases like one in Uganda that involved "a 'participatory' process . . . in which participants cannot ask questions, and are told what to do" (Cornwall and Brock 2005:1054).

The proliferation of NGOs was in part a result of demand for popular participation, changing the face and networks of development if not how projects come into being. As the 20th century gave way to the 21st, NGOs continued to proliferate as HIV/AIDS and governance–democratization–civil society became particularly prominent arenas of intervention. Work in both came to rely increasingly on focus groups and workshops as sources of community connection and as modes of training. This expanding network of NGOs and mode of operating in some cases created complex economies and politics that parallel and intersect those defined by state agencies, as well as a group of "interstitial elites" who are a central part of the apparatus through which national and international NGOs work in rural areas (Englund 2006; Smith 2003; Swidler and Watkins 2009).[12]

In the Afya ya Jamii project in Machakos, focus groups were part of an interactive model of communication that crossed organizational levels. The process of developing the photo flip-charts involved, in various combinations and settings, Akamba women from the project area;[13] a trained field coordinator from the area; Washington, DC- and Nairobi-based staff of the Salvation Army; Kenyan health officials from several parts of the country; a U.S. graphic designer–photographer; and me, a U.S. anthropologist then living in Nairobi. Developing messages and selecting photographs for the flip-charts entailed both verbal and visual communication about health issues affecting rural mothers and children. Referential content, cultural connotations and associations, social relationships, and aesthetic judgments all figured in the multiple translations involved. Focus groups were incorporated into the project design as forums to facilitate feedback from Kenyan participants.

Such an interactive model of communication fit with the project's times, a period emphasizing "bottom-up," "grassroots," "participatory" development.[14] Discussion and feedback with various participant groups are essential project components in this model. However, all that can be explicitly planned are situations that may foster discussion, not their success at kindling interchange and commentary. Once projects are planned and completed, agencies can declare them "participatory," regardless of outcome. Similarly, the shape of these fora and their accepted modes of participation require training and adaptation for all involved,

perhaps restricting the kinds of discussion produced. At its best, the interactive model may encourage and enable joint project planning, but differences of power, responsibility, and resources—among participants from different development spheres and within project communities—continue to influence and constrain even projects that seem most participatory on paper. Projects that consistently realize the participation promoted in grassroots ideology are rare. Those that may approach it depend on commitment among all participants to create communicative contexts that work.

Such communicative contexts are often nodes where actors from different development domains come together. As such, they may, indeed, have to be created, or at least shaped to accommodate circumstances and participants' respective communicative conventions. This also makes them potential sites or occasions around which short-term, episodic brokerage relations cluster, a feature in many development projects.[15] Focus groups are a research method, a way to produce information by serving as communicative nodes. As a qualitative method relying on conversational interaction, however, they are susceptible to other representations and may serve other purposes for people involved. They can appeal to several constituencies—even ones that seem contradictory—depending on whether their scientific origins and controls are emphasized or their open-ended, interactive nature. Focus groups are not just interactive, however; they involve intersubjective construction of the very context of communication—participants are also negotiating the languages, genres, and understandings of communication that allow focus group discussions to take place. This may only become evident when the context breaks down (Duranti and Goodwin 1992; Fabian 1979).

Focus groups as communicative contexts

How does such a broad interactive model of communication take shape in particular settings and events, and how might the genealogical roots of focus groups influence communicative assumptions and relations that shape their knowledge production and role in development practice? Despite variations on the name, the generic definition of a focus group has remained roughly the same in articles that span several decades and address both marketing research and development applications. "A focus group consists of a discussion about a topic of particular interest to a client organization among eight to ten people led by a trained moderator. The participants in the group have some common characteristics that relate to the topic discussed in the group" (Greenbaum 1988:10).[16] In development practice and ethnography alike, however, this clear, explicit definition comes to embody several ambiguities.

As communicative contexts, focus groups entail three specific roles: invited participants, moderator, and ob-

server(s).[17] A fourth role—identified in the methodological literature as the client, the researcher, or (more obliquely) the investigation—defines the topics. In marketing research, client and observer(s) can overlap. The elaboration of observer arrangements in marketing focus groups reflects this conjunction; facilities now typically have "back rooms," where up to a dozen observers watch focus groups through a one-way mirror, often while enjoying elaborate refreshments. All these social roles, however, map onto communicative roles in complex ways that shift over the focus group session, with different participants potentially acting as speaker, formulator, author, sponsor, addressee, hearer, target, and so on, in different exchanges (Goffman 1979; Hanks 1996; Irvine 1996).

The question of who the client is in development focus groups strikes an ambiguity at the heart of the development enterprise. For whose benefit are focus groups conducted and who depends on whom—do the agencies, ministries, experts, and development personnel depend on the communities with whom (and presumably for whom) they implement projects, or is the reverse the case? Discussion topics in development focus groups are usually defined by the implementers (who do not necessarily attend the focus groups), yet the communities give them shape and substance. For much ethnographic research, the focus group formula seems oddly formal, particularly the separate observer role. One might expect the ethnographic researcher to moderate, though focus groups might also be run by someone participants would perceive as a peer.

Marketing literature is clear that focus group participant structure incorporates hierarchy: "One of the main reasons that focus groups work … is that the moderator is the *authority figure*" (Greenbaum 1993:53). Focus group manuals capture a more ambiguous recognition of this in development: "The moderator is *in control* of the session … He or she will … encourage a lively and *natural* group discussion" (Dawson et al. 1992:44, emphasis added). A recent article describes this control as "the delicate balance between encouraging participants to talk and coercing or pressuring them to contribute to the conversation" (Suzuki et al. 2007:310). To the extent that focus groups are intended as forums for local participation, then, those involved must work against this inherent hierarchy and be sensitive to power structures both within and beyond the focus group, including the sources of authority and legitimacy associated with particular focus groups and sponsors.[18] Similar issues have long been recognized in ethnographic research, which Johannes Fabian once described as "communication in a field of power relations" (1998:56).[19]

Focus groups also rest on two assumptions about conversation in small groups that help determine the invited participants: People will talk more freely in a small group if they recognize shared experiences, interests, or

problems; and people will talk more readily with strangers than with people they know. Following the first assumption, organizers select a shared characteristic related to the focus group topic to identify appropriate and representative participants; gender is often held constant too. Yet in both development settings and ethnographic research, focus group participants in a small project area may know each other in multiplex ways. Participants may appear homogeneous with respect to focus-group-relevant characteristics, but other relations are not filtered out.[20] The second assumption simply cannot be generalized cross-culturally, and one also might wonder when and where it holds in U.S. contexts other than focus groups.

The ideal these focus group guidelines and assumptions seek to achieve is a kind of communicative democracy in which all participants can and should speak equally and the topic at hand is open for all to discuss, neutralizing constraints of power, status, or propriety. Analysis of focus groups may help highlight discursive limitations and differences in knowledge and attitudes that depart from that ideal, but focus groups tend to be treated as bounded events in which relations do not extend beyond the occasion. Ethnographic uses of focus groups would, instead, assume that differences of power, expertise, and social relations are intrinsic to knowledge production and seek to understand how focus group interactions are implicated and how they relate to other settings and relations, drawing out what Judith Irvine calls "diachronic contextualization" (1996:144). Tracing such resonant interdiscursivities is one way that intersubjective understandings and ethnographic interpretation are developed and enriched (Kratz 2009). Further, understandings of such "communicative democracy" or other ideals for communicative interaction and participation are themselves issues for ethnographic exploration, rather than something to be assumed.

To the extent that focus groups also count as popular participation, invited participants are representative in a political sense too. That may be particularly relevant within the community, influencing those who attend focus groups and the discussion that takes place. "Local status hierarchies may cause a certain degree of self-selection into groups, favouring higher status (possibly richer, more of an opinion leader) as opposed to lower status participants" (Yach 1992:607). And it would not be surprising if focus groups were sometimes regarded like the training workshops Smith describes in Nigeria: "Opportunities to travel to and participate in training workshops are significant perks controlled and allocated by project officers" (2003:710). Seemingly scientific constants and control in focus groups are almost invariably fudged.

Group dynamics are recognized as the yeast that makes focus groups work, the problem that can render them worthless, and an important source of information for interpreting what is said. Health researchers have drawn

psychological and therapeutic parallels, comparing focus group discussion to activation of "memories, feelings, and experiences ... similar to the process of free association" (Folch-Lyon and Trost 1981:445), and sociologist Morgan makes this aspect central to his focus group definition: "a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher" (2002:141). Yet prescribed management tips typically center on those who are problem participants relative to the ideal communicative democracy, who are either too silent or too dominant. Needless to say, conversational dynamics unfold according to varied cultural and communicative conventions, and the meanings of gestures, eye contact, turn interaction, and so on, are not universal.[21] Beyond focus group management, analysis of focus group transcripts usually pays little attention to interaction and centers, instead, on thematic content and individual quotes (known as "verbatims") (Kitzinger 1994:104).

More striking, however, "group dynamics" are framed in consonance with focus groups' experimental and marketing uses: Group dynamics are discussed as if they occur only among the invited participants, exclusive of the moderator–researcher. Separate consideration is given to the corresponding issue of "moderator bias," reinforcing the division between those who oversee focus groups and those invited to participate. This diminishes the possibility of consistently or critically considering social dynamics in a larger sense—moderator and researcher relations with community members, how individuals became participants, what input and involvements they and others might have in the larger project process, and its general "cartography of power and knowledge" (Watts 1993:265). Group dynamics and moderator bias are also assessed relative to the focus group's designated topics, setting parameters for what will be heard and emphasized, which debates should be foreclosed and encouraged. Yet the focus group question guide may not recognize other kinds of significance the ostensible topic may hold, how the order and arrangement of speakers may shape the discussion's outcomes, or issues of freedom and constraint in discussing various topics (Brenneis and Myers 1984).[22] Those questions can only be interpreted relative to the different cultural and communicative conventions at play in focus groups, but they identify important parameters shaping the production of knowledge.

As focus groups have become more common and ubiquitous in the social sciences and elsewhere, researchers have begun to develop and consider variations in their use, patterns, problems, and possibilities. Prescriptions in methodological literature often differ from this more varied practice, and recent trends in marketing have shown some growing dissatisfaction with focus groups because of problems related to quality of responses, "professional" focus group participants, declining depth of discussion, and increasing use of direct questions (Stewart et al. 2007:xi;

Taylor 2001; Wellner 2003:11–12). In response, some marketing researchers have adopted more "natural" settings and conversational cohorts or sought ways to incorporate ethnographic approaches.

The preceding discussion has dealt largely with methodological literature on focus groups as it relates to representations and ideologies of development and to ethnographic encounters and knowledge production. It does not do justice to experienced development practitioners and participants who skillfully maneuver a range of communicative conventions with sensitivity to these issues.[23] To illustrate and develop these points and discuss communicative aspects of focus groups in development and knowledge production that escape these representations and ideologies, I turn now to the Afya ya Jamii project in Machakos.

Focus groups in Machakos: The Afya ya Jamii project

The Afya ya Jamii project began in Machakos, Kenya, in 1985 as part of a four-country pilot program implemented through the Salvation Army World Service Office (SAWSO), the development arm of the Salvation Army. Funded by USAID's Child Survival Initiative (CSI), the program tested the feasibility of using existing women's groups for community-level promotion of interventions to improve child health.[24] The pilot projects were intended to develop a model that could be replicated worldwide. The Salvation Army women's groups, known as Home Leagues, were the infrastructure on which the Machakos project built. Images and messages on the educational flip-charts developed through the project were evaluated and modified to best suit their immediate use in Machakos, but possible wider use was occasionally raised. The Salvation Army's territorial headquarters envisioned similar projects elsewhere in Kenya.[25]

To strengthen the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of Salvation Army staff, USAID funded a Child Survival coordinator position, based at SAWSO's office in Washington, DC. The coordinator helped plan, implement, and evaluate the four projects, visiting each biannually for six to eight weeks at a time and communicating with project personnel while out of the country, with time between trips spent at the Washington home office. An experienced Kenyan nurse-midwife and health educator from the project area was field coordinator in Machakos.

The project used a "mother-to-mother" approach. Trained women's group leaders would train women's group members, who, in turn, would make home visits to teach mothers about improved child health and nutrition. One primary point of project intervention, then, was training women's group leaders in a three-week course in child health counseling. Portable educational materials were developed to supplement the training course and help women

retain and effectively transmit standardized, technically correct information about the Child Survival interventions. That is where the photo flip-charts came in. Separate flip-charts were to be developed for each intervention, with eight units planned in all.[26] Initially developed in English, the final products were produced in Kiswahili.

A prototype unit on oral rehydration was completed in 1988 with technical assistance from a centrally funded U.S. graphic designer–artist. Other units were based on the content, style, techniques, and process employed in producing this model, including use of focus groups to pretest each flip-chart as it was developed. I was the focus group observer and translator for the prototype and later took over local evaluations, revision, and production of the next two units when the Child Survival coordinator took another job. The general process for developing each flip-chart included the following steps: (1) hold an initial focus group with technical advisors to evaluate draft messages and images;[27] (2) revise as needed, translate messages into Kiswahili and check translation; (3) hold a focus group with Home League leaders to evaluate revised, translated messages and images; (4) revise as needed;[28] (5) produce flip-charts in Nairobi. Focus groups took place at community centers in or near Machakos town and were tape-recorded. I acted as moderator for the technical groups, and the project field coordinator attended as a participant and her assistant as observer–note taker. The coordinator led Home League leaders' focus groups, which I attended as observer–note taker. The two kinds of focus groups considered similar questions but in different orders. Technical advisors heard and commented on written–verbal messages and then considered associated photographs. Home League leaders first discussed photos and then messages.

This outline of the general process already suggests implicit distinctions in the kinds of knowledge involved in developing the flip-charts and sought in the focus groups. "Technical knowledge" originated in international guidelines for child health practice, but Kenyan health workers and educators reviewed how it was presented and provided examples appropriate to the particular setting (e.g., local foods that met nutritional guidelines). Technical knowledge set the parameters for content; "local knowledge" was intended to adapt the content but not to alter the basic guidelines. The Washington head office had to verify fidelity to the guidelines, which affected the timing of translation and the input from local technical advisors, sometimes in ways that I found puzzling.

It seemed to me, for instance, that initial Kiswahili translation should have preceded the technical advisors' focus group, as participants devoted much attention and expertise to adjusting and changing flip-chart messages written in English. When entire sentences were added, changed, or deleted, perhaps key points could probably have been decided in either language. But nuances covered in

discussion about whether to make more specific changes did not always translate. "The right amount of food," for instance, became "chakula cha kutosha"—"enough food," appropriate to the circumstances but not quite the message agreed to by health experts on both sides of the globe. A more effective approach, I felt, would have been to work on nuances most relevant to the final product.

After each focus group, I communicated suggested changes in both messages and photographs to Washington, putting the original draft text and proposed changes side by side. Translation took place only after the technical advisors' focus group, in part to guarantee that message revision did not contradict international health knowledge and practice. Technical advisors' discussion of Kiswahili, rather than English, text might have improved the final version, but close comparison of original and revised texts would then have been opaque to audiences in Washington that needed to document the process and confirm the quality of information and consultation with local experts. Reviewing content changes relative to the latest health knowledge seems perfectly reasonable, but it does mean that feedback was limited to reorganizing what was given, mainly tinkering that adapted it with local examples (tinkering important in bolstering both relevance and a sense of ownership). A suggestion to change dietary discussion to present it in terms of food groups, for instance, was not approved by the head office (cf. Manoff 1985:15–16) nor, in the end, was a unit summary with a panoply of child survival messages on a single page. Washington did, however, heed many other message suggestions, including the reordering of pages and the addition or deletion of some pages. The parameters within which message changes were allowed, however, invoked the larger development enterprise in which the Afya ya Jamii project was set and suggest why a sense of ownership still had to be fostered.

Focus groups with Home League leaders also sought local knowledge but at an even more specific cultural level. All technical advisors were Kenyan and lived in Machakos, but they did not all originate from the area. Home League leaders would actually use the flip-charts, so their feedback on messages mainly focused on ensuring they were clear and unambiguous. The reversed order of flip-chart review in technical and Home League focus groups, though, suggested that Home League leaders also held particular visual local knowledge important for creating effective educational tools. Feedback on photographs was heeded in virtually every case, whichever focus group it came from. The head office in Washington ceded that expertise to local participants. Who better to judge whether images shown looked like local mothers and situations or assess whether they could communicate the associated messages locally?[29]

Definitions and terminology in the literature on focus groups portray a standardized, replicable procedure and event, but focus groups vary both in "group dynamics" and in the actual forms that discussion takes, even in a single project like the one I describe. This flexibility is a strength, making focus groups adaptable to many situations; it also enables protean claims about them. In Machakos, for instance, the technical advisors' focus groups often had the feel of a committee meeting, sometimes mixed-gender, conducted in English, with participants commonly managing their own discussion to encourage equal participation:

M: [to B] You have talked a lot.

A: She is thinking about it. [laughter] Now you have thought so much. And you have the best idea.

B: I am just digesting what we are discussing.

A: Digesting?

B: Mm. Na mnaonaje? [And what do you (pl.) think?]

C: [to another woman who has not yet commented] The final conclusion is for you now.

D: And if I say the opposite and it delays then?

C: No, it's better that way because you know we are learning through that way you are seeing it—see it. I think that is the idea, you know.[30]

The focus groups for Home League leaders, by contrast, were more like classroom sessions.[31] Conducted in Kiswahili, they consisted of short turns that alternated between the field coordinator and others, including some unison responses. The coordinator usually repeated responses and called on people (often by name) to encourage equal participation (Figures 1 and 2):

FC: OK, we're on the fourth picture. You're used to it now, you simply tell [??] the way you can see this picture showing [something].

L: [soft and hard to hear] . . . I see the mother giving the child food.

FC: You see the mother is giving the child food. And where is the food—in what?

All: In a bowl.

FC: Who else [has a response]?

A: The mother is nursing.

FC: The mother is nursing in the upper picture. Mrs. . . . [what do] you see?

B: I see the mother is sitting.

FC: He?

B: I see the mother is sitting. She has—it's like she is giving her child food.

FC: Which mother is sitting?

B: The mother at the top.[32]

Figure 1. This page is from the completed flip-chart unit about weaning. It includes a small image at the top showing the same woman breastfeeding her child to underline the importance of continuing to breastfeed while weaning. Photo by Corinne A. Kratz.

Status differences, hierarchical relations, and uncertainty about relations and interactions emerged in the focus groups in multiple ways and along several dimensions, some inherent to the focus group situation. Part and parcel of development work and ethnographic research alike, recognizing those moments and how they shape interaction is key to understanding how intersubjective knowledge and social relations are both constituted in interaction. Moments of misunderstanding in ethnographic encounters can be particularly revealing of these dimensions though may only be recognized later (Briggs 1986; Fabian 1995; Kratz 2001; West 2007:1–5). Development critiques and calls for grassroots involvement often address links among hierarchy, authority, and power, particularly in control of information, decision making, and resources. The

foundations and effects of such relations can profoundly influence a project's directions, realization, and sustainability, yet these relations are not localized in a single setting. The ways of establishing and enacting hierarchy (or relative equality) in personal interactions, then, are significant, as are the kinds of hierarchy and equality established.

Turn-taking patterns are one way through which to consider these issues. In Home League leaders' focus groups, regular turn alternation between the field coordinator and others present helped socialize participants into desired communicative patterns, but it was also strong guidance and conversational control. Turn-taking patterns simultaneously advertised and maintained project role hierarchies related to such factors as education, experience with the project and with health training, and relative involvement and responsibility for local project planning and decisions. During one focus group, the coordinator addressed me in English between exchanges. This happened when discussion began to turn from simple identification of what could be seen in a photograph to interpreting possible difficulties with the postures and expressions shown.

FC: You see this mother is feeding her child enough food. Elizabeth?

E: That mother is using a spoon . . .

FC: She is using a spoon. Grace?

G: Myself, I don't know—I don't know how the mother is sitting? [laughter]

FC: Now you see she is sitting . . .

G: Myself, I see that she is sitting so that she is falling over. I don't know . . . ee. I don't know if she is sitting on her legs.

2-4

WALISHE WATOTO WADOGO KWA MARA NYINGI

Watoto wadogo wana tumbo dogo. Kwa hivyo wanahitaji kulishwa vyakula kidogo kidogo mara nyingi kila siku, mbali na maziwa ya mama. Endelea kumnyonyesha mtoto.

Walishe watoto wadogo wa miezi 4 hadi 6 uji bora, matunda, na vyakula vingine nyororo kila wakati wanapotaka, zaidi ya mara nne kwa kila siku. Kumbuka ni vizuri kuwapatia watoto maji ya matunda au matunda yaliyopondapondwa katikati ya chakula kingine.

Walishe watoto wadogo wa miezi 6 hadi 12 vyakula vilevile, lakini wapatie mara nyingi zaidi. Wapatie kila wanapotaka, zaidi ya mara sita kwa kila siku.

Figure 2. When the image in Figure 1 faced outward to those participating in a training session, the back of the flip-chart faced the group leader, showing this message stressing the importance of giving a child repeated small feedings during weaning. Photo by Corinne A. Kratz.

FC: In other words, you see the mother . . .

G: Ee.

FC: Rose says that this mother is not sitting well. [in English] Yes?

C: This child seems as if he is refusing food because . . . the child is not sitting well . . .

FC: OK. It seems that this child—it is like he is refusing food because he is not sitting as a child should sit while—while eating. How should a child sit while eating?

All: Well.

FC: Well in what way?

D: It seems . . . . isn't eating food.

FC: . . . . eating food.

E: She is looking at the child as if . . .

FC: Hm mm. [to CK in English] I hope you are taking notes.[33]

Given the disparity of status between the field coordinator leading the focus group and the others, the woman who initiated that shift framed her comment with hedges and hesitation ("I don't know—I don't know how the mother is sitting"). Her comment elicited laughter, group recognition of the shift, and turn to critique.

The coordinator called my attention to this obliquely when she switched to English, ostensibly reminding me to take notes. Her comment may, indeed, have been meant to enhance the notes, but it also signaled that she and I were paying attention to similar things, allied in seeking to improve draft flip-charts and enhance local image relevance. The switch to English, then, was many things at once. It was an aside that indexed the coordinator's influential local status and involvement with Nairobi visitors from headquarters. At the same time, it was a conversational assertion of egalitarian, cooperative relations with me. Finally, it was a gentle pointer to the dynamics of knowledge and authority in development projects. The coordinator knew what was happening was important, but did the expatriate visitor–observer recognize it? Though I opened the focus groups in Kiswahili, the coordinator may still have doubted that I could follow the meeting in that language. Her English comment was also a probe, an attempt to convey what may have been her more acute perceptions to someone sent to manage the focus groups but who may not have understood.[34]

Status differences within the technical advisors' focus groups were more subtle. As noted, speakers in these focus groups took longer turns, developing points in relation to other comments, and turn taking was less overtly regulated and more self-selecting. Nonetheless, status differences emerged at similar pivotal moments and included

similar uncertainties about my role and understanding of the situation. A prolonged discussion of images for the summary page of the breast-feeding flip-chart provides one example. Debate centered on whether child survival issues from other units should be added as well. Leading the focus group, I asked whether the summary should relate to that unit alone, eliciting several lengthy explanations in favor of combining multiple messages in the summary page. With clear consensus among the advisors, I felt I could articulate their preferences and reasons to SAWSO in Washington and said "OK," indicating that we could move on.

At that point, however, a tutor at Machakos Training College asked what I had in mind, foregrounding the situation's social differences in what might be seen as a challenge. He assumed that, as an outside focus group leader connected to the project's home office, I had unspoken preferences and ideas. Given my position, he might also have assumed those notions carried weight in final decisions. But his comment can also be read as an invitation to participate, especially in conjunction with his next remark: "Yeah, but you know it is a discussion and you can have even a better idea, then, you know when you talk, we can collect one another and then we see the point of it. Thus, to me I'm seeing it that way. He is seeing it that way. So maybe we can discuss and then see how is the final." This comment elaborates participatory ideology. In effect, the speaker attempts to level status differences that momentarily emerged to prominence, to prevent potential rupture in situational framing (Goffman 1974). Yet he is also recognizing and renegotiating situational relations of power, authority, and knowledge. Drawing me further into discussion would seem to make decisions more collaborative; the assumed hidden agenda would be open for debate, at least in part.

These brief excerpts suggest the diverse ways that status differences and hierarchies inherent in the focus group situation emerge and the subtle communicative negotiation of authority that may go on, shaping interaction and knowledge production. Such negotiations reach beyond the specific situation, representing intersections and translations among notions about communicative situations, forms of knowledge, and those involved in the project.[35] Many people took part in Afya ya Jamii in various ways, each with images and ideas about the other participants and about the women in Machakos that the project could benefit (including self-images). Flip-chart photographs gave some of those notions specific visual form and catalyzed their articulation in focus group discussion. Because the project focus was child survival, the women in the photos were automatically and primarily envisioned as mothers. Discussion of the babies that were pictured was mostly confined to whether their ages fit associated messages and whether they looked healthy, sick, or malnourished. Discussion about the mothers that were shown, however, included

comments about and evaluations of their attire and elaborated types of women and situations that mothers handle.

The photographic discussions show how interpretations and evaluations emerged through interaction and exchange, drawing on, re-creating, and debating shared knowledge of visual indexes or material signs. Comments on photographs brought particular aspects in and out of focus quite literally, drawing attention to details of posture, dress, associated objects, acts, and expressions. Ethnographers also seek to learn about and interpret the implicit cultural knowledge conveyed in such associations, though typically through a combination of participant-observation, informal discussion, and interviews that identifies a wider range of patterns and variations.

As in the final flip-charts, the images in the draft paste-ups for focus groups showed human figures in outline and removed details of house compounds, rooms, and other contextualizing features. Routine practice in development education and training, using outlines of photographed figures (sometimes called "block-outs") aims to minimize distraction, compelling viewers to focus on people and activities in the central message (Brouwer 1995:17; Houts et al. 2006).[36] By eliminating background context, block-outs narrow possible indexical associations, working against the openness and unpredictability that allow photographs to be interpreted in diverse ways (Berger 1987; Kratz 1996, 2002:92–97, 213–218; Pinney and Peterson 2003:3–4, 6–7). Limiting photographic associations and narratives limited the topics and knowledge that might be articulated in focus group discussions as well, along with chance comments and discoveries that might lead to ethnographic insights.

Photographs were interpreted in quite specific ways by focus group participants. First, the individuals pictured were seen as types. Photographs were taken of local people (so physical features were not an issue), but they were read not as local pictures (e.g., "That's Rose Nzioka from Kavyuni") but as pictures of the local (e.g., "She's a young Akamba woman").[37] How to signal the desired type and particular site of localness was central in discussion. If women in training sessions saw photographs with which they could identify, organizers assumed, they would better learn and retain health messages.[38] This teaching context aimed at behavior change, so depicted types also became exemplars. They illustrated the right (or wrong) way to care for children, simultaneously conveying implicit moral evaluations about modes of mothering.[39]

Technical advisors and Home League leaders agreed on the primary signs of localness. However, the former concentrated on external signs—dress, utensils, and so forth—whereas the latter also characterized the moods and qualities of the women pictured (e.g., clean, peaceful, happy, relaxed, patient). The two groups also identified the type sought in the photographs somewhat differently. Signs of the local were simultaneously signs of economic class and

Figure 3. The woman in this image from the completed flip-chart unit on breastfeeding is wearing clothing seen as appropriate for a "typical" mother from the area. The three-legged stool is considered a sign of being at home and of localness. The use of outline photographic figures is intended to enhance focus on the intended message, a technique commonly used in development education and training materials. Photo by Corinne A. Kratz.

occupation. People identified "town women," women "just from the *shamba* (farm)," and mothers of a "middle type—neither really from a town or clearly just from the shamba." Judgments of typicality were based on details of clothing worn by women and their babies: Images showing long sleeves, associated with town dresses or special occasions, a sweater judged to be of higher quality than usual, and fancy or knitted baby blankets were often ruled out in favor of images showing towels or *khanga*s (Figure 3). Technical advisors and Home League leaders alike identified the attire of the "typical" mother as a simple dress with a khanga around the waist and a headscarf. She was to wear rubber thongs or canvas shoes or be barefoot; technical advisers rejected one photograph because it showed fancy shoes. The woman was to sit on the ground or on a low stool. Three-legged Akamba stools were ideal and strongly affirmed by

Home League leaders as a sign of home—but not as a sign of being backward or unprogressive.

Technical advisors were actually stricter than league leaders about qualities of dress and rejected some pictures because the women looked "too expensive." They even identified the wristwatch in one picture as problematic, though many women in the area did wear watches. All local women photographed wore their own clothes, but some donned clean dresses for the pictures. Technical advisors called the prototype mother image "a typical village woman." Home League leaders, by contrast, identified the prototype image as someone "at home" *(yuko nyumbani)* or someone sitting to feed her baby, having just come from the garden. These labels may illuminate the technical advisors' narrower range of what constituted acceptable attire.

Not "typical village women" themselves (though certainly familiar with the village context), the advisors' imagined type was a lowest common denominator, a generalized stereotype that leveled economic variation and eliminated ambiguous signs like watches. The typical mothers depicted had to be unequivocally local; uncertainties and inconsistencies in visual identity could distract from health messages. In fact, technical advisors themselves probably wore "typical village attire" at home in the evening. The same outfit approved for mothers in the Afya ya Jamii images— khanga over dress, headscarf, and rubber thongs—was also the "at home" dress shown in syphilis counseling cards produced for clinics in low-income housing estates in Nairobi (MotherCare 1993).

Home League leaders identified the photographic type in terms of contextual differences, placing mothers shown in a familiar situation but not divesting them of other situations and modes of dress. They were among the women who, project personnel hoped, would see themselves in the pictures. Indeed, their photographic readings suggested the more complex, differentiated character of self-identification and an internal perspective, and some even imagined the mothers' moods and dispositions. Different aspects and associations were in focus, but, visually, the end product was the same.

The visual cues in the photographs were part of the knowledge and communicative repertoire common to technical advisors, league leaders, and many other Kenyans; objects like three-legged stools and clay cooking pots, along with the women's physical features, helped ground the photographs in Machakos and identify the mothers as Akamba women. Some photographs from the prototype flip-chart illustrate the yawning gaps that can surface between development spheres when such daily knowledge is not shared and communicative assumptions differ.[40] The initial photographs were taken by the U.S. graphic designer who came to Kenya to visit the project area.[41] The most outlandish and hilarious was taken for the weaning flip-chart, a photograph showing a woman cooking for her family and intended to accompany a message about mashing food from the family pot to feed a young child. The photograph showed an aluminum pot cooking on a low charcoal stove *(jiko)*. Next to the stove was a very well dressed young woman in fancy shoes, stirring the pot with a long wooden spoon from a standing position. Although Americans may stand while they cook, Kenyans using low fires or stoves about a foot high certainly do not.

Choosing flip-chart pictures involved another negotiation of knowledge and communicative conventions, both within focus groups and between local and head offices. Because photos were seen as carrying cultural messages rather than the technical knowledge in verbal messages, their final approval usually rested with technical advisors and Home League leaders in Machakos. Nonetheless, my communications with SAWSO in Washington discussed these decisions and final layouts in a last negotiation of aesthetics. Some Machakos preferences produced pages that seemed "cluttered" to me and to people in Washington. One photograph showing a dog in the foreground is still considered strange by some expatriates involved in the project, but it effectively illustrated problems with baby bottles (the dog was licking a bottle on the ground near a child).[42] As the timing of the translation had, the approval of this photo crystallized the finished product's dual audiences. The principal goal was to produce materials most effective in the project area (within the available budget). But the materials also had to translate back to the home office and the donor, where polished presentation conventions often set different norms. Educational and training materials are sometimes caught in an aesthetic tension, facing in two directions, when different principles of arrangement and combination may communicate different visual values. Focus groups enabled these differences in visual knowledge to emerge for consideration.

The finished products, flip-charts for the breastfeeding and weaning units, traveled back along the paths that funding, personnel, and consultation followed, duly delivered in Machakos, Nairobi, and Washington, DC.[43] If the flip-charts' visual types conveyed somewhat different identities and connotations to participants in the focus groups, they probably evoked still other glosses and associations beyond those groups: someone at home, Akamba woman, typical village woman, rural woman, poor woman, or African woman. Visual details might be read differently, and signs meaningful to viewers in some contexts might be insignificant in other contexts, another trace of the overlapping but disparate—sometimes discordant—knowledge and communicative conventions that characterize the development enterprise and its interrelations.

Focus groups played a number of roles in these negotiations and in the Afya ya Jamii project as a whole. By the time focus groups were held, the Child Survival coordinator and field coordinator had worked together for

months, giving the former a chance to develop a particular sense of child care practice and concerns in the area. Focus groups broadened that engagement, as events intended to increase and signal local participation and "ownership." Local knowledge was sought and produced during this phase, though the range of topics and issues covered was quite circumscribed. What came out of each focus group discussion was a synthesis of comments and reactions that was then conveyed to Washington as a relatively unified "local voice" to be taken into account. The varied forms of technical and Home League leader focus groups, interactional negotiations of status and participation, and discursive development of intersubjective agreement about photographic interpretation or textual details were flattened out in the synthesis, as final negotiations about the flip-charts were set within parameters that allowed "local cultural knowledge" to adapt "technical knowledge" as long as accepted child survival guidelines were not altered. If the focus groups had been part of an anthropological project, these social relations, communicative differences, and processes of knowledge production and the ways they related to other contexts and relations might have been central concerns, bringing into focus other questions of ethnographic interest. The challenge would have been to show how such situated ethnographic detail illuminates broad debates about development theory and practice and focus groups as a method (cf. Ferguson 2006:3).

Conclusion

The development enterprise is simultaneously transnational, national, and local, encompassing myriad institutions, social fields, positions, and perspectives. It also encompasses multiple overlapping communicative repertoires and constantly entails translation, not just between languages or registers but among different communicative conventions and understandings of knowledge. Considering how this multidimensionality figured in focus groups in the Afya ya Jamii project brings into comparative focus the broader political-economic organization and negotiations of knowledge, communication, and power that are part of ethnographic research as well. Though such research is typically described as an individual or small team endeavor, a longer temporal view suggests that overlapping social fields and negotiations similar to those in development work stretch across different phases of research.

Characterizing focus groups primarily as methodology may be a way to depoliticize the representations of development projects (cf. Englund 2006; Ferguson 1990) and to portray projects in terms of scientific practice that predicts success and replicability. But the nature of focus groups as small group meetings and conversational interaction makes them susceptible both to other representations and to other uses. As a pervasive midlevel situation in which partici-

pants from different development spheres often meet, focus groups can also become settings for the re-creation and negotiation of status, influence, and power as well as forums for specific decisions and outcomes in a particular project. Focus groups help verify project credentials as ensuring local involvement and are a forum for certain controlled kinds of participation. Regardless of whether focus group outcomes are seriously considered in planning and decision making, focus groups can advertise a project, recruit participants, or reinforce involvement. These possibilities are the basis for claims that focus groups are a means of popular participation. The Afya ya Jamii project in Machakos took a "mother-to-mother" approach to primary health care education, but this portrayal describes only the final point of implementation. Technical advisors' and Home League leaders' focus groups were part of the intermediate process through which vertical administrative structures involving USAID, SAWSO, and Salvation Army in Kenya (in coordination with Kenyan governmental agencies) tried to reach that point.

Just as focus groups in development projects have been linked to notions of "participation" and "ownership," a colleague in marketing noted a similar ideology of connection in that field: "Clients love them. They feel like they are listening to 'real people'" (Peter Zandan, personal communication August 30, 2008).[44] This reach for the popular and sense of connection to personal experience may be part of the addictive quality of focus groups I noted at the very start of this article, an aspect offering validation for projects and products. In a sense, it is also at the heart of the model of ethnographic research, which seeks to learn how others see the world and create meaning and social relations. But the cocaine–focus group comparison that Patnaik draws underlines the short-term rush of a brief infusion, a sharp contrast to the extended immersion and engagement characteristic of ethnographic research. My marketing colleague continued, "Focus groups are like the CliffsNotes version compared to ethnography." Building longer-term relations and histories of shared experience and interaction has been fundamental to ethnographic knowledge production, making the short-term infusions of focus groups more marginal in anthropological research practice and raising questions about what they add. Exploring such questions within ethnographic projects, however, might identify particular dimensions and strengths that focus groups potentially bring to research.[45] Further, after examining popular buzzwords associated with focus groups in development, one might ask: What parallel buzzwords and trends have characterized ethnographic research, and how do particular methods like focus groups and participant-observation relate to representations of knowledge production, to ideologies of engagement, and to each other?

The Machakos focus groups highlighted one related question worth considering: What distinctions among types

of knowledge are implicit in various models of research, methods, and epistemology? In the Machakos case, technical and cultural knowledge were contrasted, one associated with general–scientific knowledge and one with local knowledge, and seen as having different roles and weights in final flip-chart design. Such distinctions are often associated as well with those seen as holding different kinds of knowledge. Similarly, theoretical descriptions of focus groups presuppose a model of communication and knowledge production centered primarily on the exchange and maximization of referential content, privileging a single communicative function and one aspect of the communicative situation (Hymes 1972; Jakobson 1960; Silverstein 1976). When applied to focus group settings and participant dynamics, this model aims to encourage open discussion, understood as maximizing referential content on chosen topics.

The educational flip-charts considered in the Machakos focus groups illustrated and communicated messages about health but simultaneously instantiated and communicated far more. Messages about health, identities, development, and social values merged in representations of the rural mother. These representations were shown pictorially, embedded in matching texts and lessons, and created rhetorically in focus group discussions and other settings. As product and process, the flip-charts drew on communicative resources both visual and verbal. Specific interpretations of the finished flip-charts would be renegotiated yet again relative to particular contexts and communicative conventions, for example, in their presentation and reception in the home office or in use in diverse training sessions and home visits. Women in Machakos enriched and filled out the "rural mother" by locating her in situations that extended beyond the focus group frame and assimilated a greater range of contexts and complexities in Machakos women's lives. Yet even the circumstances evoked in discussion were circumscribed by the project focus. Mother and child always remained the pivot, with little of the larger world of social relations or political-economic circumstances coming to view, though they are key contexts of interpretation.

When ethnoscience was in its heyday in the 1970s, Fabian (1975) pointed out that ethnoscience interviews sought to derive knowledge from narrowly framed taxonomic questions intended to produce a set of lexical categories for analysis, disregarding discussion that took place around elicitation of the categories and thereby ignoring critical commentary and different ways of thinking about processes of ethnographic knowledge production. Although focus groups do not limit responses to particular words and do, in fact, encourage discussion, a similar point can be made about the definition of topics for focus group discussion and the role of the moderator in steering conversation to a limited range of predefined concerns. Janine

M. Traulsen et al. (2004:720) observe that conversation may continue after the focus group session ends and topics not part of the interview guide may come up, but focus group analysis does not typically take this into account. Others note that transcriptions of focus group discussions capture a certain ethnographic richness that emerges through conversational analysis, but most focus group analysis consists only of broad thematic summaries and does not capture the discursive and interactional dynamics found in spontaneous discussion (Agar and MacDonald 1995:85; Bernard 2000:211; Kitzinger 1994; Watkins and Swidler 2009). In ethnographic research, the negative capability that Jackson saw as essential can be accommodated through a shifting dialectic between openness and focus over time. The challenge for focus groups is to strike such a balance within a more limited purview.

The larger point, as Fabian notes in his discussions of ethnoscience interviews (1975) and language choice (1979), is to pay critical attention to the production of intersubjective knowledge in ethnography or in focus groups as a process that takes place through communicative interaction with a certain open, creative sense. In ethnography, such interaction is set within longer processes of engagement and encounter that develop shared histories and relations, but focus groups might be incorporated into those longer processes as well, or situated with stronger contextual analysis. An ethnographic approach to focus groups would consider the planning and negotiation of who participates part of the larger process to be analyzed and might well seek a relatively "natural" setting for the event. Unlike the case in marketing applications, focus groups in both community development settings and ethnographic research might be more likely to involve participants with multiplex and ongoing relations than they would strangers, so relations among group members would also be of interest. In such circumstances, the hierarchy inherent in focus group structure presents a ready-made arena for the display, reproduction, and mediation of status and power locally and in relations among different spheres of development that converge in the focus group. As the Machakos focus groups suggest, such relations are not constant but neither is their negotiation evenly distributed whatever the setting. In the examples cited above, such relations became salient subtexts at moments when focus group hierarchies and focus group goals of open discussion and critique seemed to contradict one another. A researcher's relations and histories with focus group interlocutors are also an important consideration in ethnographic knowledge production, not a separate variable to be "controlled," as scientist models would have it.

But taking into account this range of concerns and contexts begins to make the event more a group discussion than a focus group in the formally defined sense. Both group discussions and focus groups can bring out unexpected dimensions, categories, idioms, and experiences and go

in directions that entail shifts of focus and recognition of how attention and particular categories filter research and knowledge production. In analyzing and reflecting on such events, one must combine attention to referential and thematic aspects with attention to communicative interaction itself, with its hesitations, negotiations of status, narrative structures, and diverse communicative resources, as well as with consideration of broader dynamics that include researcher, moderator, and "client" as well as participants within the social organization of the overall endeavor. Focus groups are not a ready formula or algorithm but require careful interpretation and analysis like other ethnographic work.

Notes

1. What this 2008 quote characterizes as "general consensus" was formulated by Johannes Fabian in his 1971 article "Language, History and Anthropology." As he summarized recently, the argument "was that anthropological research of the kind we call fieldwork is carried out through communicative interaction mediated by language and that whatever objectivity we can hope to attain must be founded in intersubjectivity" (Fabian 2007:20). Fabian's formulation drew on Wilhelm von Humboldt's philosophy of language, Jürgen Habermas's critique of positivism in the social sciences, and Dell Hymes's language-centered ethnography, with some oblique references to phenomenology. In recent years, a number of anthropologists have again rediscovered phenomenology, not always aware of anthropological engagements with hermeneutic and phenomenological influences in the 1970s. With this recent rediscovery, *subjectivity* and *intersubjectivity* have become buzzwords, much as *agency* became a ubiquitous buzzword in the 1990s (Biehl et al. 2007; Jackson 1998:5–9; Luhrmann 2006; West 2007:46–47, 85; see also Duranti 2009). Like other buzzwords, *intersubjectivity* seems to have accumulated a range of different, sometimes vague and evocative, senses. Michael Jackson, who has consistently worked with phenomenological approaches and who subtitled one of his books "Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project," cautions against one common moralizing sense: "We must not construe intersubjectivity as a synonym for shared experience, empathic understanding or fellow-feeling . . . Compassion and conflict are thus complementary poles of intersubjectivity, the first affirming identity, the second confirming difference" (1998:4). Intersubjectivity is not a moral goal but, rather, a condition of possibility for knowledge production in ethnographic research, one that comes about through interaction and communication. As one encyclopedia notes, it refers to "shared meanings constructed by people in their interactions with each other and used as an everyday resource to interpret the meaning of elements of social and cultural life" (Wikipedia 2010). Note that the very communication and contexts that enable intersubjectivity are also coproduced. Engelke 2008 considers how notions of evidence relate to the intersubjective nature of fieldwork.

2. David Morgan (2002:150–152) notes, though, that focus groups are often really no more "artificial" than individual interviews.

3. For exceptions, see Fabian 1979, 1995; Briggs 1986, 2007; and Kratz 2001.

4. The development industry has been a topic of interest in anthropology as well as a realm in which anthropologists work (Edelman and Haugerud 2005; Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990; Fisher 1997; Hoben 1982; Mosse 2004; Schneider 1975).

5. See Bauman and Briggs 2003 on how implicit models of communication shape theory and practice.

6. The professional ethics statement of the American Anthropological Association (1986) observes,

> Anthropologists work in many parts of the world in close personal association with the peoples and situations they study. Their professional situation is, therefore, uniquely varied and complex. They are involved with their discipline, their colleagues, their students, their sponsors, their subjects, their own and host governments, the particular individuals and groups with whom they do their fieldwork, other populations and interest groups in the nations within which they work, and the study of processes and issues affecting general human welfare.

7. Marketing research itself developed in conjunction with the rise of product–brand management in the 1950s (Greenbaum 1988:4–5).

8. Much of this work was a collaboration with Paul Lazarsfeld, another prominent sociologist at the time, though the focus group literature does not recognize him (Merton 1987; Merton and Kendall 1946). Merton developed focus group interviews further in analyses of U.S. Army training films (Stewart and Shamdasani 1990:9). Merton himself sees a terminological conflation between his focused group interviews and contemporary focus groups and recognizes only "an amiable congruence" (1987:563, 556) between them.

9. Bracketed material is Richard Manoff's but comes at the end of his sentence. I rearranged his syntax to be clear that the strategy is adopted from marketing, not the education and action programs, as his original wording implies.

10. Glenzer (2007) notes a return to positivist social science in the framing and evaluation of development work in recent years, despite ongoing and contradictory shifts toward participatory methods and a rights-based framework in some organizations. These seemingly contradictory stances and methods were the subject of "Women's Empowerment, Impact Assessment of Development Programs, and Forms of Knowledge: New Horizons for Cross Disciplinary and Participative Research Methods," a 2006 workshop organized by Emory University's Center for the Study of Public Scholarship (CSPS) and CARE USA (see CSPS 2006).

11. Majid Rahnema points out that participation "tends to be perceived as a free exercise. This perception neither conforms to the meaning of the word, nor the way in which it is translated into practice. For, more often than not, people are asked or dragged into partaking in operations of no interest to them, in the very name of participation" (1990:116). Andrea Cornwall and Karen

Brock discuss how "participation," "empowerment," and "poverty reduction" were transformed and sanitized as they were refracted through development policy and practice, until they "came together in mainstream development discourse in a chain of equivalence with ownership, accountability, governance and partnership to make the world that the neoliberal model would have us all inhabit" (2005:1057). And James Ferguson cites a wildlife conservation project in Tanzania in which "'community participation' did not replace coercion; it supplemented it" (2006:43).

12. As Ferguson (2006:103, 112) notes, the status of large transnational NGOs can be both local and global simultaneously, and it is worth examining how relations between organizational levels come to be described and conceptualized as a vertical topography of power.

13. Machakos District is a semiarid area in eastern Kenya with a population predominantly from the Akamba ethnic group. Machakos town, the district capital, lies about sixty-five kilometers, or an hour's drive, from Nairobi. Machakos is a popular site for rural development projects, so a large number of NGOs and government agencies have worked there over the years, many at the same time. See Rocheleau et al. 1995 for a concise history of the interactions of environmental degradation, social transformation, and colonial and postcolonial state policy that have been part of the history of development projects in Machakos.

14. Top-down projects tend to emphasize more of a sender–receiver, behaviorist model of communication. In fact, an interactive model is a defining characteristic of bottom-up projects and periods. Although these opposite terms imply a reversal of initiative, differences in actual project dynamics are far from absolute. Project definition, control, and implementation may involve more negotiation in a bottom-up project, but the playing fields are never level. The very notion of "grassroots" can tend to homogenize local social terrains, rarely recognizing the variety of species, weeds, and wildflowers involved (K. Holland, personal communication 1989).

15. For instance, Daniel Jordan Smith notes that "Nigerians who work for internationally-funded programs, such as family planning projects, are seen by their kith and kin as important potential patrons who have access to money, resources, and opportunities that they are morally obliged to share" (2003:707). Eric Wolf (1956) offers one classic analysis of brokerage relations in Mexico.

16. Alternatively, a definition from the development field reads,

A focus group session can be simply defined as a discussion in which a small number (usually six to twelve) of respondents, under the guidance of a moderator, talk about topics that are believed to be of special importance to the investigation. Participants are chosen from some specific target group whose opinions and ideas are particularly germane to the investigation. [Folch-Lyon and Trost 1981:444]

17. Though not specified in the generic definition, one or more observers are part of the standard formula.

18. Recent participatory methods have sought to develop cooperative inquiry groups as a counter to the usual hierarchical relations between researcher and research subjects (Heron and Reason 2001).

19. In ethnography, however, the researcher is not necessarily an authority figure and, in fact, may be far from authoritative, as production of ethnographic knowledge typically begins with periods of uncertainty and cultural apprenticeship as a researcher forms a range of relationships and histories and begins navigating local power structures. This process does not belie persistent differences in status and power but underlines the varied and changing nature of research relations.

20. This is increasingly recognized and taken into account in development focus groups, but the relations that inhibit discussion vary in different situations and according to topics discussed. A United Nations Development Programme–World Bank–WHO training manual, for instance, notes that young women might feel reticent to speak in the presence of their mothers or mothers-in-law and that, in the presence of older married women, single "young women may feel obliged to discuss 'acceptable' [sexual] practices rather than their true range of experiences and behaviors" in an HIV education focus group (Dawson et al. 1992:3, 17). Historian Jane Burbank (personal communication December 12, 2009) noted that focus groups proliferated in the former Soviet Union in the 1990s but that these two assumptions would not have been appropriate in that setting: People in that context would not speak openly with strangers and might have been likely to see similar others as contenders.

21. Cultural variability in gestural uses and meanings is widely recognized, but variability in the subtle verbal and visual cues of conversational interaction is not. For instance, in their training manual, Susan Dawson and colleagues (1992:61–64) note the cultural variety of gestures but treat the meaning of eye contact as universal. To give just one counterexample, Chet Creider (1984, 1986) finds that speakers of English and of East African languages use verbal and visual feedback in conversation in ways that suggest different understandings of eye contact and gaze and relate to preferences for mutual postural orientation and turn lengths in conversation.

22. In the same community, some topics may be discussed freely, whereas others are hedged with avoidance, euphemism, and silence. Focus groups conducted as part of Child Survival and Safe Motherhood initiatives aptly illustrate the contrasts. Child Survival focus groups, on the one hand, were about topics readily available for discussion by women in most cases: children and their health, habits, and problems (although there were gendered differences in readiness to talk about child-related topics). Safe Motherhood, on the other hand, entailed women's discussion about their own habits, experiences, and difficulties in reproductive health and certain sexual matters (Mona Moore, personal communication October 14, 1994).

23. As Jennifer Platt (2002:44) notes in her history of the interview as a method, particularly in sociology, research practice often diverges from the descriptions and prescriptions of methodological literature.

24. Other project countries were Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Haiti; countries were selected by regional SAWSO officers on the basis of interest, infrastructure, and USAID priorities. CSI was part of an international campaign, prominent in the 1980s after release of UNICEF's *State of the World's Children* report, that aimed to reduce infant and young child mortality throughout the developing world (Rubinstein and Lane 1990:387–389). The campaign promoted "low-technology" primary care interventions with five foci: growth monitoring, oral rehydration therapy, breastfeeding, immunization, and family planning, collectively abbreviated as GOBI-F. The approach known as Safe Motherhood developed after CSI did (Moore 1994).

25. Images were the main concern in adapting material for wider use, though some local details in written messages might also have been inappropriate elsewhere in Kenya. It was clear, for instance, that the Machakos images could not be used in Maasai or Turkana areas, where mothers and homes look very different from Akamba ones. Salvation Army Home Leagues began in England in 1907 and were intended to raise standards of home life and "encourage thrift and hygiene." They expanded along with the army, beginning in the United States in 1915, and have continued to be part of outreach

programs and ministries to women (Salvation Army International Heritage Centre n.d.; Salvation Army Museum of the West n.d.). Wipper 1975 discusses other women's groups in Kenya during the colonial period.

26. They included breastfeeding, weaning, oral rehydration, immunization, recognizing malnutrition, growth monitoring, and family planning. Initially, flip-charts were produced in large format (A2 size, 22 inches by 14 inches) for training sessions, but plans included later production of smaller versions that women could easily carry on home visits.

27. Technical advisors included a nurse from Machakos hospital, a Ministry of Health trainer posted in Machakos, the district nutrition officer or nutrition assistant, tutors from Machakos Training College, the district health officer, and local staff from the Machakos Afya ya Jamii project. The field coordinator arranged focus groups and invited participants in each case. I was not living in Machakos so cannot comment on the specific relations and politics that might have been involved in this step.

28. Ideally, revisions at this stage would also have been tested and evaluated. They were usually relatively minor, however, and simply reviewed by project staff and discussed with SAWSO headquarters in Washington.

29. Before Home League leaders' focus groups met, photographs in the drafts were changed according to advice from technical advisors and were often completely redone. The draft Home League leaders saw, then, was quite different from the one technical advisors saw, having been translated as well. This usually meant they found fewer problems with drafts and approved most photographs. Some final decisions about arrangement were left, however, to the Home League leaders' preferences.

30. Breastfeeding/Technical, Tape 2:146.

31. Unless they had participated in focus groups for other projects (not impossible given the number of development projects located in Machakos), Home League leaders might have found the focus groups similar to a range of familiar settings but identical with none of them: church group meetings, women's group meetings, school classes, and government rallies. The focus groups would resonate most immediately with their project training; convened by the same organization and focused on similar topics, many training sessions were taught by the very field coordinator conducting the focus group. It was clear that focus groups were also a means of socializing both league leaders and the field coordinator to focus group communicative norms. Participants' confidence increased noticeably between their first focus group on the prototype flip-chart and later ones. In the United States, focus group participants who are too familiar with the settings are sometimes seen as a problem, becoming almost like professionals when organizations that run focus groups recruit them repeatedly. At one point, focus group hypnosis was used to try to manage group dynamics and professional participants (Taylor 2001).

32. Weaning/Home League Leaders, Side B: 176. Kiswahili original:

FC: OK, tuko katika picha namba nne. Mmezoea sasa, mnaambia [??] tu vile unaweza kuona hii picha inaonyesha.

L: [soft and hard to hear] . . . Naona mama anapatia mtoto chakula.

FC: Unaona mama anapatia mtoto chakula. Na chakula iko wapi—kwa nini?

All: Kwa bakuli.

FC: Na mwingine?

A: Mama ananyonyesha

FC: Mama ananyonyesha kwa picha ya juu. Mrs. . . . ona?

B: Naona mama anaketi.

FC: He?

B: Naona mama anaketi. Ame– . . . ati anampatia mtoto wake chakula.

FC: Mama gani anaketi?

B: Mama wa juu.

33. Weaning/Home League Leaders, Side B: ending at 220. Kiswahili original:

FC: Unaona mama huyu anapatia mtoto wake chakula cha kutosha. Elizabeth?

E: Huyo mama anatumia kijiko . . .

FC: Anatumia kijiko. Grace?

G: Mimi sijui—sijui mama amekaa namna gani? [laughter]

FC: Sasa unaona anakaa . . .

G: Mimi naona amekaa kama anaanguka. Sijui . . . ee. Sijui kama anakalia miguu.

FC: Yaani unaona mama . . .

G: Ee.

FC: Rose anasema mama huyu hakai vizuri. Yes?

C: Mtoto huyu anaonekana chakula anakataa kwa maana . . . mtoto hakai vizuri . . .

FC: Haya. Inaonekana huyu mtoto—ni kama anakataa chakula kwa maana hakai vile mtoto anatakiwa kukaa aki—akikula. Mtoto akikula anakaa namna gani?

All: Vizuri.

FC: Vizuri namna gani?

D: Inaonekana ? . . . hakula chakula.

FC: . . . kula chakula.

E: Anamwangalia mtoto kama . . .

FC: Hm mm. [to CK in English] I hope you are taking notes.

34. There is insufficient space here to go into the ways status differences and hierarchies ramify from one project setting to the next, in part through meetings such as focus groups themselves. For instance, some league leaders brought local assistants to the focus group, becoming their mediators in and initiators into such settings (in part linguistically, when assistants did not speak Kiswahili). Gumperz 1972 is one classic essay on code-switching; see also Scotton 1993.

35. They become implicated in reproducing and negotiating status and power in situations outside the focus groups as well. How distinctions created and marked by participation in focus group and training sessions can figure in other situations is illustrated in this example: Some Home League leaders tried to limit participation in their local training sessions to Salvation Army members. Their participation and positions gave them control over further dissemination, a way to use knowledge in local denominational

rivalries. When this news reached project personnel, they quickly tried to correct the situation by emphasizing that all women were welcome. When projects work through existing networks, however, people's prior associations and involvements also become part of the terrain of implementation to be taken into account.

36. David Prochaska (1990) reads such outline representation in Algerian postcards as an abstracting and decontextualizing strategy of orientalizing and colonial power. One cannot assume, however, that a formal attribute (in this case, outline representation) always has the same interpretation or meaning (Kratz 1994). The Algerian situation differs from the Kenyan in terms of communicative context, audience, and many other aspects of production, circulation, and consumption of images.

37. The burgeoning literature on visual types, stereotypes, and archetypes in photographs, postcards, advertising, and other media includes Alloula 1986, Tagg 1988, Goldberg 1990, Lutz and Collins 1993, Ruffins 1998, Geary and Webb 1998, Kratz 2002:103–111, Keim 2009, and many other works.

38. When AIDS education films made in west Africa for the Scenarios from Africa project were shown in east Africa, for instance, some local viewers saw AIDS as a problem specific to west Africa.

39. In an analysis of colonial Algerian postcards, Malek Alloula (1986) discusses photographic types that illustrated good and bad couples and families. Creating a moral imaginary through photographs is hardly new to development materials, though participants and situations involved differ from Alloula's. Nancy Rose Hunt (1988) considers how health messages can be combined and condensed with other messages about style, aesthetics, class, and morality that are addressed to multiple audiences.

40. Evelyn Waugh comically describes such alternative interpretations of a family planning poster in *Black Mischief* (1962:148–150).

41. Totally unfamiliar with the project area, he only visited for a few days. The Child Survival coordinator was not present to advise him because of various circumstances. The field coordinator was present, though, and helped him set up scenes to photograph. One can only wonder what kind of interaction and communicative negotiations went on between them to produce some odd photographs. The field coordinator certainly knew the scenes they staged bore no relation to realistic settings in Kenya.

42. An appropriate illustration had stymied those working on the draft; this suggestion was developed in one of the focus groups.

43. I am not sure if other flip-charts were completed. The person who eventually took the Child Survival coordinator's job changed the project's priorities. Instead of completing the five outstanding units, she started developing curriculum materials based on the first three flip-charts.

44. Michael Agar and James Macdonald also note "reports from several members of a national epidemiological panel that showed how focus groups turned quantitative researchers into fascinated listeners to human voices" (1995:78).

45. Agar and MacDonald (1995:85) suggest that focus groups usefully supplement ethnographic interviews and note that indexing shared cultural understandings characterizes the former and explaining those understandings is characteristic of the latter.

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