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Vulnerability as ethical practice: dismantling affective privilege and resilience to transform development hierarchies

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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces new analytical concepts to reveal overlooked dimensions of power inequalities between elite development agents (EDAs), local development agents and the targets of aid. Affective privilege captures the positioning of EDAs within affective patterning that sustains their dominant position. They enjoy a greater capacity to affect others in ways that reproduce structural power. Affective resilience captures their reduced capacity to be affected in ways that challenge their prior understandings, including understanding of self and their relations with others. Both affective privilege and affective resilience act as barriers to mutual understandings, limit reflexivity and, crucially, sustain hierarchies that are intimately felt by the power-deficient, but that pass unnoticed and therefore unaddressed by EDAs. I propose vulnerability as an ethical practice by the powerful as a means to both be attentive to these hierarchies, and to meaningfully transform relationships in development.

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Introduction

Unequal power relations between actors within broader development infrastructures are a key theme in the anthropology of development, as well as a central object for transformation in development practice. Hierarchies between expatriate/international, national-level, community-level organisations, volunteers and practitioners, and their unequal relations with targets or so-called beneficiaries of aid, are solidified through differential access to and power over resources, regimes of expertise, and technologies of governance: forms of power, as outlined in the introduction to this special issue. There has long been recognition that these hierarchies are detrimental to outcomes, with considerable effort to 'reverse' power relations for more responsive, appropriate and effective development. Despite these efforts, power inequities on account of race, class and positioning within aid chains remain persistent.

The problem is not on account of a lack of sincerity; the persistence of hierarchies is in part due to the inadequacies of our frameworks to understand power. In particular, and as argued in the introduction to this special issue, affect theory has barely penetrated thinking

in development studies, despite the centrality of affect and emotion for the persistence and transformation of unequal social relations (Ahmed 2004; Anderson 2014; Wetherell 2012). The lacuna could be on account of the difficulties of translating an indeterminate, transpersonal and barely perceptible power into a framework that can reveal its workings in concrete settings. I have attempted to provide such a framework in my recent book, *Susceptibility in Development* (Jakimow 2020), which proposes tools to reveal the differential capacity/susceptibility to affect/be affected as it is distributed within broader development assemblages, and with concrete effects (explained below). I argue that we need to be attentive to who benefits from the affects engendered within an encounter (that is, how do they sustain/disrupt forms of privilege), and the potential for such encounters to transform the pre-existing relationship between actors (Wetherell 2012). The level of analysis is the micro level of development arenas (see introduction), and how affects and emotions in encounters reveal and produce the relations between various development actors.

In my book, I focus on local development agents (LDAs): actors responsible for the design or implementation of development programmes who inhabit a similar socio-economic position and social milieu to those of the recipients of those programmes. Redfield (2012) describes these actors as 'socially heavy and materially light', meaning that they are embedded within the social relations of the development field, but are not much better off materially than the recipients of aid. In contrast, 'socially light and materially heavy' expatriate workers have fewer affective connections to the local people, and receive financial compensation that creates unbridgeable distances with national practitioners. Redfield's distinction is exceptionally useful to tease out the qualitative differences in how variously positioned individuals within aid chains engender and are susceptible to affects in encounters with Others. I prefer the term elite development actors (EDAs), however, to capture all development agents whose social milieu, belongingness and home are 'elsewhere', including national elites and upper-rank officials. It is my contention that EDAs can absorb and rebound from challenges to their sense of self, their motivations and outcomes of their work in a way that is difficult for LDAs. In this paper I test this contention from the perspective of EDAs. In doing so, I reveal two overlooked mechanisms that sustain unequal power relations within development aid chains: affective resilience and affective privilege. This is power as experienced on the intimate, felt level, and as tied to personal motivations and self-understandings. The 'personal' is hence a valid object of study not only to reveal what drives the 'doers' of development (Chambers 1997; Fechter 2012), but also as a site for the expression of power (Pedwell and Whitehead 2012).

I draw upon secondary material that provides first- and second-hand accounts of the personal. Memoirs of expatriate development practitioners (Bamforth 2014; Lovatt-Smith 2014) tell 'a story of individual education and empowerment' (Bauman 2019, 83), thereby revealing the affective investments in a sense of self: what is at stake, and what is at risk. Academic-cum-practitioner memoirs have an additional ambition to inspire readers, educating them on processes of learning and best practices (Eyben 2014; Holloway 2020). The edited collection *Chasing Misery* (Hoppe 2014) was a useful source of raw first-hand accounts of encounters in the field, many of which are deeply introspective and emotional narratives. For national EDAs, I rely on second-hand accounts and ethnographies (Bamforth 2014; Beck 2017), which lack discussion of emotions, yet describe encounters. I gathered a wide collection of texts offering the most potential for reflective accounts that were available through my local council and university libraries, that I was able to purchase, or that I already had in

my personal collection.¹ I do not offer an overview of all texts of this genre, as I am not attempting to demonstrate an absence or presence in the material (as for example in Patel's (2020) rigorous review of journal articles in development studies for examinations of 'race'), nor am I attempting to quantify the extent of affective privilege and resilience enjoyed by all EDAs. The excerpts I have selected and presented are intended to illustrate the workings of these mechanisms: indicative and revelatory, but not generalisable. Few of these texts are explicit in describing the 'affective' dimensions of development, and there is therefore an element of interpretation. I aim for verisimilitude, recognising that we have to live with a level of uncertainty in order to reveal what is unobservable yet consequential (Beatty 2019; Laszczkowski 2019).

I could relate, sometimes uncomfortably, with the first-hand accounts of expatriate development practitioners given my status as an Australian socially categorised as white, working in India and Indonesia. I have been the undergraduate student who was seen to possess authoritative knowledge purely on account of my whiteness, overriding the experience and knowledge of local practitioners (see Kothari 2006). As an academic, I enjoy an unearned premium on my work; my contributions to discussions with Indian and Indonesian collaborators are given additional weight, and I am seen (at times correctly) to have access to resources, in ways that deeply affect my relationships. These privileges based on material resources and authoritative claims are perhaps the easiest to discern, and have been at the core of attempts to reverse power relations in development. Yet they barely touch the surface of how race and national identity operate in development research and practice.² Socialised within a white supremacist society, reorienting how I engage with the world requires excavation of the subtle ways I enjoy power (Diangelo 2018): mechanisms that are invisibilised as a key modality of white supremacy. I argue that affective privilege (including affective resilience) is barely recognised as a modality of power that frustrates attempts to reverse discursive and material power hierarchies. This article is in many respects my own reckoning with my affective privilege, and a commitment to work against it.³

With these qualifications, I make four claims that structure the rest of the paper. The first is simply for the utility, if not necessity, of a framework to capture the affective dimensions of power in development: the capacity/susceptibility to affect/be affected, as outlined in my book. Second, I argue that EDAs enjoy affective privilege: a positioning within affective patterning that sustains EDAs' dominant position, and their ability to set the terms of their relationship with others. Affective resilience is a part of this privilege. EDAs' capacity to withstand and bounce back from affective challenges (to not be affected by the Other) hinders transformative moments, softening the pressure to be responsive, to adjust and negotiate. My argument is *not* that power-deficient individuals are power-*less*, with *no* capacity to affect EDAs or ability to manoeuvre within power configurations. Rather, it is simply that, on balance, affective dimensions of power reinforce other dimensions of power, frustrating genuine attempts to reverse development hierarchies. My final claim is that an ethic of vulnerability adopted by EDAs – that is, a purposeful openness to being affected by the other – is necessary to transform unequal power relations, although not in itself sufficient.

Relational capacities/susceptibilities to affect/be affected

In her long career as an aid worker, Miranda Bryant's (2014) experiences in her hometown of New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina are, for her, memorable. A familiar activity of gathering data from people in 'conflict-stricken developing countries' became 'surreal' when

conducted in the United States (2014, 41). She describes an interaction with Robert, 'a man so emaciated, so pale, I'm certain he is a breath away from this world' (2014, 41). Nine months after the disaster, Robert now lives in a government-issued trailer. With limited mobility, he struggles to get food:

As I listen to Robert's story, I roll the dice of decisions over in my mind. Should I tick the boxes on this questionnaire, get into my crappy sedan and hit the road ... as my job requires? Or do I break the bounds of neutrality and objectivity by secretly slipping him some groceries? ... I choose to break the rules. When he answers the door on my subsequent – and last – visit he reaches for the grocery bags with teary eyes. (2014, 42)

Miranda is affected in her encounter. Robert affects her, through his abjectness, his desperation, his gratitude. As a consequence of the affects generated in the encounter, the terms of their relationship are transformed. Miranda is not (solely) an observer, as her official job title decrees, but someone compelled to act, maybe even someone responsible for, Robert's well-being.

The *capacity to be affected* is a fundamental condition for becoming. We are permeable beings; who we are, the possibilities of our becoming, are not autonomous, but made in relation to human and non-human elements (Biehl and Locke 2017). Affects arise in our encounters, shaping perpetual becoming: a becoming on the verge of not-yetness, always with the potential to become otherwise to what one is (Seigworth and Gregg 2010). Processes of personhood are relational, and this relationality shapes our capacity for action (Sabsay 2016). Miranda is affected in the encounter, and this experience permeates her being, constituting the field of action. That is, becoming the kind of person who breaks rules to help another is not the decision of a sovereign actor, but rather conditioned by the affects of the encounter. The capacity to be affected is relational to a human or non-human other with the *capacity to affect*. Robert engenders feelings in Miranda – qualified as guilt, sympathy, compassion – that prompt her to act. These capacities (to affect, and to be affected) are not a quality of the individual, but are relational (Fox 2015). Robert does not *make* Miranda sympathetic; rather, the occasion – with its representational registers and identities – engenders sympathy within Miranda.

A core argument of this paper is that we need to enquire into the relational capacity to affect and be affected in development encounters – or, more precisely, the kinds of affects engendered and what these suggest about the relationship between actors. The affective dimensions of power are highly contingent and indeterminate, always with the potential to disrupt (Legg 2012). At the same time, 'power circulates through feeling', potentially reaffirming and sustaining apparatuses (Pedwell and Whitehead 2012, 116). I am more interested in the resilience of power structures, and hence focus on these latter possibilities, paying attention to the patterns and routines created through 'affective practices', the cultural and learnt conventions of action and concomitant sentiments (Wetherell 2012). Wetherell (2012) convincingly argues that "'forms of encounter" or social relationships arrive with affective slots for actors already sketched (in this situation you do superiority, I do abasement and deference, or *vice versa*)' (2012, 125). In the encounter above, Robert does abjectness, Miranda compassion. These affective slots reinforce an unequal power relation between the person holding the pen and the 'victim'. Miranda is prompted, maybe even compelled to act, but in an action that reinforces her agency over whether or not to provide additional assistance,

not Robert's ability to insist upon it. In this way moral sentiments of compassion and sympathy reinforce pre-existing hierarchies (Chakrabarty 2000, Chapter 5).

Accordingly, I want to consider two outcomes of the 'capacity to affect' with relevance for hierarchies: engendering affective responses that have beneficial outcomes for the actor, and the potential to sustain or transform the relationship between actors. A second example demonstrates these latter possibilities.⁴ Pak Harun, a volunteer in a state-led community development programme in Indonesia (an LDA), is discussing the priority plan with residents of his neighbourhood. The meeting takes place in the office next to his home, full of familiar faces. He reads scepticism in the faces of the people, who doubt that a development programme will benefit anyone other than its implementers. A group of women laugh, and he winces, although he cannot be certain what the object of their laughter is. A man stands up and accuses Pak Harun of directing benefits to his friends and family. The encounters are affecting; they compel Pak Harun to reflect on his work, and his ambition to 'do good' for the community. For these reasons he describes his involvement in the programme as risky. His social standing could be either enhanced or damaged: an outcome he will have to confront in his daily interactions in the neighbourhood. As his ambitions-for-self relate to the ability to do good for the local people, their scepticism and accusations affect him deeply. He is susceptible to being affected in such a way – that is, in a way that challenges his sense of self. The 'beneficiaries' of the programme have a relational capacity to affect, to not only compel decisions that benefit them but also shape the terms of the relationship between them (Jakimow 2020).

The conditions that engender such affective possibilities are situational, and depend on the bodies in encounters and their pre-existing relation. Returning to Miranda, her choice to describe the encounter with Robert for her short account in *Chasing Misery* is indicative of its affective force. She shares a citizenship status with Robert, and while their lives may diverge on many other axes, there is a compulsion to respond that is not as deeply felt when on overseas postings. Miranda admits:

aid workers employed on foreign soil can buffet themselves from the pain their beneficiaries experience by virtue of understanding that, theoretically, they can board a plane and leave the disaster when they so choose. I had come to understand what it is like, however, to be a root-bound resident of such a scene. New Orleans was my home and this ruin was my surround. (2014, 44)

Chasing Misery does have accounts of aid-workers breaking rules to provide additional assistance in 'foreign' countries; more often, however, the story is about holding firm against such affective assaults. Mia Ali (2014) narrates breaking the rules to give a lift to a woman in South Sudan who had just lost her child. This surrender to being moved to action only comes after recounting the many times she has driven past people needing a lift: 'I know what they think of me. I see it in their eyes as I explain I'm sorry, it's a question of insurance' (Ali 2014, 53). Mia is not unmoved; she is just not moved enough to compel action and break the formal terms of her relationships with 'locals'.

We therefore need to enquire into the *differential* capacity to affect to be affected, and the ways these map onto other development hierarchies. That is, who is able to engender affects in the Other, for whose purposes, and who (unintentionally) benefits? And by whom is one capable of being affected in ways that compel action, prompt reflection or engender

doubts? Is it that one's neighbour can engender stronger emotions through complaints than a foreign refugee? And is it that someone embedded within ties of sociality with beneficiaries are more likely to be susceptible to being affected than someone whose home is elsewhere? The term 'susceptibility' underlines this differential capacity to be affected in encounters with differently positioned bodies. At stake are not only the ways that affective patterning serves certain interests, but also the ways relations are constituted and reconstituted. That is, the differential capacity/susceptibility to affect/be affected reflects and *produces* the relationship between bodies. For this reason, an ethic of vulnerability that purposefully reflects on and seeks to change that affective patterning is necessary to transform development hierarchies. But first, we must enquire into the impediments to such transformations: affective privilege and resilience.

Affective privilege

I was told of a slightly longer than usual crackle over the ancient phone lines as it dawned on the local administrators in their dusty, paper-strewn offices, that they were being summoned by the capital Getting off the phone after another of these calls to an unsuspecting minor official, a colleague of mine once remarked that he 'could hear his spine stiffen'. Just receiving a call out of the blue from a member of the Urdu-speaking elite in the capital had terrified him. (Bamforth 2014, 32–33)

Bamforth's (2014) anecdote while working in Islamabad is an example of the relative capacity of EDAs to generate forceful affects in their encounters with LDAs. It is not an unexpected scene. Unequal access to resources, cultural capital and status maps onto hierarchies clearly on display. This hierarchy is felt in the bodies of the individuals: the stiffening of the spine and the fear of the local administrator, in a position of deference, even surrender, and the feeling of being able to generate such a response experienced by the Pakistani government official. The latter enjoys a privileged position within affective patterns; his words have a greater affective force, thereby reinforcing the power of his demands. The local administrator could have spoken back, his words generating their own force on account of their unexpectedness. But he does not, and likely he could not bring himself to: he lacks the capacity to affect in ways that disrupt the status quo.

I surmise that most of the readers of this article have felt their own affective privilege, as have I: the feeling one gets when one's own words have a greater weight, our responses attended to. Ruth Townley (2014) notices it while working for a storytelling non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Uganda. In one scene, she becomes the focus: 'Although they perform for everybody, I sense their focus, in some ways, is on me' (2014, 130). Similarly, Richard Holloway (2020, 114) recalls his ability to provoke feelings in a workshop with LDAs: 'I could legitimately pressure participants to honestly face up to dilemmas or contradictions that they partially felt but had not internalised There was squirming, there was denial, there was sometimes anger'. While Richard attributes this capacity to affect others to his extensive experience in the field – which is no doubt true – being a white expatriate male is not insignificant. The ability to command attention, to engender affects in others that help in the achievement of one's objectives, maps onto other hierarchies related to 'race', gender, class and so on.

I use the word 'privilege' as shorthand for the power that an individual holds on account of their positioning within affective patterning, but with two qualifications. First, affecting others in this way is not always welcome, or a benefit. Holloway (2020, 84) talks about how his bodily affects interfere in his work: 'the occasional visit by a foreigner would disturb the dynamics of the local organisation's relations with its clients'. His presence is enough to generate disruptive affects. Ruth Townley is uncomfortable both with being the focus of the storytelling and with the other emotions she engenders in others purely through her presence as a white humanitarian worker: 'As we move through the camp, the expectancy of the people crowding me is nearly unbearable. They want an end to war and I anger them with the sheer inadequacy of my presence' (2014, 128). I use the *susceptibility* to affect to describe these instances in which an individual engenders affects in others unwillingly, and in ways that cause them harm, to move away from the positive connotation associated with capacity.⁵ For example, the suspicion Pak Harun engendered in the community meeting described above that he was benefiting personally from the programme hinders his ability to encourage participation. While the literature on affect makes no distinction between capacity (with positive outcomes as outlined above) and susceptibility to affect, I keep these conceptually distinct to better reveal the forms of dominance and subjugation they disrupt or sustain.

Second, by using 'privilege' I do not intend to limit analysis to the status bestowed upon certain bodies without reference to the broader conditions that sustain it. Leonardo (2004, 137) rightly identifies how the term downplays the active role of white people in sustaining the 'conditions of white supremacy [that] make white privilege possible'. He argues for less attention to be placed on the 'unearned advantages, or the *state* of being dominant, and more around processes that secure domination and the privileges associated with it' (2004, 137, original emphasis). Similarly, I call for attention to the affective *practices* that cause certain feelings to arise – or prevent them from arising – in scenes of development, and which perpetuate affective privilege. This may be as simple as shielding EDAs from encounters that could engender negative feelings. Tom Bamforth (2014, 147) recounts an incident when potential donors were taken to a camp in Mindanao after a typhoon. The 'donor party was surrounded in concentric circles by their own heavily armed embassy security teams' as well as the Philippine army. As one United Nations (UN) colleague explained, 'it was vital ... that no one used the donor visit as an "opportunity to complain"'. A confrontation might have prompted questions as to the insufficiency of assistance, or underlined the ethical responsibility of the donors to attend to their needs. At the dinner that night, 'the donors declared themselves to be moved by the experience' (2014, 147), yet not sufficiently moved, apparently, to offer any financial support. Much of the choreographed ritual of development engenders the 'right' feelings in participants, allowing donors and EDAs to feel satisfaction at their good work, while avoiding scenes that might dispel this notion (Jakimow 2020; Mosse 2005).

Affective practices are established and iterated in encounters between EDAs and 'beneficiaries'. Beck (2017) describes a scene in which a national business advisor-cum-community worker for a microfinance organisation in Guatemala met with prospective participants for the first time. Rodrigo asked questions of the women, cutting them off before they could answer. He gave information, and then pointed at women to get them to repeat what he had just said. At the conclusion of the meeting when the women agreed to join the programme, he replied: 'Good ... I will be your professor and you will be the students' (Beck

2017, 104). The pointing, the rote learning, the cutting in, are affective practices that establish slots of superiority and deference (Wetherell 2012). The scene demonstrates how the EDA 'create[s] hierarchical social relations ... business advisors are cast in the role of teachers and take pleasure in the status this brings' (Beck 2017, 104). Put differently, the affective practices of the encounters between business advisor and local women enable this feeling of pleasure; a desire for this feeling of status prompts actions that establish these practices. Hierarchies are therefore established not solely on account of the cold-blooded administrative requirements of the programme, but also out of the warm-blooded desires and self-making projects of individuals (Kapoor 2017). In a similar scene, women 'beneficiaries' 'looked uncomfortable ... perhaps hiding their true reactions' (Beck 2017, 117). Their capacity to disrupt the scene and its attendant hierarchies – their capacity to affect – was muted. I am not suggesting that the women have no ability to challenge or disrupt their inferior positioning. My point is simply that affective patterning that predisposes but does not determine 'affective slots' is established in ways that reinforce the dominance of EDAs. The ability to establish these affective practices is a form of affective privilege.

Affective privilege also manifests as a lack of necessity to understand and be attuned to affective practices. In contrast to accounts of affect as pre-personal forces (eg Thrift 2008), I follow Anderson as seeing affects as transpersonal: 'formed through encounters and relations that exceed any particular person or any particular thing ... [but] personal in the sense that they are expressed in a specific person or specific thing and change in that process of expression and qualification' (2014, 102). That is, for affect to have a force, it must move a person, the person must qualify that feeling (as emotion) using the cultural resources and discourses available to them, with processes of (mis)interpretation (Ahmed 2004) shaping action. A person's capacity to be affected (and others' capacity to affect them) is influenced by their subject position, yet the actual affective response is personal, and hence indeterminate. I argue that EDAs lack the affective pedagogy to respond in ways aligned with affective communities (Ahmed 2010). For example, Richard Holloway (2020) thought that the term people used to address him, 'Morena', simply meant 'foreigner'. He later learnt it meant 'My Lord' or 'God', a realisation that was 'sobering' and 'unacceptable'. The lack of attunement to affective signals of superiority and supplication that accompanied this label is significant, however. Richard could not read the affective privilege that he enjoyed and, relatedly, was ignorant of how his whiteness structured his relations with others. A lack of affective alignment delays or prevents responsiveness and, in turn, reduces the capacity of the Other to affect.

The naivety of EDAs in unfamiliar affective routines can have advantages in their latent potential to *disrupt* power relations. Holloway (2020) recalls a second scene in which he was out of affective alignment, this time in a tribal town hall meeting. A young man spoke up: 'He was told to be quiet and keep his place by the elders, *but this man's cry stayed with me* – we had not asked young people what they wanted' (2020, 19–20, emphasis added). In the scene, the young man makes an impression on the expatriate worker, but does not affect the other people present who are attuned to the felt hierarchies of affective routines. Richard is receptive; the elders are dismissive. The young man's capacity to affect Richard is therefore greater, and while he did not succeed in getting the pilot training he desired, it caused Richard to reflect, and include youth programmes in the broader set of activities. Social relations that make it difficult for power-deficient individuals to speak up in community meetings is a known deficiency of participatory development, and the continuation of elite capture (Kothari and Cooke 2005). What I point to here are the affective practices that make

it difficult for subordinate groups to impress upon others their reduced relational capacity to affect, to move others to attentiveness and responsiveness. In this case, the EDA's lack of social embeddedness disrupted extant power relations.

The ability to allow oneself to be open to some relational affects and not others, is, however, an additional form of affective privilege that Holloway (2020) enjoys, and which reinforces his higher status. Richard urges the reader and future practitioner: 'We need to move out of the trap of considering people as "beneficiaries", instead viewing them as equals, peers or clients' (2020, 208). He suggests practices of 'learning how to move your mindset from thinking of poor and marginalised people in the country as *beneficiaries* or "vulnerable" or even "victims" ... and appreciating them as people with capacities and competences' (2020, 208, original emphasis). I could not agree more, but find the presumption that the power to decide the terms of the relationship rests with the EDA disturbing – although nonetheless accurate. The words 'consider', 'view' and 'move your mindset' suggests cognitive acts, but at stake are the impressions one allows the other to make, one's capacity to be affected by them. What I am interested in is the relative lack of capacity of the Other to set the terms of the relationship. In the encounter between two permeable relational beings, their respective bodily forces – the affects they engender – reflect, and *constitute*, their relationship. Affective privilege manifests as a relative capacity to have greater force within these encounters, while being resilient to being affected by others. This final form of affective privilege leads us to the second impediment to transformative relationships: affective resilience.

Affective resilience

Maybe it was some error in the stock count. My warehouse manager, a reasonably friendly and easy-going guy, seemed to be holding things up. All I remember is how I roared at him How we glared at each other How I almost hit him. That's how angry I was I stormed out of the warehouse ... and cowered and howled behind the latrines I had done my best to adopt a fusion of ruthless efficiency and *hakuna matata*, and it felt like the result was one scratchy, cynical, impatient bitch.

(O'Donoghue 2014, 79)

Lucy O'Donoghue's (2014) self-aware and reflective essay provides an excellent example of what I have described elsewhere as an 'affective injury' (Jakimow 2018). The scene of her yelling and the emotional aftermath is noteworthy not only for the strong emotions she names, but also the way the encounter shattered her sense of self, or at the least her self-representation. Put differently, the scene challenged her idea of who she was trying to be, maybe even the possibility of that self. She takes stock, the strength of the emotions inviting, maybe even demanding, reflection on her work, her 'self' and, thereby, her relation with others.

While Lucy is deeply affected in the encounter, EDAs generally enjoy affective resilience – that is, an ability to avoid or bounce back from encounters that would otherwise fundamentally challenge what they are doing, who they are or who they are aspiring to be. Resilience is 'the ability of something or someone to return to its original shape after it has been pulled, stretched, pressed or bent' (Bracke 2016, 54), with positive connotations in the development and humanitarian sector of being able to recover from shocks, or 'build back better' after disasters (see Alburo-Cañete, this issue). Resilience as a desired quality in self or others can also be negative, however, such as its articulation as a moral force within neoliberal

economies, in which 'good subjects' withstand (but neither overcome nor transform) the conditions of extreme precarity (Bracke 2016). I focus on another negative aspect of resilience, and that is the ability of dominant individuals to withstand the moral challenges that arise (or fail to arise) in encounters with power-deficient individuals. These are 'felt' challenges: the engendering of doubts, the sinking feeling that one has done wrong, the affront of becoming a person within a particular moment that clashes violently with self-narratives.

Affective resilience is thus the protection of 'self'. One's ability to be resilient is shaped (but not determined) by the affective privilege accorded their social positioning (that is, their subject position), but is either realised, or not, with the self. As noted above, the self is permeable, in that it is constituted in relation to others, one's embodied experiences and impressions. Yet I posit that permeability is situational; people are differentially susceptible to being impressed upon in ways that shape the self. While 'a shock might profoundly reconstitute the subject', resilience enables 'a continuity and coherence of the self prior to, during, and after' (Bracke 2016, 61). Lucy is not resilient in the above encounter, which prompted a reconstitution of her self-in-relation to the warehouse manager. But she admits such scenarios are rare in the humanitarian sector. 'Trying to connect with others, especially local staff, was considered, at best, chummy and cliché' (O'Donoghue 2014, 79–80). She contrasts the distance aspired and achieved by EDAs with the experiences of local staff, who 'rarely got such opportunities to compartmentalise their lives. Their social fabric fastened them to a particular community' (2014, 80–81). 'Socially light' expat development workers can absorb and rebound from challenges to who they are in a way that is difficult for 'socially heavy' local development workers (Jakimow 2020; Redfield 2012).

The affective resilience of EDAs is partially a result of the most important referents for self being distant from the site of 'development'. In other words, moral registers, enduring relationships, referents in processes of differentiation, are not correspondent with the those of the development 'field'. The accounts of expat workers are replete with such examples. Caryl Feldacker (2014) notes the importance of having a retreat from the field where one can truly be oneself. The audience that evaluates life projects and casts judgement is not the people proximate in one's work, but 'back home'. For example, Holloway (2020) says of development practitioners: we 'present ourselves both to ourselves and to our contemporaries as doing worthwhile work ... helping people make the world a better place' (2020, 207). These 'contemporaries' include friends in the financial sector, and people who 'may sneer (publicly or not) about do-goodism' (2020, 207). It is clear this audience is 'back home'. 'Home' is also where the cultural resources for one's self-making projects are located (Ortner 2006), and where belonging and differentiation are tied. Expatriates talk of how their experiences of 'surviving the relative hardships' provide them bragging rights back home (Feldacker 2014, 265). 'Locals' are far from irrelevant, but they are not the family and friends who are the central relational actors in processes-of-self. The greatest threats to a sense of durable self thus arise not in relation to proximate people in the field, but the imaginary 'audience' of home (Biehl and Locke 2017).

When the primary audience and relational others in processes of 'self' are not at 'home', they are fellow expatriate workers. Memoirs are replete with instances when one's credentials are challenged, yet the 'Others' who relationally engender shame or embarrassment are members of the same 'tribe': those also living in the bubble of 'Aidland' (Apthorpe 2011). Melissa Phillips (2014) describes her vulnerability in an airport in Kenya on her first posting: 'Embarrassed and feeling like I'd shown weakness', at risk was 'my impression of myself how others actually saw me' (2014, 27). Helen Seegar (2014) notes: 'In the aid work sector, the

prestige, admiration and recognition of a specific individual is directly proportional to how authentically grubby, sweaty, sunburnt and sleep-deprived he or she is' (2014, 31). What is left unsaid, which is all the more telling, is that the 'Other' is not a local, but an expat worker. Recipients of development and LDAs are likely to be forgiving of initial bumbling at a foreign airport, while being much less impressed by a grubby appearance. What is critical here is that the 'relationality' that is an inherent part of our processes-of-self, and our attunement to social worlds (Throop 2018), is not with people occupying lower positions within development hierarchies, but other people 'like us'.

While expatriate workers are most likely to construct self-in-relation to a *distant* home, national development workers also have affective resilience on account of the spatial and temporal nature of their work. Projects are short term, and so they are not there to see the durable effects, to take pride in or be embarrassed by the lasting legacies of their work. Moral registers may be shared, and national EDAs are more likely to be attuned to the affective patterns in which they work, even as they enjoy a privileged position within them (Bornstein 2012). Yet there is still an 'Othering' that occurs between EDAs and the recipients of aid, in which the latter are seen as belonging to a different class, having different habits and concerns, and of a different milieu (Pigg 1992). Furthermore, national development workers are unlikely to live in the locales where development work takes place, returning home to the capital, the city or the enclave. The community workers-cum-business advisors in Beck's (2017, 87) study rarely 'live in, or close to, the semirural communities in which women live'. Their infrequent visits consisting primarily of fulfilling administrative requirements means that they 'do not know the "ins and outs" of the community' and do not 'build strong relationships' (2017, 87). This lack of embeddedness reduces their relational force in the processes-of-self of the development worker. Women beneficiaries form their own expectations of the NGO, but these exist in 'co-constitute[d] development hallways' (2017, 93). While there was a culture of internal and external evaluations, there was no means for the sentiments of the beneficiaries to penetrate thinking or inform practices.

The positioning and roles of national and expat EDAs also shield them from the affective challenges posed by confrontation, or to the consequences of failure. The national EDAs in Beck's (2017) study followed the instructions from 'experts' based in donor countries, and therefore were distanced from the emotional consequences if things went wrong. Expatriate EDAs are often kept busy with bureaucratic management (Malkki 1996) or denied access to the 'field' on account of security (Seegar 2014), making them less likely to be directly challenged by the local people. The ability to devolve the social and emotional fallout of development initiatives is evident in Holloway's (2020, 115) reflection on his idea to ask parents for a goat each in order to make the school sustainable in Zambia:

As a peripatetic trainer, I never knew whether ideas I had suggested actually worked, but in this case I met the man later and he told me that the idea was working well, although he had to overcome suspicion by the parents that he was making money personally from the scheme. (2020, 115)

Richard glosses over the detail of the man having to withstand the suspicion of parents: a moral charge with much affective force in scenes of development (Bornstein 2012), particularly when the accuser is a neighbour, or community elder (Jakimow 2020). EDAs do not experience the proximity to hear such accusations, nor are the stakes of these accusations

as grave for them as they are for LDAs. Hands-off work offers affective resilience by avoiding uncomfortable encounters.

The final manifestation of affective resilience is evident in the lack of compulsion to reflect on mistakes and failures. While Holloway's (2020) *Adventures in the Aid Trade* provides numerous lessons from his 40 years of experience, what is striking is the lack of reflection on his complicity in development failures and his position of privilege in his relations with others. His privileged position and authorial voice means that there is *no compulsion* to do so, with a concomitant ability to shield oneself from brutal self-reckoning. At stake is who or what can prompt such self-reckoning. Lisa Lovatt-Smith's (2014) memoir *Who Knows Tomorrow* charts a journey from glamorous career in fashion, to volunteer and then activist, alongside a journey of growing embeddedness within Ghanaian society, through time, marriage and adoption. She spent years working to improve the condition of orphanages, which were often shocking in their abuse and exploitation of children. Yet despite first-hand experiences and her intimate relations, it was only after reading research reports from the 'West' that she realised her work was misguided: 'It was difficult for me to admit that I'd been mistaken. But suddenly I could see, as clear as daylight, that my ten-point plan was all wrong' (Lovatt-Smith 2014, 264). To her credit, Lisa makes a pivot, and from supporting and establishing orphanages, she became an activist to close them down. What I find noteworthy, however, is how the veil of ignorance was allowed to persist for so long, revealing her affective resilience in encounters in Ghana that arguably should have demanded deeper self-introspection.

The capacity of power-deficient individuals to affect – in particular, the potential to engender feelings that demand reflection and a response – is relational to the capacity of the EDA to be affected. The literature on personhood has focussed on permeability, the relationality of the self, the dependence on others for processes of personhood (Butler 2015). Relatively less attention has been placed on quotidian practices of shielding oneself against threats, our capacity to live with discomfort (Laidlow 2014). Elsewhere I have examined the ways LDAs recover from affective injuries, to recuperate the idea of self that has been threatened in an encounter, and the consequences for reflexivity and responsiveness (Jakimow 2018; 2020). Here, I draw attention to the affective resilience of EDAs, which is not through acts of recovery as much as shielding oneself from having one's sense of self threatened in the first place. I argue that we need to dismantle this shield through an ethic of vulnerability to break down development hierarchies.

Vulnerability as ethical practice

Feminist scholars have sought to reclaim vulnerability against masculine notions that associate it with 'weakness', to be overcome in favour of self-mastery (Butler 2016).⁶ Vulnerability underlines our dependence on others for our social existence, our 'vulnerability to the Other in order to be' (Butler 1997, 21). We are being acted upon at the same time that we act, and while this makes us vulnerable, this vulnerability is the starting point of agency (Butler 2016).

Vulnerability emerges from subjects' relationality, and it is constitutive of our capacity for action ... to be vulnerable implies the capacity to affect and be affected. This aspect of vulnerability involves a constitutive openness in the subject, regardless of whether it is wanted or not. (Sabsay 2016, 285).

That we are all socially formed subjects foregrounds our mutual dependence, and our responsibility for one another. Occupying a position of vulnerability in relation to a powerful Other is hence a political statement and demand.

Vulnerability has mostly been explored as a political tool for the power deficient (Butler 2016; Laszczkowski 2019), but I argue that it can be repurposed as a practice for the powerful. Development is an ideal site to explore these possibilities, as it is perhaps one of the few arenas in which the desire to transform relationships, empowering the power deficient and disempowering the powerful, is explicit, and (mostly) genuine (Chambers 1983). While early attempts simply disrupted knowledge hierarchies and relocated decision-making, the need to work on the 'self' of the development actor is increasingly seen as critical to transforming development (Chambers 1997; Fechter 2012). Quarles van Ufford and Giri (2003, 253) take from Foucault (1986) the 'care of self', calling for 'the cultivation of an appropriate mode of being', with critical self-reflection a starting point for new visions and practices of development. What vulnerability adds to this discussion is to consider these processes of self as 'always more than a work of thought or reflection' (Moore 2011, 21). Affect, emotions and our relations with human and non-human others permeate our ongoing processes of self, they impress *upon* us in ways that are 'radically involuntary' (Butler 2015, 7). This impressionability *should* allow other actors in the development arena some effect on the ongoing processes of self of EDAs, and thereby the terms of the relationship between them. Affects engendered in encounters lay open the potential to become otherwise, but this potential is not often realised. There are impediments to such co-constitution, requiring purposeful practices to intensify vulnerability.

Following Gilson (2014), I therefore argue for vulnerability as an ethical practice entailing a purposive openness, empathy and responsiveness to how the other is feeling. In the terms I have used above, an ethic of vulnerability is an attentiveness to the differential capacity/susceptibility to affect/be affected, including an acknowledgement of one's own affective privilege and the weakened ability of others to make an impression (affective resilience). It is, then, a means of dismantling this affective privilege and resilience, through a willingness to open oneself up, allowing oneself to be moved, particularly in encounters with subordinate individuals (see Albuero-Cañete et al. this issue for the contributors' struggles with these practices). The ambition is not to willingly surrender to persuasion and manipulation, but to leave open the possibilities for creativity. As Bracke notes, the opposite of resilience and the desire to resist stress and return to a prior state is 'adapting to a new situation through adjustment, negotiation, and compromise' (2016, 55). Openness allows possibilities for transformation: in the self (the sense of who one is), the self in relation to others, and crucially, the terms of the relationship itself. As we seek to transform unequal relations in development, and beyond, and arrive at creative solutions to enduring problems, vulnerability as an ethical practice is an important tool.

I have attempted, and struggled, to adopt vulnerability as an ethical practice. Without claiming success by any measure, I provide an example of the kinds of politics it potentially allows. Below are my opening remarks at the Development Studies Association of Australia inaugural conference in 2020. These followed the 'Welcome to Country', a ceremony in which an Indigenous Elder of the country in which the event takes place offers a verbal statement of welcome. Such performances of recognition and remorse operate with the contentious and fraught politics of settler colonies, yet have often become hollow, a routine act 'quickly forgotten and brushed aside to resume business' (Daigle 2019, 9). To reflect my mixed feelings about such ceremonies, I said:

I am humbled and touched by the words of Indigenous Elders, I am deeply appreciative of being welcomed on to Country cared for by them and their ancestors. But I am also uncomfortable, because I know I am being welcomed on to land that has been stolen ... I am uncomfortable because I am a beneficiary of the violence of dispossession, of violence to culture, and to the alternative imaginings and futures that might have been

What prompted this speech was not discomfort, but rather an acknowledgement that I usually feel good hearing a welcome to a country, warm at being invited to share in the Elder's life and smug at being on the right side of politics. Experiencing 'good-feeling' is a product of both my affective privilege (the way these events are orchestrated to engender these emotions in their majority white audience) and affective resilience, in that unless I purposefully open myself to the guilt and shame of being a beneficiary of dispossession, I need not confront those feelings. Indigenous scholars such as Daigle (2019) argue that these 'spectacles of reconciliation' are 'good-feeling' events, which perpetuate colonial relations and allow futurities to go unchallenged. Indigenous people often bear the emotional and time burden of mitigating white guilt and attending to white fragility. I argue that people in positions of privilege need to own and nurture this fragility, to become vulnerable to being impressed upon in these performances of reconciliation in ways that make us squirm, reflect and ultimately take responsibility. Comfort 'dulls ... imaginative capacities' (Gilson 2014, 1). In seeking discomfort, I want to contribute to a reimagination of Australian society.

An openness to being affected in and of itself will not overcome the other conditions that sustain unequal power relations: namely, access to material resources and authoritative knowledge. While affective privilege may seem insignificant in relation to these other mechanisms, I argue that a failure to acknowledge and address it partially accounts for the failure to 'reverse' development hierarchies, despite (many) good intentions. This oversight is a problem related to the resistance to properly account for, and dismantle, racism within development practice and research (Kothari 2006; Patel 2020). The parallels between white privilege and affective privilege are not coincidental, as race scholars have been demonstrating for some time (eg Baldwin 1963; Eddo-Lodge 2017). I am indebted to these scholars for clarifying to me my own affective privilege, and I hope the concept may in turn be of use beyond development studies.

An ethic of vulnerability is a personal quest, but its transformational possibilities go beyond an individual enterprise. Affective privilege and resilience is structural and institutional, tied to practices of development delivery that aim to keep it as a 'feel-good' enterprise. Development practice already has many of the tools required for dismantling them. Reflexivity is foremost: 'a deliberate process of becoming unsettled about what is normal' (Eyben 2014, 20). I suggest that our reflexive practices need to include a conscious account of our positioning within affective patterning, the affective privilege and resilience we enjoy, as well as an openness to feel, to be moved and impressed upon. In this way, affect as an object not only of theory, but also of practice, can help us to both rethink and *transform* power configurations in development.

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Notes

1. This paper was written during the COVID-19 pandemic, when postal services to Australia were disrupted. My review of books missed several autobiographical and second-hand accounts that failed to arrive.
2. My whiteness and my national identity are two independent yet intersecting statuses that bestow upon me privilege and power. Australians not socially categorised as white have a different positioning within development encounters: see Wu (this issue) and Kothari (2006).
3. White people are increasingly reckoning with their 'white privilege', yet as many have noted (Eddo-Lodge 2017; Leonardo 2004), Black writers have long provided accounts that could/should have sparked introspection much earlier.
4. The vignette is taken from my 10 months of ethnographic research in Medan, Indonesia (see Jakimow 2020).
5. There is no conceptual distinction between capacity and susceptibility in the literature on affect. I find, however, that to understand how capacity to affect maps onto power hierarchies it is useful to use distinguish between a power-deficient individual inadvertently and unwillingly engendering affects in another in ways that cause the affecting body harm (eg Ahmed 2004), compared to how powerful bodies affect others in ways that sustain or perpetuate their position.
6. The extensive literature critiquing vulnerability in the development sector falls outside the scope of this paper, although see Alburo-Cañete (this issue) for an overview.

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