

Understanding Power in Development Studies through Emotion and Affect:

Promising Lines of Enquiry

By

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Abstract

In this volume, the contributors take affect and emotions as a means to cast 'development' in fresh light. Recognising that the affective dimensions of life are a critical part of social, political and economic organisation, each contribution draws upon theories of affect and emotion to enrich understandings of power within development studies. This introductory essay critically reflects on dominant understandings of power in the field, outlining how these can be augmented, or rethought, through attention to affect and emotions. It proposes new lines of enquiry that bring a necessary dynamism to the analysis of power in three ways, revealing how emotion and affect: a) sustain or potentially challenge broader social and economic conditions; b) influence processes of self-formation, and; c) reinforce or potentially disrupt social hierarchies. We aim to advance a research agenda that draws upon affect theory to enhance understandings of development with a focus on power's sedimentation and disruption.

Keywords: Affect, emotions, power, development studies, theory

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New Lines of Enquiry

Recognition of the importance of affect and emotions has arrived quite late in development studies, where the rational-calculative individual has reigned supreme until recently.

Attention to the intangible elements of life can seem indulgent when there are political and economic issues at stake. Rather than being irrelevant to policy and practice however, research inattentive to affect and emotions offers only anaemic accounts of social worlds, and partial understandings of social problems and solutions (Anderson and Smith 2001). In the field of development, there is now a sense among academics (Clouser 2016; Wright 2012) and institutions such as the World Bank (2015) that 'emotions' matter, for both understandings of development, and, improving development praxis. Further, as Baillie Smith and Jenkins (2012) note, development studies is in many ways an emotive field, as scholars (and practitioners) are often passionate to do good.

Important moves have been made to underline the usefulness of emotions and affect as analytical tools to understand development (Clouser 2016; Wright 2012). The aim of this special issue is to build upon this previous work and put forward a research agenda to further scholarship in the emotional and affective dimensions of development. This introduction identifies the lines of enquiry in which affect and emotion can augment extant understandings and outlines an analytical strategy through which to examine them. I take affect and emotions as a means to cast 'development' in fresh light, recognising that the affective dimensions of life are a critical part of social, political and economic organisation. Each of the contributions to this collection helps us to understand development as inherently political processes, the consequences of these processes, and the possibilities for resistance and transformation.

DEFINING TERMS

In this collection, contributors have foregrounded the affective and emotional elements of development as they are revelatory of power's effects, and failures. Often collapsed into the

affective dimensions of life, there are important differences between affect and emotion. Affect captures embodied modulations, the movement from one state to another, the 'passage...of forces or intensities' other than consciousness and beyond emotion' (Seigworth and Gregg 2010: 1). Affect is intimate, experienced at the level of the person, but is also impersonal (Mazzarella 2017), or as Anderson (2014) prefers, transpersonal, in that the forces that mediate our responses emerge through encounters, rather than belonging to a single human or non-human object. Emotions, in contrast, are pre-eminently cultural, and biographical (Wetherell 2012). We make sense of, and express, how we feel using the cultural frames at our disposal, which are tied to systems of representation and, hence, power. How we interpret and express feeling is shaped by emotional repertoires: the historically and culturally produced possible emotional responses for different social identities, shaped by ideologies of gender, race, ability and so on (Harding and Pribram 2002). While the difference between emotions and affect should not be overstated (Harding and Pribram 2002), the movement between being impressed upon, interpreting, and acting upon that impression is critical to understanding how power works through people.

The so-called affective turn aims to 'trace how power operates through affect and how affective life is imbued with relations of power, without reducing affective life to power's effect' (Anderson 2014: 8). In other words, affect is useful in understanding the mechanisms of power while being attentive to forces of destabilization and creativity. On one hand, affect helps move social sciences away from strictly post-structuralist readings of power as being all-encompassing and determinate, to reveal the *textures of life* that lie beyond discourse and systems of signification (Hemmings 2005; see also Pedwell and Whitehead 2012). Rather than a body being an 'automaton' that simply does power's bidding, affective responses capture that which happens prior to conscious awareness (that is, prior to being captured by power) and therefore contains the potential to disrupt existing social orders (Thrift 2008). On the other hand, affect is also complicit with power. The affective dimensions of life can augment power; discourses are *felt* through the body, working through the individual below consciousness. Human affect does not lie outside of systems of signification but 'is inextricably linked with meaning-making and with the semiotic (broadly defined) and the

discursive' (Wetherell 2012: 20). Affect is not either/or an accomplice or disrupter to power, it has the potential to be both.

It is the dialectic between what Foucault describes as apparatuses that orient, determine and govern, and that of the Deleuzian concept of assemblages that has the potential for disorder, de-territorializations, disruption, which can be put to use in extending understandings of power in development. As Legg (2011: 129) notes, the two are not in opposition, rather 'each state contains the traces, remnants, seeds and potential for the alternate state'. Rather than look for one or the other—regimes of power, *or* creative potentialities—it is more useful to consider these as being in productive tension. Research in development studies has tended to sit on one side or the other of this dialectic. Analysis of power relations from both materialist and discursive perspectives has tended to posit overarching regimes—be they capitalist systems of production and consumption, or monolithic development discourses—that people either resist, or acquiesce to (Scott 1994). People are either constituted as subjects within broader forces outside of their control, or else rational free agents, manoeuvring within systems. The systems are either maintained through the forces of reproduction, or else challenged through direct oppositional action. This special issue rejects such binaries, and is in conversation with what High (2014: 7) describes as the 'resistance to resistance' literature (see also Ortner 2006), which sees the relationship between resistance and acquiescence as complex and ambivalent. At stake are how unease and separation from the 'common-sense' of our times emerge, the role of affect and emotion in the emergence of world-changing forces, or alternatively, the sustaining of the status quo (Li 2019).

RETHINKING POWER IN DEVELOPMENT

While there have been various ways to conceptualise power in development studies, two broad approaches have dominated the field, particularly in post-development and anti-development critiques: political economic approaches with their roots in Marxism and discursive understandings of power with their roots in Foucault. I argue that attention to emotion and affect helps overcome an inherent weakness in these approaches: the binary of

power and resistance and concomitant failure to account for potentialities in overarching apparatuses. I first consider political economic approaches to understanding immanent development, meaning the broader processes of structural, political, economic change, before turning to biopolitics as a means to understand power within intentional development - 'the stuff of international aid: public and their agencies implementing 'development' projects, programmes and policies with specific ends' (Bebbington 2004: 726).

Political economic critiques of immanent development

Political economy analyses illuminate how structural conditions differentially constrain and enable life chances, and the consequences of this unevenness. Emotions and affect can enhance our understanding of the *lived experience* of structural conditions in two ways. First, hierarchical and exploitative class relations entail not only the extraction of surplus value in material terms; emotional and affective labour is increasingly a resource extracted by elites for profit in production and service chains (Anerkar et al. 2016; Salazar et al. 2016). Second, negative emotional impacts can be considered a form of structural violence (Farmer 2004). For example, Sultana (2011) highlights the emotional suffering of women in Bangladesh unable to obtain clean drinking water for their families, as well as the feelings of humiliation that they suffer in their daily struggles to negotiate access. These studies highlight the importance of emotions for well-being, and as a corollary, negative emotions as a type of violence (see also Hak et al. this issue).

Research on emotions and affect goes beyond understanding the *everyday experience* of structural conditions in a static sense, to shed light on the *processes* of reproduction or transformation of these conditions. Much of the anti-development literature aims to break the ideological hold of 'development', and to seek alternative and plural modes of social organisation (Acosta 2017). What remains under-theorised, however, is why and how certain ideologies take hold and become sites of personal investment, and the conditions under which their hold is weakened. Part of the answers to these questions can be found in the affective dimensions of life. Ideologies sustain material relations and systems of discrimination and oppression obtain their force and intensity through emotions and affect

(Ahmed 2004; Fanon 1967; Pedwell and Whitehead 2012). Further, institutions such as the state and market are not comprised of rational systems and processes, but sustained through the affective investments that people make in them, turning abstract entities into social facts (Anderson and Smith 2001; Beyers 2015). Affective recruitment also encourages individuals to invest in the 'common sense' of the prevailing cultural hegemony (Berlant 2011). People remain attached to ideas of 'progress' and the 'good life' (or 'development') even when seemingly out of reach (High 2015; Jakimow 2016). In this way, affective structures within a political history of development contribute to the reproduction of structural conditions (da Costa 2016).

The affective dimensions of life have, however, been more widely used to explain the potential for change. According to Gramscian notions of hegemony, "common sense" arises from the *feeling* of the populace, consolidated and articulated through organic intellectuals (Creahern 2017). This intangible collective affect (Anderson 2014) is both the means through which a dominant hegemony is reproduced over time, as well as a potential starting point for a breakdown of consent (see also Li 2019). For example, Murrey (2016) examines the agency of people negatively impacted by an oil pipeline in Cameroon, arguing that attention to emotional geographies elucidate long-term struggles for survival, itself a form of resistance in subalterns' refusal to give in (see Hak et al. this issue). From the mobilization of collectives to the everyday resistance of subalterns, emotions and affects are crucial for the possibilities of structural change. In examining how the affective dimensions of life may lead to acquiescence and *then* resistance, I do not position these possibilities within a binary. Rather, as High (2014) argues, we need more careful analysis of the relationship between them.

The emotional and affective dimensions of life are also critical to answer questions central to political economy: 'who owns what, who does what, who gets what, and what do they do with it' (Li 2015: 6). Power asymmetries provide some groups with disproportionate access to decision-making and resources (Greif 1998). These structures of power are not purely material and political however, but also sustained through social norms as to what people *ought* to feel and do, and the scripts and schemas through which people make sense of their

world (Scott 1995). Attention to affect and emotions can help to reveal the force and persistence of certain institutions. Ahmed (2010) argues that if an individual feels as they 'should' in response to particular objects, then one is aligned with an *affective community*. If they do not, then they experience alienation.

Emotions and affect are also an under-recognised element of moral economies, and sites of entitlement, compelling action that may be aligned with or diverge from commonly held values. For example, Wright (2012) demonstrates the capacity of marginalised people in the Philippines to affect officials as a strategy to gain access to resources. Activists—dressed in clothing that signalled their poverty—shamed officials into providing necessary documents for their land claims. Similarly, in examining the role emotions play in how people use, access and struggle over access to clean water in Bangladesh as seen above, Sultana (2011) finds the capacity to engender an emotional response is one strategy to access clean water (see also Sjamsoe'oed Sadjad this issue). Although moral economies may engender or intensify certain feelings, feelings are not wholly captured, and may animate action that is not bound to social norms or values. In this way, emotions contribute to the ambiguity and contestation of sites of entitlements, and the forming anew of moral economies.

Post-development critiques of intentional development

Foucauldian understandings of power have driven the main advances to thinking about power in development studies since the 1990s. Post-development critiques built an understanding of development as discourse, examining how the intersection of knowledge and power enabled regimes of expertise (Escobar 1995; Ferguson 1990). Development discourse—as a product of epistemic perspectives of the 'West'—inscribes power in development practices. While justifiably influential, these critiques fail to capture the unconscious underpinnings of power, and the way power is mediated at the level of the subject. Kapoor (2017: 2666) characterises Ferguson's 'Anti-politics machine' as a 'cold critique, devoid of human passion' in which bureaucrats are described as cogs in the machine, 'caught in an inescapable power-ridden network'. He argues that reliance on Foucault's theorization of power in which there is 'no gap between the discursive space and

its positive content or effect' (2017: 2667) has prevented an understanding of how development persists or how real alternatives might arise.

Affect theory has much to offer in a warm-blooded account of development as discourse. The abovementioned dialectic between the discursive apparatuses that govern, and assemblages with the potential for dis-order and disruption, captures two intertwined elements of power that are currently under-theorised in post-development thought. First, affect reveals the force and intensity of the discursive. The ubiquity and influence of the development discourse engenders certain affective responses; not only desire (Kapoor 2017), but also fear, anxiety, shame, animate actions and thought. Affect also augments power. Discursive regimes are felt through the body, mobilizing actors to think and act in ways that reinforce discursive regimes. At the same time, affect is not *captured by* or *reducible to* discursive power; affect is in 'excess of the ways in which life and living are organised', to quote Anderson (2014: 16). Bodies may be moved by forces and intensities that conflict or disrupt discursive power. Attention to the dialectic between these two elements of power helps to reveal how development persists, and how real alternatives may arise.

Studies attuned to emotions and affect can therefore augment understandings of development as discourse, revealing why such discourses are seductive, and the mechanisms through which they persist. For example, sentiments have helped establish humanitarianism as a responsibility, while also forging a hierarchy between modern/backward, developed/undeveloped (Keenaghan and Reilly 2017). Such affective animations frustrate more complex understandings of structural conditions, and are ultimately unsuccessful in engendering a sense of responsibility to change them (Barford 2017; Schwittay 2014). At the same time, Schwittay offers the possibility that affect can give 'rise to an affirmative and anticipatory politics' (2014: 175). Lousley (2014) argues that Band Aid should not be entirely dismissed as 'sentimental', as it enabled people across the social spectrum in Euro-America to imagine themselves as part of a larger project to change the world. Similarly, Malkki (2015) shows how knitting stuffed animals for a humanitarian program produced an 'affective imagination of connection, or relationship to the imagined child in need' (2015: 124, emphasis removed). This relationship need not be hierarchical, if it

is conceived within an ethical geography of care, charged ‘with emotions such as anger, anticipation and hope that make responsibility not a burden but forward-looking’ to alternative visions of the world (Raghuram *et al.* 2009: 11).

The emotional and affective power of development discourses are also evident in local settings, where the socio-cultural context inflects personal responses. Morales and Harriss (2014: 711) illuminate the ‘subtle power dynamics of everyday life’ by revealing how feelings of powerlessness, discomfort, or embarrassment inhibit participation in participatory development, while feelings of competence, power and pride encourage it. They show how the evoking of embarrassment and fear is very effective in motivating behavioural change in open defecation, reinforcing a depoliticizing discourse of self-responsibility. State agents can engender feelings of embarrassment in marginalised people in part due to how the discourse of development reinforces the ignorance—and hence shame—of ‘backward’ people. Emotions and affect do not necessarily reinforce hierarchies, however, and largely overlooked is the capacity of targets of development to *affect* the doers of development. For example, Kar (2013) disrupts easy readings of the hierarchical relationship between microfinance loan officers and lenders in India. Local discourses of ‘money lending’ make NGO staff-cum-loan officers susceptible to shame and defensiveness. Borrowers have the capacity to affect NGO workers (engender these feelings through taunts for example), in order to delay or avoid repayments. The capacity of borrowers to affect, and the susceptibility of NGO workers to be affected, disrupts unequal power relations between them (see also Jakimow 2020).

Another element to biopolitical power is the fashioning of subjects amenable to development. In Foucault’s (1984; 1996) work on freedom, discourses are viewed not as imposing certain cultural models and constituting subjects; rather, it is through the ‘exercise of the self’ that ‘one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being’ (1994: 282). Power is not absent but rather is achieved through structuring a field of possible actions (Li 2006) within which individuals exercise ‘freedom’. Affect theory can reveal the efficacy of mechanisms that constitute ‘free’ subjects in ways that serve the interests of the state. Rose argues that ethopower ‘works through the values, beliefs, and

sentiments' (2000: 1399) that produce affective connections of the free and autonomous individual to the community. The stirring of emotions contributes to processes of subjectification, as individuals are *moved* to embrace certain ethical formations. Such techniques have proven effective in recruiting volunteers, who then undertake the free labour that enables the roll-back of state welfare services (Lacey and Ilcan 2006, see also Albuero-Cañete this issue).

While important, such understandings leave little space for processes of becoming that are not fully captured by the social, including its affective dimensions (Moore 2011). While affect and emotion may be mechanisms through which subjects are constituted in ways conducive to the ends of the state, they also introduce a contingency, precisely because they gain their power from forms of regulation but are not fully captured by them. For example, Singh (2013) offers a critique of Agrawal's (2005) examination of the discursive constitution of subjects through the concept of 'environmentality'. Singh argues that this concept privileges technologies of power, overlooking the importance of emotion, affect and embodied experiences in processes of self-formation. Using Spinoza's concept of *potentia*, Singh reveals how tribal people's affective practices escape technologies of power, producing new subjectivities that share a relationship with, but are not contained by, discursive regimes. Emotions and affect may augment technologies of power, at the same time as holding the potential for creativity.

LINES OF ENQUIRY / OVERVIEW OF ARTICLES

The above discussion suggests that studies attentive to emotions and affect augment understanding of power in development studies in a number of ways. In relation to immanent development, they illuminate how structural conditions and systems of oppression are sustained or challenged; the differentiation of negative impacts; and people's strategies to navigate these conditions. In terms of intentional development, emotions and affect shed light on the maintenance and disruption of hierarchies at the global and local level; the recruitment of individuals to become development actors, as part of, or in challenge to, systems of governance; the strategies people deploy to access development

resources. Table 1 provides an overview of the different lines of enquiry which respond to long-standing questions in development studies while raising others. My purpose in artificially dissecting power into three levels—collective conditions, encounters between bodies, and selfhood—is to better elucidate the dialectic between power regimes and creative possibilities. Most of the studies reviewed above each examine one side of this dialectic, rather than revealing how the seeds of one are found in the other (Singh 2013; Pandian 2009 are exceptions). Doing so remains an important area of future research.

The articles in this special issue all speak, in various ways, to the usefulness of emotions and affect as analytical tools in development studies. The first article by Sochanny Hak, Yvonne Underhill-Sem and Chanrith Ngin (2021, this issue) shows how emotions are central to collective resistance to structural conditions in Cambodia. Using a feminist political-ecology approach, they explain differences in the ways people from two villages responded to land exclusion, revealing the importance of emotional responses in inspiring/enabling, or alternatively inhibiting/disabling collective action. They find that both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ emotions—those that are constructive or inhibiting—were decisive. Their article invites us to consider the emotional conditions required for collective action, and thereby the possibilities to challenge broader structural conditions: insights valuable across scales.

Mahardhika Sjamsoe’oed Sadjad’s (2021, this issue) article similarly examines processes of immanent development, but at the level of encounters. Her rich ethnographic material unravels the microcosmic flows within the assemblage of relations between refugees and local residents in Indonesia. She reveals the tensions between feelings of solidarity and social jealousy among the host society, and the ways these order power relations. Critically, by showing these to be interrelated rather than opposing emotions, Sjamsoe’oed Sadjad shows how affect orders society and sustains power relations, as well as its disruptive potential. Together, these inform the ‘moral logic’ informing refugee reception in Indonesia.

The article by Sarah Wright, Jagjit Plahe and Gavin Jack (2022, this issue) examines the epistemological politics of climate change, and the potential for embodied and affective ways of knowing to disrupt technocratic knowledge of climate change. They offer the notion

of 'knowledge spaces' as a means to theorize the spaces within which certain knowledges come into being, with attention to their emotional topologies. Evocative and moving accounts from organisers, farmer-leaders and activists speaking about their experiences with typhoons in the Philippines reveal the richness and depth of embodied knowledges, their multi-sensory engagement with the more-than-human, and their emerging senses of place and self.

Four articles examine affective flows and practices within intentional development. In her article on a digital crowdfunding platform in India, Shonali Banerjee (2021, this issue) interrogates the potential for direct NGO-giver fundraising to transform the top-down power relations inherent in conventional donor relationships. Her account of 'intimate technologies for development', reveals how the processes and relations that generate sentiments through such platforms can exacerbate, rather than solve unequal access to funds. Most critically, she uncovers an under-recognised cost of mobilizing funds in the form of social capital depletion of NGO workers. Digital crowdfunding becomes another means through which tech companies derive profit from the emotional labour of others, in this case, poorly resourced NGOs.

Susanne Schech's (2021, this issue) article examines Northern volunteering in the Global South as potential expressions of political agency and solidarity, and/or neoliberal governmentalities reproducing unequal relations. Through the vantage point of long-term Australian volunteers in Cambodia and Peru and a careful elaboration of the volunteering assemblages they occupy and produce, she investigates the conditions in which a critical politics can arise. Volunteers tap into structures of feeling of dependency and gratitude in Cambodia, and post-development and decolonial discourses in Peru, but these are ultimately disrupted by changes to Australian aid and asylum policies. The charged emotional responses led to social and political reimagination, albeit with constraints on political mobilisation.

Tanya Jakimow (2021, this issue) interrogates encounters between elite development agents (EDAs, including international aid workers and national development workers), and local

development agents and the recipients of aid (LDAs). Reading memoirs and practitioner accounts through two analytical concepts— affective privilege and affective resilience— she reveals how power works through and between bodies, reproducing hierarchies and unequal relations. The resilience of EDAs to being moved or impressed upon by LDAs and recipients of aid is a barrier to mutual understanding, limits reflexivity, and sustains hierarchies. Jakimow proposes adopting ‘vulnerability as ethical practice’ that is attentive to the differential capacity to affect and be affected in development practice.

Joyce Wu’s (forthcoming, this issue) article considers how the self is disciplined within international development. In her auto-ethnographic account as ‘the gender specialist’ in an international development research project, she introduces two concepts— the code of civility and the love law— to examine why projects that explicitly address ‘gender’ still reinforce patriarchal norms. ‘Affective norms’ are powerful disciplining tools that are difficult to pinpoint, and hence challenge. Most powerful are Wu’s narratives as to what it feels to be ‘unloved’, and to be ‘unlovable’ due to one’s gender, sexuality, race. Wu thereby underlines how patriarchy and white supremacy are sustained and reproduced through the flesh, and through their effects as deeply felt trauma.

Kaira Albuero-Cañete’s (2022, this issue) article also examines disciplining in intentional development, this time in relation to post-disaster reconstruction in the Philippines. She introduces the concept of ‘benevolent discipline’ to characterise a mode of governing through affect. State discourses of benevolence are animated and amplified by affect; they tap into the emotional intensities of the disaster as experienced by residents of Tacloban. Importantly, Albuero-Cañete goes beyond a simple narrative of the production of development subjects, to underline the contingency in such processes. ‘Affective frictions’ between the state and displaced communities generate the potential for alternative practices of recovery and open up new possibilities for becoming.

In the final article, contributors to this special issue reflect on how affect circulates within academic communities, reinforcing or disrupting hierarchies (Albuero-Cañete et al. forthcoming, this issue). The genesis of this article was an email exchange with senior

scholars that prompted a process of decision-making as to whether we went ahead with the special issue in *TWQ*. We unpack our individual and collective journeys from welcome discomfort, to judgement, and finally to the solidarity that helped us regain comfort in which decisions could be made. We reflect on what our affective experience and practices reveal about unequal relations in the academy, and decolonial publishing practices in development studies.

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in Medan, Indonesia, and with women Municipal Councillors in Dehra Dun, India, funded by an ARC Discovery Early Career Research Award (2013-2017).

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Table 1: Lines of Enquiry for Emotions and Affect in Development Studies

Level of Analysis	Established objects of Enquiry	Emergent lines of enquiry
Macro Level (collective conditions)		
Structural Conditions <i>Immanent development</i>	Mechanisms for reproduction of structural conditions Potentialities for disruption, disorder and change	The generation of collective feeling / individual affective investments that reinforce or disrupt hegemony The animation and mobilization of social movements Structural violence and well-being
Development Infrastructures <i>Intentional development</i>	Development as a discourse Rendering technical of complex social and political problems	The affective force of discourse, and the discursive shaping of affect Sentiment as a basis for solidarities that transcend hierarchies
Micro level (encounters)		
Local political economies <i>Immanent development</i>	Relations of production and distribution Social Institutions Moral economies	Affective dimensions of institutions and moral economies Capacity to affect as a resource in manoeuvring for resources
Development arenas <i>Intentional development</i>	Development as discursive practices that close off possibilities for alternative actions Regimes of expertise and hierarchies between the 'doers' and 'targets' of aid	Differential capacity/susceptibility to affect and be affected Affective configurations that reinforce unequal power relations Affect that is in excess, and hence a challenge to, discursive power
Intimate level (self)		
Political economy of personhood <i>Immanent development</i>	Political subjectivities as a starting point for action and mobilization Agency within structures of power	Affective labour sustaining capitalist relations of production Emotional and affective resources as part of self-fashioning projects
Development subject / subjectivities <i>Intentional development</i>	Constitution of subjects through development discourses Agency to contest and negotiate meaning in the ongoing production of self	The affective mobilization of volunteers Affective prompts for creative self-fashioning and understanding 'prickly subjects'