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Brokering Transnational Flows of Care: the Case of Citizen Aid

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Abstract

A Cambodian town is the site of transnational flows of resources between private donors, and Cambodians in need of assistance. Such forms of 'citizen aid', initiated by individuals, constitute a form of resource transfer across borders which falls outside the purview of migration scholars. Unlike remittances, they are not primarily channelled through kin-related or geographical ties. Instead, they are enabled by brokers of care, Cambodian and international, who facilitate both personal connections and forms of support. The lens of the broker enables an understanding of citizen aid as a form of brokering care. It offers a critique of the moral ambiguity of the broker, as well as on the relationship between care and control. Casting people in need not merely as recipients, but as providing opportunities for intervention sought after by supporters, means upending conventional notions of who are recipients and donors, and what kind of resources they control respectively.

Keywords: Citizen Aid, Brokerage, Care, Mobility, Cambodia, Development

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In the wealth of literature on migration in Asia, the theme of ‘care’ features prominently. It is central especially to female mobilities in the context of domestic care work, often involving women who are also engaged in transnational care practices for family members in their home countries (Baldassar and Merla 2014, Constable 2007, Parreñas 2005). Much less obvious -and not usually considered within the context of migration and mobility- are flows of care extending between relatively privileged individuals from middle and high-income countries, both within and outside of Asia, and people and communities in need of assistance. A case in point are Southeast Asian countries where, in spite of a growing middle class, substantial parts of the population are living below the poverty line. The purpose of this paper is to set out what this, ostensibly marginal, practice of ‘citizen aid’ may offer to our understanding of care and control in Asian migrations.

I propose that such ‘citizen aid’, ‘Do it yourself-Aid’ (Kristof 2010, Schnable 2015a, b), or private aid initiatives (Kinsbergen and Schulpen 2010, Pollet, Habraken, Schulpen, and Huyse 2014) can be productively understood as a form of transnational care. Notably, the caring practices I want to draw attention to here are not driven by familial relatedness and the emotions and obligations associated with them, but by a desire from supporters to establish a personal connection with individuals who are very differently situated to them in relation to geography, language, culture and life worlds. ‘Brokering care’ is therefore defined here as facilitating the transfer of resources such as goods, money or labour between private aid supporters and local recipients; these transfers are crucially characterised by the relationships unfolding between them, which matter as a motivation for, as well as a consequence of these activities. Based on these insights, I suggest that brokering care is driven not only by a philanthropic impulse as articulated by Bornstein (2009). Just as important is an equivalent ‘anthropological impulse’, that is, the desire for an intimate connection with a social Other. This aspect offers a reversal of the discourse of humanitarian reason (Fassin 2012), insofar as the direction of the gaze is not trained on a suffering Global South, but on the donors themselves. Moreover, the case of brokering care renders donors not only, or not primarily as givers, but also as recipients of opportunities to ‘make a difference’. Finally, a focus on brokering care may contribute to our understanding of the interlacing of care and control, and in particular how brokering care opens spaces for intervention, and thus for exerting power, in the lives of others.

Brokerage and the Infrastructure of Citizen Aid

As Xiang, Yeoh and Lindquist have pointed out (2012), literature on migration has been characterised by a focus on where migrants come from and what follows once they get to their destinations, but has neglected to examine the infrastructures of mobility – the people, agencies and practices that are central to make these movements happen. Comparable to patterns in migration research, much less is known about the infrastructures which enable and shape these flows of care, equivalent to the ‘black box’ of migration invoked by Xiang, Yeoh and Lindquist (2012). They propose to open this black box through considering the role of the broker in enabling movements of people across borders. Taking a cue from their approach, I suggest that a focus on the broker is also instrumental in order to make visible the transnational flows of care that constitute citizen aid; and that, in fact, the notion of brokerage is essential to unlock an understanding of this phenomenon.

Further, I take from this the imperative to look more closely not only at who are the sources of, or recipients of these flows of care, but how these come to be connected in the first place. I ask how, by whom and through which infrastructures these flows are facilitated, take shape, and are given meaning. This includes attention to the role of the broker. More specifically, the question is how an analytical focus on the broker might enable a better grasp of how these care flows are brought about in practice. Further, it might provide a deeper understanding of the broader social and political contexts which give rise to these flows of care, and thus ways of engaging with distant others. In order to make the figure of the broker in the context of these forms of aid more tangible, I sketch the activities of a range of individuals who, in different ways, fulfil such a function.

The figure of the broker as an analytical device, it has been argued, is undergoing a renaissance. Deborah James demonstrates the ‘return of the broker’ in the context of South African land reform (2011) while Johan Lindquist (2015) traces its changing uses from its origins in political anthropology through decades of relative neglect and obscurity until its more recent appearance in ethnographically-grounded development studies (Mosse and Lewis 2006), as well as utilising it for making visible infrastructures of migration (Xiang, Yeoh and Lindquist 2012). As they observe, ‘in the contemporary moment it appears that

brokers are proliferating rather than becoming obsolete' (2012:7). One reason for this, they suggest, is the current context of 'neoliberal reform and economic and political deregulation' and the concomitant 'relations of inequality' they cause, which opens up opportunities as well as necessities for brokering in order to mediate flows of resources between unequally situated parties (Xiang, Yeoh and Lindquist 2012: 4, 7-8). These circumstances make the figure of the broker, both empirically and theoretically, so pertinent for understanding transnational flows of care. In the context of this renaissance, it is important to steer clear of the methodological individualism which hampered earlier work in political anthropology and instead to 'consider the broker as an ethnographic entry-point that illuminates broader contexts and processes from a particular position of mediation' (Lindquist 2015:11). Here, I employ the figure of the broker as such an entry point to illuminate the modalities and effects of transnational flows of care in the form of citizen aid.

In the first instance, a key reason why the figure of the broker articulates so productively with the phenomenon of citizen aid, is that the broker's role is to connect 'local systems' to a 'larger whole'. As Eric Wolf put it, in the context of brokerage between local communities and the state in Mexico, the broker is a 'powerful yet marginal and vulnerable figure located between fault lines and connection points within complex systems and relationships' (Wolf 1956). In particular, Wolf posited that brokers 'stand guard over the crucial junctures or synapses of relationships which connect the local system to the larger whole' (1956: 1075-6). This configuration captures an essential aspect of the infrastructure of citizen aid, insofar as brokers connect overseas supporters with recipients in the brokers' local networks and communities. This necessity for, as well as flourishing of intermeditation in the sphere of citizen aid is arguably brought about, *pace* Lindquist, by persistent relations of inequality - in this case embodied by particular individuals and communities in Cambodia, and relatively affluent ones in the wider region of Asia-Pacific and parts of the Global North.

A second aspect of the broker which offers analytical potential to illuminate the case of citizen aid, is the definition of brokers as mediating the flow of resources that they do not directly control (Lindquist 2015:2, Neubert 1996, Wolf 1956). As Boussevain puts it, 'brokers have no control over first degree resources, but they have strategic contacts with those who control these resources: a broker's capital consists of his personal network of relations with people' (1974:158). I will illustrate the creation, maintenance and use of such networks in the context of private aid brokers in Cambodia below. This also includes the

potentially controversial issue in what ways brokers stand to personally gain from their mediating activities, which is especially pertinent in the case of aid brokerage, and may renew the question of moral ambiguity of the broker (Wolf 1956).

A further aspect of the configuration that requires as well as enables brokerage are 'relations of decentralisation'. As Bierschenk, Chaveau and Olivier de Sardan et al argue with regard to development brokers in sub-Saharan Africa, 'in this context, brokers assume growing importance (...) they can be found wherever decentralised aid is present' (2002: 8). Drawing on Wolf, they similarly find that 'the broker holds a position exactly at the interface (...) between the development configuration, on the one hand, and local societies, on the other' (2002: 21). What they describe as 'decentralised aid' is the tendency in overseas aid policy in the 1990s to commission intermediaries, such as local governments or civil society bodies, to implement aid projects funded by donors, rather than dealing with local communities directly.

This need for intermediation means that 'actors who have broker potential are able to spot the opportunities offered by decentralised aid' (Bierschenk, Chaveau and Olivier de Sardan 2002:20); while also making aid brokerage possible in the first place, since, as they argue, 'brokerage is not possible in a zone that does not have projects'. In a departure from the scenario of decentralised aid as described by Bierschenk, Chaveau and Olivier de Sardan (2002) and Neubert (1996), though, the work of brokering citizen aid is not reliant on, or aimed at facilitating the flow of organisational donor resources. Instead, it is about channelling those resources controlled by private individuals and small groups towards those in the brokers' networks who require them. I suggest that it is the fact that resources are not solicited from development agencies, but from private individuals, that renders these transnational flows as a form of brokering care.

Brokering Care

What, then, may be different about brokering care, in relation to other resource flows? In other words, what might an examination of brokering care tell us about other forms of transnational care - including their possibly concomitant forms of control- and what can it add to our understanding of brokers? How may it constitute a form of care in itself? In exploring these issues, I draw on a range of ethnographic materials collected over several periods of fieldwork in Cambodia between 2009 and 2015¹. This included actors involved in

forms of citizen aid – such as supporters, brokers, and recipients – as well as paid aid workers who were engaged in forms of citizen aid in their spare time. My interactions comprised participant observation in citizen aid projects; formal interviews and informal conversations, as well as close readings of websites and online material of projects which I was familiar with in the offline world. In order to substantiate the roles and practices of care brokerage, I present in the first instance two brokers whose activities, if not representative, convey a sense of what brokering care may entail. I should add that even though all the brokers discussed in this paper are men, I have also witnessed a number of women acting in such a capacity. The majority of these women I talked to, though, were non-Cambodian, and for many of them, brokering was a side activity rather than their main occupation. Apart from the uniformity of gender in the cases presented here, it is worth noting that there was considerable diversity with regard to their nationality, age, socio-economic status or life trajectory. As Bierschenk, Chaveau and de Sardan (2002) note, while development brokers originate often from a pool of local foreigners or expatriates, there are just as likely nationals taking on such a role. By way of illustration, I sketch here two emblematic broker figures: Robert, an American in his sixties, and Kosal, a Cambodian man in his mid-forties.

Robert

The towering figure of Robert was hard to miss among the small groups of elderly tourists and backpackers that were dotting the tables of the small neighbourhood restaurant. Enquiring about small-independent aid projects in Cambodia, I had been advised to ‘talk to Robert’ as a key source of knowledge on such aid activities. A US American by nationality, Robert had worked as a special needs educator for a long time, before relocating to South Korea to teach English. During his time, he was asked by a friend, a nurse, to accompany her to Cambodia in order to support a small community health project she was involved with in a provincial town. This marked the beginning of several years of journeys back and forth, and after Robert had retired from English teaching altogether, he decided to base himself there entirely, and from then onwards spent most of this time facilitating such DIY ventures. When I first talked to him, he was using the small restaurant, the Green Leaf, as base. During the course of a morning, he would have breakfast there; meet a Cambodian friend, Bunny, who ran his own, free-access English school in a poor part of town, and discuss curriculum matters. Later on, he held a preliminary scholarship interview with two Cambodian students, accompanied by their teacher, for funding offered by a couple in Canada that Robert had

alerted them to, and for which he processing applications. With a particular interest in people with disabilities, Robert was alert when a young Cambodian woman, a landmine victim, approached him in her wheelchair. ‘They know where to find me’, he explained. After an initial conversation about her living situation, he handed her his card, with information about an NGO that was looking for people with disabilities to train in handicraft making. He also explained that he had advised the owners of the Green Leaf restaurant on their own book-donating scheme, which involved tourist customers donating funds to buy school books for the village where the family of the restaurant owners lived.

When I got in touch a year later, Robert had realized one of his ambitions, which was persuading the Dutch owner of the premises of a former café to let him have use of the space to set up a fair trade market, offering training and support for people with disabilities. The list of Robert’s activities and achievements was long; drawing on contacts with former work colleagues in South Korea, as well as a long list of friends and associates in parts of Europe and North America, he had facilitated small-scale local initiatives and leveraged funds from overseas for them; people from abroad who came to visit regularly asked him where their volunteer skills might be best applied; and being well-known and trusted locally meant that when foreign visitors were looking for advice on where to donate any money or services, he was able to point them in the direction of local initiatives whom he knew well and was confident that they would be worthy recipients.

Kosal

Robert also put me in touch with Kosal, a Cambodian born in the early 1970s, whose mother had abandoned him as a baby during the Khmer Rouge regime. Brought up by a foster mother, Kosal has endured hardship and hunger, like many of his contemporaries, but had managed through determination and managing several jobs simultaneously to put himself through high school. After graduating, and while working as a tour guide at local temples, his first step was to establish a children’s home, a place where children in need of support could reside and receive additional English tutoring, while pursuing their state school education. Instrumental in enabling this was a chance encounter with a Japanese journalist in the early 1990s, before the UN-organised elections in 1993. Asked by the journalist to accompany him on a dangerous assignment to report on Khmer Rouge forces who had withdrawn to a remote

province, the two struck up a friendship. In recognition of his assistance, the journalist promised that once his piece was published, he would return and help Kosal realise his ambition of giving these children a home and thus chances for a better future. This partnership turned out to be the beginning of more than a decade of transnational connections, with Kosal at the centre.

During the times I spoke with him, he was maintaining a complex and wide-ranging set of relationships between supporters overseas – elderly couples from the UK, who had financed a new shelter for the classroom; volunteer students from Japan and the US, who came and taught English, Japanese, and undertook activities with the children; and a small international school who had financed his motorcycle taxi, which had their sponsorship proudly emblazoned on its, as it ferried his charges into town for their classes and back. While he was still working night shifts at a local hotel, the children’s home - which consisted of two small huts on stilts, as well as a few outbuildings for teaching, washing, and storage- was run mostly on the basis of donated money, goods, and the labour of volunteers, by ‘friends of Kosal’ as he called them. They were based in other parts of Asia and Europe; some visited more or less regularly, kept in touch via email and social media, some came for one-of volunteering stints. They spread the word to their friends and family about what he was doing, and why they thought he was worth supporting. The wealth of these supportive relationships maintained by him was evidenced through a myriad of sun-bleached photographs, memories of visits and shared meals, documenting the construction of new classrooms, drawings by children expressing their appreciation of Kosal in forms of portraits, pinned to the walls of their classrooms and living spaces.

Care Flows and Personal Connections

While these two life stories are unique in their detail, there are many others like them - Cambodian and foreign, women and men, ranging in age from their twenties to their sixties, all in some way engaged in facilitating contacts and fostering relationships between local Cambodians and people living elsewhere who were, or could be, supporters, helping them meet their needs or achieve their ambitions. In what ways, however, might these activities be considered as forms of transnational care, rather than merely transactional flows of resources, such as the ‘development rent’ being channelled by the development brokers described by Neubert (1996) in parts of sub-Saharan Africa?

In the mind of Robert, the forms of care that he facilitated and, arguably, provided himself through his brokering activities, were interlinked with and perhaps even defined by what he and many others described as a personal connection between supporters and recipients. As he said of his own situation, and as a result of his brokerage activities, *'I feel connected... I feel I belong here. Cambodians - you need to be connected to them'*. He recounted his relationship with a Cambodian family who ran a local restaurant, and whom he had known for a few years:

'there is genuine respect and caring for them ... once the trust has been established, the jokey facade goes, and there are tears... like sometime, maybe we've had a beer or two. I'm sitting here with the owner and there is strong pain, and he feels the need to do something. And I feed this with my own skills'.

In this case, Pich, the husband, had long wanted to contribute to the education of the children of his rural home village, bearing in mind his own upbringing, when there were few, if any, books available in the village school. Robert suggested that he and his wife set up a scheme where customers could choose to donate books from a collection displayed on a shelf in the restaurant, which would then be delivered once a month to their home village, together with stationary and other supplies. Describing his input, Robert thought that

'the [book donation] idea, that was really ignited by the relationship with me. We built this over six years, and it's a revelation for him, because he wouldn't go there before. But he knows the situation, himself, as a kid. It was an action plan that supports his values. And they own it, every step of the way'.

Put in this way, the skills he offered to Pich are an expression of Roberts' care; but providing such care is not necessarily an end in itself. These forms of care arise from, and also turn into a vehicle for Robert nurturing a personal connection with Pich and his family. In this sense, caring - or brokering care - became a form of connecting, and established a sense of Robert's belonging to Cambodia. The care broker's work of 'making connections' thus attains a double meaning: in the form of establishing contact in order to enable the flow of resources; and at the same time, facilitating the flows in such a way that these resource flows become infused with, or are a conduit for a sense of personal connection between supporter and recipients. This holds independent of how subjectively this may be felt, how reciprocal this may be, and to what extent this may be grounded in variously understood social realities.

The prospect of making such connections, or feeling connected, may not only hold for brokers such as Robert, but may indeed be a core component of what motivates individuals to become involved in citizen aid activities, or at least to become donors. As Robert summed up his experience of the last few years of dealing with such potential donors,

'people are more likely to make a contribution when they can make a connection ... to the people they are giving to. When I take them round [to projects] they get to see a little bit of the real Cambodia. On the last day, quite often they present me with a fistful of cash. That's given to me, and I facilitate that personal connection [to the recipients]'.

A similar story was told by Sideth, a Cambodian hotel worker in his thirties, who once a year took two weeks off from his regular job in order to look after a group of Singaporean school students. He established a programme which includes setting up an itinerary for their visit, with the main aim to channel resources towards poor schools in the area. Together with a friend who is based in a poor, rural area, Sideth pre-selected a number of schools in need of support, and presented them to the Singaporean students, who decide which ones in particular to visit. As Sideth explained, those schools

'only have 3 classrooms for 190 students. So they have no loos, no library, no fresh water. No electricity of course. So for the Singaporean, it's a good experience for their lives... they have never seen that before; they saw the kids how they were trying to look after their cow and going to school at the same time'.

They were between 17-20 years old, mostly Chinese and Malay Singaporeans, both Christians and Muslims. Their time was dedicated to daily school visits where they bring supplies, talk, teach, and play with the children. They may also set themselves a project such as constructing toilets or installing solar panels. For some of the Singaporean students, this turns into a longer-term involvement as they return even after their school trips end, and they continue visiting the same schools as before. In the same way, Sideth also regularly connects foreign customers with local communities; in his words, *'during the hotel work, I help hotel customers to help Khmer people'*.

As with Kosal and Pich, taking their biographies into account, one might argue that Sideth is not only facilitating connections between sponsors and recipients, but that their brokering activities also extend and revitalise a connection with their personal histories, and memories and experiences of their own hardship and deprivation. As Sideth explains what drives his brokering activities,

'My mum had six children. My dad is there but he has health problems. I am the second oldest, and two little sisters still at home. After the civil war, we don't have money. My mum has business in the market, cook for the Khmer. Siblings support the family...I still help them. Three years ago the government wanted to develop the river [in the city] so my family had to move. So we got our own experience of a poor background.'

The Cambodian brokers' own biographies point to the role of kinship and familial obligations of care in the wider scenario of care flows into and within Cambodian networks. As mentioned at the outset, the majority of global care flows are conceptualised as motivated by familial responsibilities, and are crucially intertwined with commodified forms of care work, which are a key driver for female migrants moving from the Global South as part of the global care economy (Yeates 2004). As the stories of Kosal, Pich and Sideth illustrate, the obligation of caring for kin or one's home village does not exclude, but may branch out into the further brokering of care from foreigners, directed at other Cambodians who are seen as being similarly in need as they once were.

What makes brokering transnational care distinctive as part of citizen aid is that the personal connections which are often sought by supporters, and the sense of a shared humanity across national and cultural divides that is cherished, are not based on either migrant kin relations such as those which generate the flow of remittances, or diasporic networks, along which support flows driven by a sense of common ethnic, national or political identity and purpose. Instead, transnational flows of care such as those which Robert facilitated are driven by the wish to establish a connection with people whom one is not related to, but who are, in many ways, very different from oneself. In this way, providing care becomes the modality through which relatedness to a social Other can be established. This, I suggest, reveals an important, missing dimension of what is often glossed as a purely philanthropic or humanitarian impulse (Bornstein 2009, Fassin 2012): helping others here becomes a form which enables an intimate social relation between individuals across socio-economic, cultural and experiential divides.

These sought-after connections are not unique to citizen aid: they are prefigured in seeking ‘authentic’ encounters in tourism (e.g. Cohen 1988), as well as in the archetypal form of Christian child sponsorship (Bornstein 2003). Most recently, digital microlending platforms such as kiva.org proffer such connections in order to attract potential lenders, even as these must remain unrealised (Schwittay 2014). In contrast to such centralised platforms, the hallmark of citizen aid is that it creates its own infrastructures which enable these relationships, and the individual broker is central to this. Their role, among others, is to scale down these engagements to a concrete, intimate level which cannot usually be matched by aid agencies with more complex levels of organisation, bureaucracy and hierarchy.

Brokering Care and Personal Gain

As Lindquist (2015) reminds us, anthropological interest in brokers and brokerage has not only waxed and waned, but has sometimes operated with assumptions that turned out to be simplistic or untenable. One of them is the purported moral ambiguity of the brokers, based on the idea that their actions must be fundamentally self-serving, and potentially exploitative towards their clients. While Lindquist and others show that such distinctions are difficult to maintain in practice, the case of brokering care, as I describe it here, offers an interesting perspective. Based on popular expectations, those who facilitate relations between potential supporters and beneficiaries are meant to foreground other people’s welfare rather than their own. Given that the amalgamation of altruistic and self-oriented motives is very common, and perhaps even an inherent characteristic of charitable activities (Fechter 2012), the examples I present here provide further evidence that seeking to identify brokers as uniformly exploitative is not productive, and indeed unjustified.

The question in what ways brokering care may be morally ambiguous, and if so in what way, is nevertheless pertinent. Such brokers as described here, insofar as they run their own aid projects, fulfil a dual function of both broker (as fundraiser) and stakeholder (as project founder). In the sense that they raise funds for their own project, they may be self-interested stakeholders; but as these projects are fundamentally designed to help others, this does not make them self-interested in a straightforward manner, and not exploitative as suggested by some of the literature on brokerage. Indeed, these brokers of care may be unique, as none of those I encountered was a ‘matchmaker’ only. Virtually all of them, in addition to, or as part of their brokering activities, were engaged in their own private aid initiatives. This circumstance supports my proposition -and their own assertions- that as brokers of care, they

were 'not in it for the money'. This contrasts with the archetypal figure of the broker, as argued by Bierschenk, Chaveau and Olivier de Sardan, who posit that 'as an entrepreneur, the broker sets out to gain a benefit: he expects a "commission" for his role in the transmission of information' (2002:16). While their self-interest is assumed, they also concede that genuine 'faith in development is an important quality in a broker'. Neubert puts it more starkly when he describes brokers as 'parasites' whose 'rent seeking behaviour at a local level or of patron-client relationships points out the negative image of a broker whose role is at best ambiguous' (Neubert 1996: 2).

In his work on development brokers however, Neubert recognises the existence of differently situated brokers, namely those who are 'at the same time members of the so called target groups', as well as those who live in the local community, such as resident foreigners or members of the local middle class, who act as advocates for, but are not part of the target group (Neubert 1996: 21). In the same way, many of the brokers I discuss here have multiple affiliations to local projects, and may hold roles of founders, advocates, and stakeholders at the same time, as well as acting as brokers for the benefit of these projects or communities. Given this necessarily muddled picture, what particular benefits might be involved specifically in brokering care?

Talking to Robert about what he might gain from his care brokering activities, he was quick to profess a sense of self-satisfaction, lest he be regarded as too saintly: *'look, we're all self-serving- we all want a pat on the back, see how well I'm doing!'*, following up with a more detailed trail of thought, *'I belong here. I get my needs met here. And that's what it's all about- getting your needs met... while creating opportunities for Cambodians'*. A similar amalgamation of benefits was also expressed by Kosal. Talking about running the English classes for the children he looks after, he explained that *'I'm happy when I see all of their faces studying together. When I hear good news from them- they passed exam. When I see them, I remember my elementary school, I remember how I coped'*. At the same time, Kosal's satisfaction was not only based on witnessing his students do well, but on the existence of the transnational connections that he so laboriously nurtured, as they link him to the wider world outside Cambodia, and perhaps to a sense of cosmopolitan belonging. He proudly counted his friends and visitors – Ben from South Africa; Mie, the girl from Belgium, who drops in when she is in Laos; his long-time Japanese journalist friend and collaborator; the family from Yorkshire, and the girl from Ghana, *'they never forget me, they send volunteers, and they*

come back'. Continued support and repeat visits are evidenced in the photos and drawings that furnish the walls of his classrooms and homestead.

Neither Robert nor Kosal gained from their brokering financially - and indeed Kosal continuously needed to supplement his charity work with funds from his paid work as a night-time receptionist. Sideth's case was different insofar as he was paid a modest amount of money by the Singaporean group for the time he took off from his main job, compensating for his loss of earnings during that time. He was also able to channel some of the income brought by the Singaporean school students towards his mother, who provided catering for them during their trip. The situation of Matt, however, a semi-retired British man in his sixties, evidenced the moral ambiguity of brokers more explicitly. He brokered support, mainly from tourists and would-be volunteers, towards small Cambodian NGOs. Initially, he charged them a relatively modest amount for his brokerage services, notably to financially sustain his operation, including an office and a staff member. Emphasising the non-profit nature of his work, he proclaimed that he would just *'help to connect people. They offer resources, we help them to put them to use. I have this crazy urge that I want to help others... we don't make much money from it!'* Matt explained his brokerage activities not as specific to Cambodia, or indeed to brokering care, but found that he *'gets a kick'* out of connecting people more generally. In his previous role working in retail banking in the UK, this was indeed part of this job: *'I've always been the jam in the sandwich, connecting people, getting them the money, and being paid for it'*. After a couple of years, however, it appeared that the sums he was charging were ever-increasing, beyond the point that several volunteers considered reasonable, and complained about being *'ripped off'*.

From the range of roles and responses described here emerges that the gains from brokering care - such as a sense of personal satisfaction - are often, though not always, married to a profound dedication to the causes they are brokering for. While some, such as Ross and Sideth, received small financial gains which they re-deployed to sustain their brokering activities, there was a strong conviction among several of them that financial enrichment - even on a small scale- was contemptible. As Robert stated emphatically, *'me or my friends, nobody takes money or a salary, they all do it for free'*. This contempt might hold especially in the context of brokering care, which, more so than other kinds of brokerage, may by definition be expected to be carried out strictly *pro bono*. This displays parallels with

critiques of commodified intimate labour, where intimate care is expected to remain emotionally genuine, even when it is being remunerated (e.g. Boris and Parreñas 2010). Similarly, Steve, who channeled the proceeds of pub quizzes in his home town in the UK towards a Cambodian family he knew well, talked with disgust about those who benefit financially, denouncing them as *'Middlemen? Can't stand them'*. This was in spite of the fact that he might be considered a middleman himself - but one, crucially, who took no 'cut'. His gain was having a friendly relationship with the family, and their daughter who now had a bike to ride to school, knowing that he had made this happen. The insistence which especially foreign brokers like Robert and Steve place on their lack of material self-interest, arguably indicates that the moral purity, rather than ambiguity, of the broker is not taken for granted, but requires particular emphasis and demonstration, and even more so in the in the context of 'brokering care'.

As has emerged through these examples, the brokers portrayed occupy particular positions in terms of their nationality, class, and gender. While they include both Cambodian and foreign nationals, their reach to possible donors, the knowledge they can offer, and their selection of causes are shaped by these positionalities. While I have not discussed female brokers here, I knew of several women - mostly foreign- who regularly brokered connections between foreign donors and local projects, as well as using their discretion to direct funds they were given to causes they deemed worthy. In contrast to male brokers, this was perhaps carried out more as a side activity, rather than a main occupation. All of these brokering decisions, however, as well as the ensuing relations, were clearly underpinned by, and created, unequal power relations.

Care and Control of Resources

If it emerges that brokers of care benefit from their activities - not necessarily, or not at all, financially - attending to their possible gains invites us to turn around the analytical lens and ask who, in the scenario of overseas aid, are considered the ones in need. The recognition that those who are usually referred to as 'donors' are also beneficiaries is not new. Liisa Malkki for example identified in what ways both professional aid workers with the Finnish Red Cross, as well as Finnish volunteers are driven by their own forms of 'neediness' (2015). These may include seeking temporary reprieve from everyday life in a society that is experienced as stultifying, or from intensive loneliness among the elderly. Significantly, the

context of brokering care enables us to pose this question more stringently and ask in what ways the needs -or gains- of brokers of care may also materialise as forms of control.

What is at stake in reversing this gaze is also the idea of aid itself, as it is conventionally conceived as a relationship in which giving and receiving travels in established directions. The predominant gaze on those in the Global South as ‘suffering’ has been the subject of ample critique. Therefore, reversing the lens to recognize donors in the Global North in their ‘unmistakable neediness’ (Malkii 2015:8) seems a welcome unsettling of habitual conceptualisations. I suggest, however, that it falls short of taking this approach to its logical consequence. If Northern donors are also recipients, then not only it is necessary to understand what it is that they are variously needing and receiving. Just as importantly, it means that those usually considered ‘poor’ emerge as resource-rich. This turns on its head the prevalent understanding- which I have so far here replicated- that considers ‘private aid’ supporters as providers of resources such as money, goods, efforts, skills and labour, and the individuals and communities who receive these as beneficiaries. In reverse, the task is to identify the kinds of resources which the latter offer and provide to the ‘needy donors’. Based on the case of brokering care, I suggest that one key resource here comprises opportunities for intervention, in addition to the personal relationships, as discussed above. As illustrated by the brokers quoted above, the offer of such relationships or connectedness was indeed in considerable demand by overseas supporters, as well as a key driver for brokers themselves.

Robert exemplified such a reverse perspective when he expressed that all his needs are met; in the first instance through his brokerage, but ultimately through the existence of, and his relationship with people he supported, such as Pich, the restaurant owner, and the Cambodians with disabilities with whom Robert had crossed paths, and in whose lives he hoped to have made a difference. The configuration of Robert being in need, and disadvantaged Cambodians being the providers of opportunity also became evident when he talked about how he first became involved in brokering care. As he explained, he was, perhaps unconsciously, on the lookout for such an opportunity for intervention:

‘when I was still in Korea, I got information about someone trying to start a school here in Cambodia, and when I heard about it, I had my flight booked within two hours. I came, and I realised, what about this and the other school there? And that was it, now it’s a way of life for me’.

Similarly, he stressed that he never accosted others for financial support: instead, he was *'just inviting people to be involved'*. In several other brokers' narratives, a recurring motif is their searching for such opportunities to participate, or for suitable spaces of intervention, even if the encounters that open up such opportunities are often talked about as brought about by chance, or serendipity. Sideth, for example, was aware that some of the hotel customers he deals with were actively looking for ways to give, ways to help, and, in his words, *'to have an impact'*. In a similar vein, many of the overseas supporters express their gratitude towards the 'care brokers', and thank them for giving them the chance to give, for facilitating an experience of the 'real Cambodia', or indeed to establish the 'personal connection' that they value more than anything else. In this sense, the Cambodians in need of support emerge as being in control of resources sought by their supporters, and it may be useful to consider the implications of this for the relationship between care and control.

Didier Fassin, for example, makes forcefully visible the realities of a governmentality of humanitarianism (2012). Such an approach, however, also glosses a range of practices as driven by a humanitarian imperative, thus possibly disregarding other aspects which are integral to it, including an 'anthropological imperative', and the possibility for relationships with an Other. Moreover, as the case of brokering care, or citizen aid more broadly shows and which the focus on humanitarian governmentality obscures, is that 'sufferers' or 'victims' are needed by humanitarians - namely, as exemplified above, as providers of opportunities to intervene. A similar situation is presented by Tomas Cole (this volume) where disabled Karen refugees offer a valuable site of intervention for the missionaries who 'care' for them. Pursuing this line of thought, one might ask in what ways brokering care may thus constitute a form of exerting control.

None of the brokers, perhaps unsurprisingly, expressly mentioned or indicated they felt involved in practices of control, either with regard to overseas 'donors' or those Cambodians being supported. There was, however, the sense that channelling resources – regardless of the fact that they did not own or entirely control these themselves – enabled them to bring about significant change in the lives of people. As Robert stated emphatically, *'I see myself as a facilitator. My intention is to take action to change lives.'* More appropriately, one might consider less control, but the capacity to make a difference to others as a function of brokering care, and thus as a form of exerting power. This may hold even though, as Robert

reiterated, as a broker he sees his role in enabling people to make their own choices, rather than take decisions for them. By this definition, brokering care is furnished with the potential to effect change in others' lives. One might argue that making a difference to the life course of others constitutes, in the least, a form of efficacy, and thus power. In what way this equates to a form of control may be subject to debate. At the very least, this extends the question in two directions, that is, being critically aware of what kind of control 'brokering care' - and more broadly, any form of 'humanitarianism' may bring with it; and by the same token, being equally attentive to the possibility of what kind of control the 'needy poor' exert on the brokers and supporters through the kinds of resources which they have at their disposal.

Conclusion

What insights might be offered by this seemingly curious case of brokering care, in the wider context of citizen aid? First, in the context of migration and mobility in Asia, the activities of Robert, Kosal, Sideth and others like them, stake a claim that resources and people move not only through established networks and pathways of labour migration, but also in ways that are routinely classified as overseas aid. One might suggest that they have remained comparatively invisible in the established literature on development partly because of their small-scale, independent, dispersed nature, thus remaining under the radar of conventional development research. Recognising the existence and shape of such private aid also means acknowledging the quintessential role of such brokers in it. Precisely due to the non-involvement of large agencies, brokers are vital in order to enable local people and communities to gain access to people and resources in the Asia Pacific region and beyond.

The paper is based on the assumption that brokering private aid, that is, facilitating contacts and channelling resources from overseas supporters towards Cambodians in need, can be understood as a form of providing care. In relation to other forms of development brokerage, brokering care is characterised by providing donors with the experience of a personal connection with individuals or identified groups of recipients. Rather than a purely philanthropic impulse (Bornstein 2009), this case supports the view that just as importantly, it is the desire for a relationship with a social Other- an anthropological impulse- which animates citizen aid, and which brokers are uniquely placed to offer.

An additional insight relates to how the brokering of care resonates with Baldassar and Merla's (2014) initial definition of transnational care. In their view, care 'binds members

together in intergenerational networks of reciprocity and obligation, love and trust, that are simultaneously fraught with tension, contest and relations of unequal power' (Baldassar and Merla 2014: 7). The brokering of care as described here differentiates this understanding insofar as the relations of care are established not in the context of perceived obligations to biological kin, but through acts of volition by donors and brokers. Nevertheless, this tends to leave expectations of reciprocity intact, insofar as both emphasise the extent to which they are already benefiting from this exchange – such as through feeling 'connected'.

Given the brokers' key role in their networks of transnational flows, the question arises of their suspected moral ambiguity which is recurrent in the literature, specifically the possibility that they may reap personal benefit from their activities. Based on the brokers' narratives and practices presented here, it emerges that while few of them could be considered outright exploitative, all of them report gains - emotional ones, but also in relation to their efficacy, or in the case of Cambodian brokers, a sense of connecting to their own histories of poverty, and being part of wider transnational networks which involve them in cosmopolitan friendships and socialities.

Furthering this critical perspective, what might an exploration of brokering care add to understandings about the relation between care and control? On the one hand, it becomes clear that what brokers gain from channelling resource flows is less an overt form of control, such as over the recipients of these funds. Indeed, the role of the broker is very much understood as not directly controlling change, but catalysing it. This capacity for intervention, however, could be understood as a form exerting power within the lives of recipients as well as donors. On the other hand, a reversal of the habitual humanitarianism gaze makes visible the ways in which Cambodian beneficiaries are not just recipients, but control resources which are highly valued by donors and supporters. These are opportunities for intervention, and the possibility of establishing one-to-one, individual relationships with someone whom they might not otherwise come in contact with, and who is very different from them. In being able to offer (or refuse) the opportunity to help, apparently needy individuals emerge as people who are needed by supporters - a capacity that adds a further aspect to the complex intertwining of care and control in the context of overseas aid.

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