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Local in Practice: Professional Distinctions in Angolan Development Work

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Abstract

Development workers employed by international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are commonly classified as national (local) or international (expatriate) staff members. The distinction is presumed to reflect the varieties of expertise required for the work and the workers' different biographies. I examine the experiences of Angolans working in an international democratization program to demonstrate how some professionals at the lowest tiers of international development NGOs engage in social practices that strategically emphasize or conceal certain skills, kinds of knowledge, or family circumstances to fulfill industry expectations of "local staff." Doing so allows them access to employment with international organizations and pursuit of a variety of personal and professional goals. These practices reinforce hierarchical inequalities within the development industry, however, limiting these workers' influence over programmatic action. I argue that professional distinctions among development workers are social achievements and instruments of strategic manipulation by individuals and NGOs rather than accurate reflections of work or workers. The case study provides insight into the institutional reproduction of hierarchical inequalities and the complexly social reasons why those who suffer their limitations may act in ways that reinforce, rather than resist, unequal social structures.

Keywords

international development; nongovernmental organizations; institutional inequality; local staff; expatriates; Angola

In December 2008, while awaiting a public meeting, I stood with Arnaldo, the youngest member of the Bie field staff of the Good Governance in Angola Program (GGAP).¹ As we watched attendees from every corner of the rural municipality arrive and file into the newly built municipal meeting hall, one young man saw us standing to the side and made straight for us, eyes wide with disbelief. After a nervous bout of surprised laughter, the two Angolans explained that they had been good friends while in high school (*médio*) in Namibia but had since lost track of one another (see Figure 1). They stumbled over each other's words trying to explain the immensity of their shock at this chance encounter, emphasizing that while in Namibia they had not realized they were both from the Angolan Central Highlands and certainly neither had ever imagined running into the other in remote Andulo. Arnaldo's friend was now working as a radio journalist in the provincial capital,

¹The program name and all personal names are pseudonyms.

and Arnaldo had been working for almost a year as a national staff member with one of the three large international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that, in consortium, implemented the GGAP in Bie Province. They exchanged phone numbers and made quick arrangements to see one another again in Kuito, or perhaps better, Huambo City, before parting to continue with their respective duties. I suggested to Arnaldo that his friend might like to join the GGAP staff for dinner, but he forcefully rejected the idea, making it quite clear he did not want to be seen in Andulo with another returned person. He then expressly asked that I not discuss his time in Namibia with community members or local government officials involved with the GGAP.

Members of the GGAP staff working in Bie often concealed, rather than emphasized, skills, knowledge, and life experiences that might set them apart from the local community members and municipal officials with whom they worked most closely. I argue that their purpose in doing so was to suppress their colleagues' cognizance of how their circumstances might refute the international development industry's common presumptions of "local staff." Such subterfuge both furthered and hampered these workers' pursuit of their goals by allowing them only conditional access to international NGOs and to the broader development industry. Arnaldo and his colleagues in Andulo, Carlota and Cristóvão, were all raised in (different) refugee camps in Namibia during the Angolan civil war. The fourth member of the GGAP's Bie office, Paulo, had lived in Angola for decades, marrying an Angolan wife and raising their children there, but was native to Cape Verde and held dual citizenship. These biographical facts were not widely shared beyond the small field office and were made clear to me only through privileged interviews. These workers' educational histories must have been known to human resources officers and thus to the GGAP's consortium of international NGOs in a bureaucratic sense, but in speaking more recently (January 2015) in Luanda with professionals who were senior staff in the GGAP in 2008, I have confirmed that these backgrounds were not widely known to these workers' advisors or supervisors. The GGAP's local Bie field staff, despite having been raised and educated not only outside the province but outside Angola, were classified as "local" staff because they worked in their country of citizenship (Redfield 2013:129). The classification came with a set of presumptions they acted to fulfill and a set of limitations to which they were held.

To investigate the professional structures of international development work like the distinction between national and international staff, their underpinnings, and their effects on development workers like Arnaldo and his colleagues in Bie Province, I draw from a larger ethnographic study of the GGAP, a democratization intervention implemented from 2007–2012 in postwar Angola. I conducted participant-observation, including iterative formal interviews, within the three international NGOs responsible for the GGAP over the course of 12 months around the midpoint of the program's first phase, in 2008–2009. I held no formal duties within the program and made no independent contribution to it, though in the course of participant observation I did pitch in on office matters where it was helpful to do so, under the direction of staff. I spent several months in the GGAP's Luanda headquarters, then subsequently I split my time between two implementation offices in Bie and Huambo provinces. While in Bie, I stayed with a staff member's family and accompanied that field team each day in their work; in Huambo, I stayed at an NGO guesthouse with other visitors and similarly participated in the daily life of program implementation.

The experiences of national development workers in postwar Angola, and their relationships with beneficiaries and with international (expatriate) colleagues, provide particular insight into the “processes of production of difference in a world of culturally, socially, and economically interconnected and interdependent spaces” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997:43). The development industry’s institutional structures and practices clearly produce such social difference while simultaneously rendering disparate spaces economically, socially, and culturally interconnected and interdependent, in part through the employment and transfer of staff through them as agents of development. In investigating the production of difference through development work, anthropologists must attend to the inequalities produced within development institutions as much as to the broader social inequalities produced by them (e.g., Power 2003), most especially if the two sets of inequalities might reinforce one another (cf. Kothari 2006a; Thomas and Clarke 2013).

The anthropology of development has previously demonstrated that the industry predicates itself in part on establishing developing countries as “the local” and as objects external to itself in need of its intervention (Elyachar 2005; Ferguson 1994; Li 2007; Mitchell 2002). In this literature, the production of the local and its distancing from the structures of the development industry largely occurs through “encounters” between development workers and aid recipients (Peters 2000; Watson 2014), wherein the relationship between them defines each role. Here I demonstrate that the international development industry also produces the local, and social distance, among its own ranks of workers through the cultural categories of local-national and international staff. The professional distinction between local and expatriate staff justifies differential treatment of staff members and their discrepant influence over development work, but “local” staff members are also sometimes complicit in reproducing this inequality because they can use these professional identities to further their own personal and professional projects.

The international development industry’s classification of staff and its expectations of their comportment—part of the “power geometry of the interventionist imagination” (Brown 2011:109)—both opens possibilities for Angolans and others to pursue their own projects and, I argue, simultaneously limits the scope of such projects. Below I briefly describe the institutional practices of the international development industry with regard to classification of staff and the inequalities ostensibly justified by these distinctions. I then consider the experience of Angolan staff members working within the GGAP not to make a general point about the experiences of all national staff in all development programs but, rather, to argue against general presumptions about national staff working in international development organizations. I suggest that national staff have come to occupy a certain field of significance in the international development industry that is akin to the “savage slot,” the representational role that anthropology as a discipline was historically prescribed within academe that legitimated the notion of “the West” (Trouillot 1991). If anthropology as a discipline “did not create the savage ... [but] came to fill the savage slot in the trilogy order-utopia-savagery, a trilogy which preceded anthropology’s institutionalization and gave it continuing coherence in spite of intradisciplinary shifts” (Trouillot 1991:40), national staff in international development organizations are similarly invited to participate as professionals in the “serious game” (Ortner 1999) of global social improvement—but with implicit limitations regarding their roles and which of their contributions will be recognized.

These constraints reinforce the development industry's imagined order by internally instantiating its presumptions about the characteristics of developing countries and their people and, by contrast, of "developed" societies and their members.

"Local" development professionals in the GGAP made use of several strategies in order to conform to the expectations of their institutional categorization, including selectively concealing elements of their backgrounds and educations and manipulating their home lives so as to meet work demands that erroneously presumed them to be local to the GGAP's places of intervention. In recounting these successful strategies, I argue that the professional distinction between local-national and international staff in the international development industry is neither an empirical reflection of the spatial, demographic facts of its workforce nor an instrumental reflection of the pragmatic demands of its work; instead, it is an imposition of the development industry's relational worldview onto its own institutional structures. This distinction is also a product often born of the complicit and self-limiting social practices of national staff members themselves as they make use of it toward their own ends. Following Arjun Appadurai (1996), I argue that, rather than being local for the development industry in a spatial sense, national staff members often "practice local" in a social and relational sense.

THE LOCAL AND THE FOREIGN AS PROFESSIONAL DISTINCTIONS IN DEVELOPMENT NGOS

The partitioning of staff into local versus foreign is a central, determining characteristic for any development worker and an internal cultural effect of development thinking, crystallized into the distinct social categories (cf. Pigg 1992) of development industry *doxa*, Pierre Bourdieu's (1977:164–169) term for the experience of social life as through categories that seem self-evident, even natural, to members of a society (or, here, an industry). The idea of *doxa* acknowledges the experience of living in a society—or serving as a professional worker in an industry—whose otherwise arbitrary organization into dominant and subordinate subsections (e.g., old and young, male and female) seems indisputably natural to its members even as they are produced and reproduced by specific, political human action. The categories of international and national staff are *doxic* in international development in that the categories seem so self-evident the industry cannot imagine its workers through other means (cf. Malkki 1992 on the seeming naturalness of territorially based identities). Even as the contemporary industry debates reorganization and increasingly adopts the monikers *Northern* and *Southern* in an attempt to reject the social evolutionism of the terms *developed* and *developing*, the categories of local or foreign to the work of development still hold as foundational, *doxic* distinctions. The idea of *doxa* as the social experience of these distinctions is also a useful theoretical tool for analyzing the experience of national staff in international development work for another reason. Bourdieu points out that occupants of disadvantaged social categories are nevertheless compelled to recognize the social legitimacy of those distinctions in part because they must submit to them in order to make use of them (Bourdieu 1977:164–165). Members of the GGAP's Bie cohort could not help but act the part of local-national staff because inhabiting this identity was both their entrance

fee to the development profession and the enabling structure of their potential trajectories in the industry.

To be a member of the local versus the international staff in the eyes of an international NGO is generally taken to be roughly the same position relative to the community of service regardless of the locale or the individual staff member. That is, an Angolan in Angola is presumed to have roughly the same relationship to Angolan beneficiaries and to the national scene as does a Tanzanian in Tanzania or a Kazak in Kazakhstan (Mandel 2002). By the same stroke, to be Angolan in Angola is taken to be commensurate whether one is working in Cabinda, Bie, or Cuando Cubango—no matter where a particular Angolan is originally from. To be not-Angolan in Angola is similarly taken to be roughly the same position whether one is Mozambican, Ukrainian, or Bangladeshi. In this thinking, the central social distinction within professional development work is not West versus not-West, Northern versus Southern, or developed versus developing. The central distinction is whether a staff member is classified as being “from here” (or of here) or “not from here” (not of here) in relation to the work, which is imagined to exist nonspecifically within the developing country rather than in a particular site or community within that country. The expatriate staff, from developing or developed country alike, are treated as a homogenous professional class, the sociality of which may in fact homogenize its members and reinforce the standardization of the development approach across contexts in hiring and other aspects (Eyben 2011; Rajak and Stirrat 2011). The consequences of the dichotomy for local staff, however, are still quite open for investigation.

For many, the most salient effects of these institutional categories are the rights that different NGO staff members have to employment benefits. Even in positions of equivalent skill or responsibility, foreign staff can expect a number of extra benefits that are thought necessary to facilitate and compensate for their displacement from “home” and, in the case of Angola, their work in a “hardship post.” Angolan staff, like the international news media’s hidden labor force of local journalists, photographers, and “fixers” in other conflict and postconflict zones, are not considered to be working in a hardship post (Bishara 2013; see also Coles 2007; Peters 2013a). Benefits for expatriate development workers often include housing; use of company cars outside working hours; “home leave” in addition to regular-use vacation days; relocation funds at the beginning and end of contract periods; and international mail and phone privileges. National staff members are almost never considered eligible for similar benefits largely because they are seen as belonging in and to their work site, not as displaced or inconvenienced by the work location. In emergencies, international staff can expect their employers to evacuate them and their families to safety; this is almost never the case for the national staff working alongside them (Redfield 2013).

Salaries are often highly discrepant between international and national staff members even with similar duties, education, and experience. Specific figures are not widely shared among organizations and, indeed, are a topic of proprietary market research for industry consultants such as the Birches Group. Disparities between expatriate and national staff have been found to cause psychological distress among colleagues, and in light of these effects, some researchers question the effectiveness of these managerial structures for social development (e.g., Carr et al. 2010; MacLachlan et al. 2010). Distinction between national and

international staff is only one aspect of development's hierarchies, however, and overlaps with similar inequities between, for example, administrative and implementation staff. Implementation positions—nearly always “local” because of the work's prerequisites of language and social experience—hold less prestige and far less influence over decision making in development organizations (Peters in press). Administrative posts, increasingly held by national staff members but historically international positions, hold the most power over development work and institutions. Rather than protest such inequalities of recompense and influence, some national staff members seek to make use of them by transferring to positions in which they would be foreign—if possible as administrative and supervisory staff rather than implementation or technical staff (Peters 2013b; Redfield 2013).

Such hierarchical and unequal forms of belonging occurring within the one modern system given over to addressing humankind's global inequities should occasion especially sharp anthropological analysis (cf. Crewe and Harrison 1998; Schuller 2012) both because “the structure of the work itself influences the outcomes of development” (Hindman and Fechter 2011:2) and because those actors most intimately engaged in development work themselves merit independent attention. Such research advances our critical understandings of how inequalities can be reproduced by those who suffer their constraint, as also happens in the reproduction of social class more broadly (e.g., Willis 1977). Gender and race inequalities in development work have already occasioned analyses that find the development industry is not immune to those globally diffused social hierarchies of difference despite its commitments to social justice (Benton in press; Crewe and Fernando 2006; Roth 2015; Verma 2011). The example I provide here is distinct in that it is generated within the industry itself, though it clearly recalls and is likely a reverberation of “earlier organizations of social division and classifications of human value” through coeval ideas of race, territorial belonging, and capacity for self-governance (Thomas and Clarke 2013:306). That the category of national staff is routinely confounded with that of “local staff” is itself integral to the development industry's broader cultural formation of “the local,” here personified in the local staff member and in opposition to “the international” as personified in the expatriate worker. While personification of global–local difference is not unique to the development industry—military and diplomatic missions and transnational corporations are other institutions with similar internal distinctions—international development is perhaps uniquely dependent upon it given its intended purpose of modernizing social change, commonly imagined to be the elevation of “local” practices and beliefs to more sophisticated, “international” forms.

THE GGAP IN BIÉ PROVINCE

In Angola's first decade of peace after more than 30 years of war, the ruling MPLA (Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola [Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola]) party supported an active modernization campaign, allowing international development organizations to mount democratization interventions like the GGAP. In my ethnographic study of the program, focusing on Angolan staff members' experiences and their perceptions of international development work and organizations, I witnessed many moments of staff discomfort in their communities of service and among colleagues, as illustrated by Arnaldo's concern that I not discuss his international background in Andulo.

The anthropology of development notes that discomfort between local field workers and recipients stems most often from the social distance broadly found between classes, ethnic groups, genders, and other national axes of social difference (Heaton Shrestha 2006; Mosse 2005) as national staff often come from higher social strata than do their beneficiaries. This literature also finds local staff members purposefully constructing or emphasizing such distance in performances of professionalism, wherein to affect airs of language or dress serves to set oneself above the community of service (Englund 2006; Heaton-Shrestha 2004; Redfield 2013:133–136). The case of the GGAP staff in Bie counters this literature, opening a series of broader questions on national staff identities and professional social practice within the international development industry.

Examining the experiences of the Bie cohort allows new insight into the contested social space of international development organizations' national staff, particularly that vast majority who are not the elite "brokers" of national and international influence (Bierschenk et al. 2002; Lewis and Mosse 2006) nor the influential, senior staff of local organizations (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2012; Yarrow 2008). In the Angolan case, brokers "who specialize in the acquisition, control, and redistribution of development 'revenue'" (Mosse and Lewis 2006:12) operated at the highest national level, nearly exclusively in Luanda. The very few Angolan NGOs whose senior or founding staff might be considered "intermediate" activists and professionals within the global networks of development (Baillie Smith and Jenkins 2012) likewise were found almost exclusively in Luanda. As provincial implementation staff of international NGO programs, these Bie workers were more akin to Ann Swidler and Susan Watkins's (2009) examples of local "aspiring elites" or "interstitial elites" than to the brokers' stratum of national elites or the "intermediate" class of activists influential in local- or national-level, rather than international, organizations. Rather than career activists or professionals, this class of development worker is more likely to have "cross[ed] the boundary from unemployed villager to a salaried job," though often only precariously (Swidler and Watkins 2009:1188).

The example of Arnaldo and his colleagues gives nuance to this understanding of national staff, as none of them followed the path Swidler and Watkins describe. The GGAP's Bie staff was certainly elite with respect to most local community members as they held salaried positions. In their work with local government employees as a second type of program beneficiary, however, their local social status was actually equal or even lesser, as positions with international organizations were considered less stable and less advantageous for advancement than were positions in private industry or with government. Nor did these Bie staff members escape the limited opportunities of their natal villages through first receiving training themselves as recipients of NGO intervention, then volunteering and eventually becoming local employees of these organizations (on the desire to follow this trajectory, see Maes 2012; Maes and Kalofonos 2013; Nguyen 2010).

Furthermore, their motivations in seeking these field worker positions were more than simply economic or instrumental. Arnaldo's "time in Namibia," for instance, had been within the confines of a United Nations refugee camp, where he was able to complete a secondary school education. Arnaldo had been motivated to accept his position with the GGAP not only because he needed employment after he repatriated as a young adult but also

because he considered himself to “owe his life” and his life chances to the international NGOs who had served him, his mother, and his siblings while they were war refugees. He saw himself as repaying a type of social or moral debt—a sacrifice in the face of his fervent desire for a career in the performing arts but a worthy one. With the exception of their low professional status within their employing organization, the Bie cohort as a whole tracked more closely the trajectories of most expatriate staff, having lived and studied abroad and subsequently having found work in international NGOs that held some promise to their ethics and career aspirations.

This group of development workers was composed neither of powerful national elites able to “broker” deals between international and national institutions nor local community members who successfully “broke in” to the formal employment structures of international development NGOs. Occupying a social stratum in the lower middle of the development hierarchy—employed fulltime by international NGOs but as rank-and-file implementation staff fulfilling assignments rather than determining policy or program design—they were “able to manipulate others who have less knowledge than they do but [were] still subject to exploitation by those who installed them” (Merry 2006:40). In “the developmentalist configuration” (Olivier de Sardan 2005), Arnaldo and colleagues were employees, not founders or directors, nor even supervisors of other staff members. They were simply “local” or “national” implementation staff, terms used interchangeably in development parlance to signify an industry classification that both describes and shapes their social location.

“PRACTICING LOCAL” DESPITE DISPLACEMENT

The category of local staff equates to that of national staff such that a far broader and more diverse category of “national staff” come to be considered “local” to the place and population of development intervention. This elision of local and national, as Peter Redfield notes, may be possible through the imaginary of mobility. He notes for the case of Doctors Without Borders’ Ugandan employees that, although national staff are not necessarily “local in terms of a given project site ... none ... had crossed a national boundary, and thus the organization considered them to be ‘at home’” (Redfield 2013:129). While clearly true in Redfield’s observations, the Bie cohort demonstrates that industry classification of “national” staff does not always follow from the fact of limited or absent international mobility but instead constructs it by ascribing it to certain development workers. The category allows for the presumption that workers have not crossed an international border and are therefore “at home,” and several sequelae of ascription and value then follow—that they speak national languages, for instance, have nearby family to support, or have family present to aid them.

Members of the Bie cohort, however, had all crossed national boundaries with meaningful social and material consequences. For them, the category of national staff was both resource and limitation. To more comfortably fit the presumptions of the category, they maintained discretion in discussing their time abroad and in revealing their educational accomplishments, but they also faced several of the same challenges as did the expatriate staff members officially recognized and supported in their displacement from home and family.

In part because living conditions and especially educational opportunities for children were so poor in rural Bie Province, most members of the GGAP field staff there maintained their homes and families in Kuito or even Huambo, roughly two-and-a-half, or six, hours' drive from the Andulo field office, respectively (see Figure 2). These staff members took regional buses to Andulo early on Monday mornings or late on Sunday evenings, stayed together in a house they rented independently of any NGO subsidy, and left again on a bus on Friday afternoons to spend the weekends at home with their families. If there were NGO vehicles making the trip in the right direction on a Friday or a Monday, they might try to arrange rides to save both time and bus fare. Carlota, the only woman on the Bie staff, did move with her husband and four young children to Andulo proper at the beginning of her posting and was the only staff member not making this weekly commute. Her husband was unable to find work in the municipality, however, and as their four children matured (their oldest was 14 years old in 2008) the couple became increasingly concerned about their educations and enrichment opportunities and was starting to make plans to leave for an urban setting.

For Arnaldo, Paulo, and Cristóvão, the weekly commute and time away from their families was a significant hardship and expense of their employment in the GGAP. Like Arnaldo, Cristóvão and Paulo were pleased to work for the GGAP for the salary but also because they sought to fulfill other goals through their work, as well. Upon repatriating from Namibia, Cristóvão first found employment with a for-profit South African firm, scouting Angolan agricultural prospects for possible investment. As it seemed no one else besides this foreign company was willing to hire a returnee, he was immensely relieved to have the work; moreover, he enjoyed feeling that he was participating in something that could help Angola recover from its long wars. He did not see much opportunity to develop his own skills and career within the company, however. After a time, one of Cristóvão's aunts pointed out that international development NGOs improve their staff members' skills with on-the-job training, so he began to search specifically for positions with such an organization. When an accounting job in the Húila Province office of an international NGO came open, he applied and was hired.

Cristóvão found the organization very different from the agricultural investment firm; it was "like a school," and he took advantage of many training opportunities. He enjoyed attending NGO workshops, meeting people working in similar organizations or in the government, and learning about development work. After a few years in the Húila office, he moved to take a position in the organization's Kuito office, as in the interim he had married a woman whose extended family was in Bie's provincial capital. As the GGAP was beginning, he was then internally recruited to its field site in Andulo. His young family remained in Kuito while he commuted to Andulo each week. In 2008 he anticipated staying in the Kuito area for some time because he was supporting several of his wife's family members there and wanted to see his nieces and nephews complete secondary school before he left the province for more urban opportunities.

Contrary to institutional presumptions, these staff members had each indeed crossed international borders and in some cases were displaced by their work, facing many of the personal concerns and constraints that international staff members face in moving their families to development field sites. These professionals enjoyed none of the support in terms

of resources or understanding that was regularly granted to international staff members in recognition of similar concerns. Some international staff members and their families were much farther from home, of course, but not all of them. The programs manager for one of the GGAP's sponsoring international NGOs, for example, was a Swiss man who had married an Angolan woman, raising their three children there, and so had been living and working in Angola for over 20 years. He was still classified as an international staff member with all attendant rights and resources. His children had enjoyed organizational subsidies to attend a private French school in Luanda, and the youngest of them, the only one still in school in 2008, was routinely dropped off and picked up for school by an NGO car and driver. Needless to say, none of the children of Angolan staff were ever chauffeured to school or home by NGO cars and drivers, nor were they ever considered eligible for private or international school tuition subsidies. Actual displacement experienced did not determine the support a GGAP staff member could ask for and receive; registered nationality did. Such separation and displacement, however onerous for the Bie staff and others, was at least temporarily sufferable in exchange for the opportunity to contribute to Angolan development and pursue one's own professional growth.

QUALIFYING AS LOCAL STAFF FOR THE GGAP

To spur Angolan development, the GGAP sought to improve local government effectiveness and transparency and increase community participation in local government through two sets of activities. In the first, staff members like Carlota, Cristóvão, and Félix were seconded to the municipal administration itself to coach personnel there in budgeting, computer literacy, and project management skills, all with a strong flavor of "good governance" in the sense of administrative transparency and responsiveness to local communities (e.g., Grindle 1997, 2004). In the project's second arm, staff like Arnaldo and Paulo were to train community-based committees to deliberate priorities, make well-evidenced requests of local government, and design and carry out projects such as improving school buildings or public water points (*chafarizes*) with competitively awarded grants from the GGAP. Finally, the staff organized public forums like the one at which Arnaldo had encountered his friend, to bring community members into structured conversation with local officials.

The GGAP's parent NGOs emphasized hiring local staff whenever appropriate candidates could be found and, for the provincial implementation work, sought exclusively local staff. This work—being embedded in local government offices, on one side, and working intimately with war-ravaged rural communities, on the other—required linguistic skills and social experience particular to each site. Development NGOs routinely distinguish the skills and knowledge necessary for different staff positions—and the candidates who might suit them—by categorizing some as "local" or "national" and others as "international." International candidates are assumed to be technical experts because of advanced education; generally familiar with development theory, logic, and bureaucratic practice (Kothari 2005). In assessing international candidates, institutions question most closely whether or not they have enough "field experience" working in a developing country to fill an in-country position or to support in-country programming from afar.

By contrast, local (national) candidates are often presumed naturally competent “in the field” and conversant in vernacular languages and systems of comportment without regard to whether they as individuals are “local” to the particular intervention site. In assessing national candidates, institutions question more closely whether a candidate has enough education and professional experience to accomplish the office tasks of modern bureaucracy—capacities that are taken-for-granted in even the youngest and least experienced international candidates (Kothari 2006b). The individual candidate’s relationship to a development organization is thus predicated on this imagined relationship to development work and its location in developing countries. Subverting local or national control, many recruitment procedures are no longer controlled by in-country staff but by international headquarters offices, as international NGOs have taken on many of the characteristics of audit-oriented bureaucracies, organizing their activities within a rational framework that demands comparability, even commensurability, across contexts (Green 2003) and control and oversight from above.

The GGAP’s job descriptions for Arnaldo and his colleagues’ positions reveal several industry presumptions. Although the description of tasks emphasizes, for instance, that the successful candidate will “work on a day-in and day-out basis with the targeted communities” in some of the most rural and war-affected areas of Angola, the qualifications sought for the Community Development Coordinator position include a “degree or diploma,” “strong communication training and public presentation skills,” and an “analytical mind,” computer literacy, and Portuguese and English language skills (see Figure 3). While these qualifications and particularly the years of experience desired were all genuinely necessary to carry out the duties of the position as it was embedded within international NGOs, certain other, equally necessary, skills go unmentioned. Such positions necessarily required the candidate to speak at least one if not several local languages, such as Umbundu for Bie Province, or, in other field sites, Tchokwe or Nganguela, but the advertisement does not list these requirements. The qualifications noted are not only those necessary for the work but are more specifically those presumed to be most difficult to find in the potential candidate pool—the limiting factors of the national staff as imagined by the industry.

Industry presumptions also shape not only the job descriptions for local staff but their dissemination. When approved, job descriptions for local staff were physically posted on bulletin boards outside the GGAP’s project offices in each of its field sites and outside the parent NGOs’ regional offices, as well as sometimes in additional public locations such as local schools and churches and, in cities such as Kuito or Huambo, at Internet cafes or libraries. At the time of my fieldwork, I never saw a local fieldworker position advertised on international job boards such as Devex.com or Reliefweb.int, although the GGAP and its parent NGOs did post administrative positions in these online fora. Arnaldo’s experience of learning about an open position for national staff in the GGAP, however, reveals that at least in his case international connections and communications were more effective than were local, physical advertisements.

Arnaldo had not been in the habit of touring NGO offices to observe their bulletin boards, although he was looking for work after his repatriation. He found out about the vacancy he eventually came to fill through his sister, still in Namibia, who had been a schoolmate there

to Cristóvão. Cristóvão had kept in touch with Arnaldo's sister and others throughout his own repatriation to Angola and was knowledgeable about her family's—specifically her four brothers'—repatriation difficulties. When the GGAP position came open, Cristóvão called her and explained not only how Arnaldo should forward his materials to the GGAP office in Kuito but also that this opening was perhaps one of the only opportunities he might have to find work in the region as a returnee. Arnaldo recalls submitting materials to the sponsoring NGO with his sister's and Cristóvão's help and then hearing nothing for what seemed an eternity. He presumed that with his lack of work history—he had only held volunteer positions and student work positions until he joined the GGAP—he could not be a competitive candidate.

It was a surprise, therefore, when the NGO office manager in Kuito called him and requested that he visit the office for interviews the following day. In the moment he received this call, Arnaldo was in the departures lounge of the Huambo airport awaiting a flight to Namibia. He was checked in for the flight and anxious to visit friends in Namibia and to take a break from the stress of looking for work and habituating to Angola. He gave serious thought to continuing on his trip, as he did not think the position would really be offered to him. His mother, on consultation, made the decisive argument that he must go and at least gain the experience of being interviewed for work. He traveled to Kuito for the interview and was in fact hired into a contract position with the expectation that if it went well, he would convert to a staff position. It was more than he had been expecting, and as he was not visiting the bulletin boards looking for local staff positions with international NGOs, it would never have happened had his sister and Cristóvão not known one another from Namibia and kept in touch.

“PRACTICING LOCAL” THROUGH LANGUAGE

The social location of local staff inside international NGOs is in many ways, though not all, one of hierarchical subordination. GGAP staff members engaged in moments of social subordination among their programmatic and organizational colleagues in a multitude of ways, but most pressing for my argument here are instances in which a staff member subversively conformed to the role of a development industry subordinate. As when Arnaldo implored me not to discuss his Namibian history, staff members were more than just discreet about revealing knowledge or professional capacity that did not fit the development industry's imaginary of Angolan “local staff.” Enacting and putting into practice the social location of “local” staff safeguarded jobs and opened up certain opportunities—but also closed off others. Consider first an example from the program's midterm assessment, conducted by a scholar from the United States, Dr. Reich, who toured several field sites, reviewed internal documents, and conducted interviews in October 2008 to independently evaluate the program's progress for its funders.

Together with Carlota and a supervisor from the regional NGO office, Dr. Reich and I were awaiting his appointment to interview the municipal administrator in Andulo, the Bie field site. As we waited, Félix—a former GGAP staff member who had been fired from the Bie office only to be immediately hired by the municipal administration—entered the room to retrieve files from its desktop computer. As Félix searched the slow computer for the right

files, Dr. Reich struck up a conversation with me in English about my ethnographic fieldwork. As he spoke, both Carlota and Félix startled and quickly averted their eyes from us, trying not to let on that they followed our English language exchange. At first puzzled by their reactions, I realized that Dr. Reich likely thought we had a measure of privacy that we did not have and that Carlota and Félix did not want to correct his presumption. Dr. Reich had no way to know who spoke English nor did he have particular cause to wonder, and he operated under the common expatriate presumption that local Angolan staff likely did not speak English. He had no way to know that Carlota was a product of a Namibian education nor that Félix had previously worked as a UN translator and was proficient in Portuguese, French, and English. I was in the habit of speaking exclusively Portuguese with the GGAP staff with the exception of certain expatriates in the interest of developing my own capacities and, as Arnaldo's example above demonstrates, to concord with their preferences.

Dr. Reich, on this first visit outside Luanda, had thus far only heard Portuguese and indigenous languages spoken. In striking up an English language conversation, he was perhaps looking to give both of us a break and in this moment was doing no more than simply passing the time and making relevant conversation; he was not asking any particularly sensitive questions. I became increasingly uncomfortable, however, and waited to see if Félix or Carlota might somehow participate. As they kept their eyes averted, I started to worry I was complicit in a subterfuge if Dr. Reich presumed we were speaking exclusively. I considered addressing Félix or Carlota in English to include them in the conversation but worried this would betray their confidences. Including them by address in Portuguese, meanwhile, would have confirmed my complicity in concealing their capacities. As our conversation continued, I realized also that Dr. Reich knew Félix only as a member of the municipal administration staff and could not know his background as a former member of the GGAP staff. As Félix finally printed his documents and departed the small antechamber, these various secrets overwhelmed me, and I diverted my attention from Dr. Reich to ask Carlota, in Portuguese, to confirm whether that had been the same Félix who used to work in the GGAP. She answered me quickly and comfortably, though she seemed confused that I would ask such an obvious question and one so far removed from the topics about which Dr. Reich and I had just been speaking. This caused Dr. Reich to switch quickly back to Portuguese to ask the staff about Félix's departure and other personnel changes in the program. At a brief opportunity later in the day, I told Dr. Reich I had come across several people in the municipality who spoke excellent English, though did not identify them. He was quite surprised.²

Of course Félix, Carlota, and others have a multitude of reasons, and rights, to participate or not in a conversation in the language of their choice. But I highlight that one effect of refraining from participation in English, in this instance and others, is to leave the presumptive capacities of Angolan "local staff" unchallenged. The reverse—purporting to speak Portuguese or local languages natively—also occurred among the staff, to the same effect.

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²Dr. Reich has generously offered comments on earlier drafts of this article, and although he does not himself recall this particular exchange, he confirms that he was surprised to hear of English speakers in the provinces, whether among local administrative staff, international NGO national staff, or ordinary community members.

Arnaldo, like Carlota and Cristóvão, had fled with his family to Namibia as a child, growing up in UNHCR administered refugee camps among families from all over Africa. The camp ran educational services under a British model, in English, and Arnaldo studied through high school there. Although Arnaldo's mother held informal Portuguese lessons in their living quarters for Angolan families during their time at the camps, I knew his spoken and especially his written Portuguese to be impoverished: a type of vernacular Portuguese that did not meet the professional standards of linguistic form expected in NGO offices. His GGAP colleagues (and occasionally the foreign anthropologist) regularly proofread his reports and presentation slides to correct for errors of basic grammar and spelling before they could be sent on to other GGAP offices or especially to local government. I was unable to judge his Umbundu myself, but as it was a consistent topic of collegial teasing in the office I understood it to be similarly spotty. Arnaldo preferred, when possible, to have his colleagues speak to community members and government officials during formal GGAP events.

Although he felt terrible stress in his work, much of it related to his capacities in Umbundu and Portuguese, Arnaldo increasingly found his position enjoyable and rewarding after his first year. Motivated to serve in an international NGO and at the time of his hire having already spent months unsuccessfully looking for work after repatriating to Angola, he had at first been ecstatic to be hired for the GGAP position. He nearly withdrew his acceptance, however, after learning he was to work in Andulo rather than Kuito, the provincial capital. He "had heard too many difficult stories about Andulo," and it was only at his mother's encouragement that he took the risk of accepting a position there. In light of the GGAP's insistence that implementation staff be locally knowledgeable and embedded within their rural communities of service, members of the Bie cohort were originally a very poor fit for the work. Arnaldo was insecure in the vernacular languages, and he, Carlota, and Cristóvão were each careful to conceal their backgrounds as war refugees, in part because such background is often interpreted as evidence of having supported UNITA (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola [National Union for the Total Independence of Angola]) in the civil war (Pearce 2012). Far from the "local" staff members the GGAP intended to have working as implementers in rural Bie Province, it had instead a cohort of Angolans who were social outsiders there.

Though outsiders in Andulo, this cohort could and did practice the role of local staff within the development industry, in part by concealing their English language capacities and thus their internationalized backgrounds, and in part by collaborating among themselves to send out properly local-seeming reports and materials, such as when we together conspired to correct Arnaldo's errors of Portuguese. The Bie cohort—singly and together—found it advantageous to fit into development's "savage slot": not themselves "savage," of course, but like anthropology's historical role within academe and its contributions to bolstering the West's self-definition by offering comparative analyses of non-Western peoples (Trouillot 1991), these professionals were responsible for representing—and, perhaps, through such representations, creating—"the local" as a necessary complement to the international. Their role was not to act as development beneficiaries or any proxy of them but, rather, as a certain kind of professional: the local staff member. Acting the part of "local" safeguarded their jobs and livelihoods, paid social and moral debts, and fit a workable framework to potentially

uncomfortable social exchanges. In their positions as industry professionals, they retained a privilege and status above many beneficiaries (Phillips 2013), but in obscuring their full backgrounds to perform the role of local staff they also cemented their social location as a type of development industry subordinate.

Subordinate positions are not always wholly unwelcome. James Ferguson's inquiry (2013) into the "pursuits of subordination" that are perhaps increasingly common in societies that deny the vast majority of the population access to formal labor allows a nuanced perspective on my observations. Ferguson's work suggests that hierarchical inequalities may not be so easily denounced in favor of a more egalitarian development industry. Not only are these waged positions often socially desirable ends in themselves, but it could be the case that their subordinate position in the development hierarchy is also advantageous or desirable. Admission into an international NGO as a national staff member does offer "a quite full-bodied social membership" (Ferguson 2013:225) not only with respect to one's family and local community as a result of wage earning but also within the structures of professional international development itself. In daily work, among colleagues, and through periodic trainings and other opportunities, one can improve skills and become acquainted with others from different backgrounds. Nearly to a person in my interviews of the GGAP staff and their colleagues, I was told that international NGOs were "like a school," offering innumerable opportunities for learning and growth. Many avenues for training and skills development were available exclusively to local staff and were as valuable to them, as was the salary that came with the job. These opportunities are made available in the industry in part because of the presumption that the national staff are in need of them, a twinned presumption of the lack and need of the developing country itself.

SHARED CONSEQUENCES FOR PRACTICING LOCAL STAFF

At the level of the larger industry, there exist two broader consequences of such "practicing local" in professional development work. First, not all staff members' full competencies are made use of in the work, as staff may hide these in order to maintain the fiction of being local in a regime that does not consider local knowledge to include, for instance, English language skills or the technical skills of budgeting, monitoring, evaluation, and other expertise thought inherently international and therefore not local. Second, individuals genuinely knowledgeable about local histories and social matters are often not identified for these positions nor incorporated fully into development institutions as they are crowded out by those preferentially hired in the guise of local staff despite their lack of local knowledge. Together these injuries are echoes within the development industry of the external injustices that international development organizations and programs seek to abolish. Beyond the international development industry, this cohort's example of participation, or even complicity, with the production of institutional inequality offers insight into why and how other inequalities live on, even as they are criticized: they may be entrance fees or even entrances, full stop, to institutional and social belonging (Ferguson 2013).

The development industry imaginary would perhaps have us consider "the local" in a spatial or scalar sense rather than the relational sense Appadurai urges (1996:178). It is in the spatial sense that national staff are classified as ostensibly local, imagined to belong to or

come from someplace contiguous with the site of their professional activities. In the case of the GGAP's Bie field staff, of course, none actually met this expectation. They either moved to the site or regularly commuted over 150 kilometers between their homes and the site. Most significantly, all had been raised and educated in a foreign system, thousands of kilometers away. These staff members adjusted their behaviors and were discreet about the skills and knowledge they held that would not fit into development's spatialized concept of a local worker. In these practices, they came to enact and produce local knowledge for the development industry in the relational and contextual sense that Appadurai defines. He writes, for instance, that "local knowledge is what it is not principally by contrast with other knowledges—which (from some nonlocal point of view) the observer might regard as less localized—but by virtue of its local teleology and ethos" (Appadurai 1996:181). For Arnaldo, his colleagues, and perhaps many others in other development interventions, "local knowledge" in development work is actually the knack of looking and acting like local staff are supposed to while in fact having the professional skills and education demanded by an increasingly bureaucratized and professionalized development workplace.

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FIGURE 1. GGAP staff member Arnaldo (left) is surprised to encounter another returned Angolan refugee while on the job in Andulo, Bie Province. (Photo by author)

FIGURE 2.

Map of Angola indicating selected cities and town. (Drawn by Joe Stoll, used with permission)

Qualifications

Education		Experience	
Degree or Diploma	R	3 years experience working with local government and poor communities	R
Strong communication (oral) training and public presentation skills	R	3 years experience working with curricula development and training	R
Training in good governance and community development	R	3 years experience with an integrated development program	R
Analytical mind	R	3 years experience in senior management position within an NGO	R
Written communication skills	R		
Portuguese and English	R		
Computer literacy (Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint) and information-finding skills	R		

FIGURE 3.

Desired qualifications for the GGAP Community Development Coordinator position, verbatim from vacancy announcement.