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EMPOWERING CHANGEMAKERS FOR A BETTER SOCIETY

“THE POETICS OF IMAGINED LIVES: DESIRE, IMAGINATION AND FABULATION IN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURING”

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Joint work with Mollie Painter (Nottingham Trent University)

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ABSTRACT

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The Poetics of Imagined Lives: Imagination, Desire, Fabulation and Social Entrepreneuring

by

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“Imagination is the mode of thought most precisely suited to the vagueness of the virtual”
(Massumi, 2002a, b, p. 134).

“Assemblages are passionate, they are compositions of desire... The rationality, the efficiency of an assemblage does not exist without the passions the assemblage brings into play, without the desire that constitutes it as much as it constitutes them.” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988: 399)

Introduction, theoretical framing

Empirical context

What is it that ‘makes’ gender-based violence such an intractable problem and how are solutions or responses to be co-created, given the intersectionality that lies at its heart? These were some of the questions that emerged in and through an UKRI-DIDA funded network-building project called WE-DARE (Women’s Equality: Digital Access and the Right to Expression) in South Africa and Nigeria. Our initial goals, to co-create digital solutions with those exposed to GBV in Africa, quickly proved at the same time much too simple and way too ambitious. At the heart of GBV responsiveness lies material realities and relationships that have to be enacted affectively

before, during and after any co-creation of 'solutions can meaningfully take place. Women needed a safe space to congregate, to speak openly, to receive support and to actively 'make' different lives potentially reachable. So, as an emergent response, a grassroots community pilot was designed with our NGO partners Cadena and 1000 Women Trust, focused on bringing women in the township of Wattville, Johannesburg together for sewing workshops, during which they crafted sanitary pads. The safe space this created allowed community leaders and members to be empowered to openly address the lack of dignity, the bodily shame, the realities of period poverty and general financial precarity that kept women trapped in abusive relationships. The desire emerged to repeat these workshops, but also to experiment with what could be produced, how it is produced and how it may produce sustainable livelihoods. In this project, we embrace these rhizomatic possibilities and hope to study its emergence.

Theoretical framing

Vitalist processual philosophy, central in the philosophical basis of more recently developed new materialist, posthuman or more-than-human philosophy (Bennett, 2010; Braidotti, 2019) is associated with Gilles Deleuze's (leaning on Bergson, Nietzsche and Spinoza in particular, Deleuze, 1988; Hjorth and Holt, 2014; Holt and Hjorth, 2014). The inspiration to this paper is the We-Dare project, briefly described in the opening above. Vitalist philosophy seems to be developed to support the discovery of the 'missing people', as Deleuze puts it. The phrase has a distinctly postcolonial ring to it and a feminist too. The missing people are those that are excluded from the majority, where majority is defined by those that inhabit the privileged position in a society's social configurations. The majority is seldom the numerical majority, but the majority in terms of political, aesthetical, ethical, and identity-based forms of domination.

Minority is then outside the normal, outside the safe, outside the dominant discourses in which a subjectivity with agency and rights is available to them to use. The minority is positioned outside the privileged banks of class, gender, race, (i.e., intersectionality problems) where 'the social' of society provides no source of identity for them, no status as fully citizen. Even if formal status as citizen is granted, this provides no safety, access, or rights in practice. They are 'the missing people' in this sense (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986). The creation of new possibilities for living is always related to the missing people.