A Common Theme – Ethical Practice

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As with every Open Issue, we aim here at opening up new lines of inquiry, embracing a range of themes and topics. Generally some unexpected common themes emerge, and this Open Issue is no exception. Across all of these papers there is a shared concern with the dynamics of ethical practice. What drives it, how can it be fostered, what does it generate?
Jenny Onyx takes the 'social impact' debate from top-down evaluation or assessment to grassroots practice. Instead of beginning with elite-defined program 'impact', Onyx starts with the actual practices of civil society organisations. Through 'practice theory', social interactions are seen as constituting the social field. Rather than fixing and monetising impact, the approach charts civil society as a 'developmental process'. The approach then involves mapping the multi-faceted social interactions of organizations. The emphasis here is on highlighting the dynamic process of social relations, as the immediate manifestation of civil society.

The following two papers address issues of ethical practice through the analysis of fields of policy. Ying Hooi Khoo offers an in-depth account of the disjunctures between human rights practice and national reporting to United Nations Human Rights Council. Khoo's focus is on the Malaysian case, and clearly the tensions she highlights are shown to have wide application wherever states fail to embrace the reporting process and instead approach it as a diplomatic exercise. For Khoo the UN process offers opportunities for states and NGOs to develop human rights practice on the ground. Through it, states can build reputation, and NGOs can gain leverage. In the Malaysian case these opportunities remain unrealized, in large part due to the defensive stance taken by the Malaysian state.

Wearing, Cunningham, Schweinsberg and Jobberns discuss the ethics of whale watching, as an instance in the commercialisation of nature. They stress the ethical boundaries that arise, set by an underlying framework of ecological tourism. There are practical limits in terms of interference, but there are also ethical concerns in terms of the exploitation of the ecological commons for commercial gain. What responsibilities come with exploitation, in terms of public education and active conservation? The authors suggest these can be realized in practice through the ethics of eco-tourism, and provide both 'an avenue for economic growth and the development of political capital'.

Questions of ethical practice also arise for the remaining two papers, both of which conduct ethnographic or participant investigations into fields of practice. Kirpitchenko offers an opportunity to reflect on our own practices as students and academics, and thereby 'bring home' the question of ethical practice, specifically through the analysis of academic cosmopolitanism. The phenomenon of academic mobility across international borders and between different cultures, both as an intellectual and an experiential exercise, is seen as

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generating the conditions for cosmopolitanism. The paper investigates the practices of academic cosmopolitanism, and finds they flourish in the encounters and interactions of research subjects. Kirpitchenko argues that intellectual inquiry and mobility dovetails with inclusivity and interculturalism, creating fertile ground for cosmopolitanism.

In a final paper for the Open Issue, Chris Khoo, with Schulenkorf and Adair, take us to the ethics of sport and development policy in Samoa. The paper investigates the use Australian foreign aid to promote cricket for community development. Khoo et al. draw on local engagement and in-depth interviews with participants to discuss whether the program had benefitted local communities, and to identify any issues needing to be addressed. As is often the case with aid programs, a key issue was indigenisation and 'ownership', and specifically the relationship between a widely-played local version of cricket, 'kirikiti', and official cricket as an international sport. Khoo et al. stress that respondents saw the need to build on local practices rather than supplant them, thereby highlighting a centrally important dimension of ethical practice as embedded practice.