A New Materialist approach for NGO research: The NGO-research assemblage

Introduction

The premise adopted in this chapter is that before we begin to research NGOs, we must first interrogate what we think they are. This is because the way we conceptualise NGOs will shape the questions we might ask about them, the methods we use, the data we generate, our analytical approach and how we understand ourselves in relation to our research. Thinking about how to conceptualise NGOs is not an idle academic exercise. It is an important ethical issue because our choices and assumptions have real-world implications for what can be known about NGOs and the work they do.

This chapter will respond to the premise outlined above by exploring what New Materialism and, more specifically, what 'assemblage' (*agencement*) (Deleuze and Parnet, 1987; Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; DeLanda, 2006) might offer as a conceptual approach for researching NGOs. It will contend that if we conceptualise NGOs as emerging from a 'research assemblage' (Fox and Alldred, 2015a, 2015b) of dynamic processes that involve the material world, discourses and people, we might find new ways to decolonise our research practices and the knowledge we produce about NGOs. The aim of this chapter is to help new and more experienced researchers reflect on what counts as data and how we might understand our own role as researchers. This chapter is also an invitation to critically question the knowledge that we contribute to the wider field of NGO research.

A New Materialist turn for NGO research

Contemporary research on NGOs has acknowledged the dilemmas involved in defining NGOs as knowable entities (Lewis and Opoku-Mensah, 2006; Bernal and Grewal, 2014). Such research has also explored how their location within wider contexts of development (Tvedt, 2006; Richard, 2009), social movements (Kudva, 2005) and international relations (Ahmed and Potter, 2006) can serve to further complicate definitions. Engaging with these dilemmas has enabled researchers to elucidate nuanced typologies of NGOs. While this pursuit of typologies has opened doors to critical questions about what NGOs are, it has also led to a conceptual cul-de-sac as these definitions ultimately fail to fully capture the dynamism of these organisations. One important conceptual turn in NGO research has been to consider what NGOs do rather than what they are, and this has led to an interrogation of how power operates in and through NGOs. This conceptual turn, heavily influenced by poststructuralism and postcolonialism, has been particularly interested in thinking through the ways that NGOs perpetuate discourses of neoliberal development (Ferguson, 1994; Schuller, 2009), co-opt social movements through processes of NGOisation (Lang, 1997; Alvarez, 2014; 2018; Schöneberg, 2019), and are intertwined with systems of imperialism that undermine national sovereignty (Funk, 2006; Hearn, 2007; Mitchell et al. 2020). This has led Bernal and Grewal (2014: 8) to surmise that:

> The designations 'non-profit' and 'non-governmental' should be taken instead as pointing to complex relationships that need to be investigated and analysed. Such relationships are complex not simply because of the diversity of NGOs or states, but also because NGOs exist in a geopolitical context of the knowledge and power

> frameworks of the expanding modern West. This context includes new and old networks of finance, communication and knowledge that take for granted and promote assumptions about the nature of states, markets and civil society, as well as other issues such as gender relations.

If, as Bernal and Grewal (2014: 8) suggest, 'NGOs exist in a geopolitical context of the knowledge and power frameworks of the expanding modern West' then it is not surprising that Lang has posed the question 'how successful can [NGOs] be when they are dependent on exactly the structures that need to be transformed?' (1997: 113). According to Roy, these concerns have precipitated attempts by activists and researchers to disentangle NGOs from 'patriarchal and imperial [...] structures of state, civil society and the market' (2015: 111). However, she warns that this 'fetishization of autonomy' is dangerous because 'there are no pure spaces' that exist outside of these structures (Roy, 2015: 111). While poststructural and postcolonial critiques of NGOs have disrupted the ideal of an NGO as a benign non-state entity and brought much-needed attention to understandings of how power operates in and through NGOs at local, national and global levels, they have created another impasse for NGOs and NGO research. What are we to do as activists, researchers and aid workers if NGOs and the people working for them are subject to the power/knowledge structures of neoliberalism, patriarchy and imperialism?

The argument put forward in this chapter is that an alternative conceptual approach is needed, one that provides a way of acknowledging the ways in which power operates while leaving open the possibility for NGOs to be more than entities that are simply subject to pre-existing discursive structures. The desire for a fresh conceptual approach is not new to the field of NGO research; however, the thread developed in this chapter is concerned specifically with the possibilities that New Materialism might offer. New Materialism foregrounds the importance of matter, agency and the workings of power. One way to understand what is different about New Materialism compared to other philosophical ideas is to consider its framing of ontology, epistemology and ethics. Put simply, ontology refers to the nature of being, its properties and the relations between those properties. For New Materialists and for those interested in theories of assemblage this typically means 'there are no structures, systems of mechanisms at work; instead, there are innumerable 'events' comprising the material effects of both nature and culture which together produce the world and human history' (Fox, n.d.). Put another way, New Materialism 'rejects the distinction between the physical world and the social constructs of human thoughts, meanings and desires' (Fox and Alldred, 2018: 3).

If we hold this ontology to be true, that the nature of being is constantly in flux and not static or possessing an absolute essence, then this has implications for epistemology, or how we know what we know and what it is possible to know. To this end, New Materialism draws our attention towards an analysis of how things come to be (their becomings) and their ongoing inter- and intra-relationships. It is not a pursuit of knowledge about the essence of what things are, but instead leaves room for 'complexity that accounts for open configurations, continuous connections and unstable hierarchies, structures and axes of difference' (Tamboukou, 2010: 679). This in turn has consequences for ethics and the moral principles that shape our behaviour as researchers and extends to the methodologies we use and the claims to knowledge we make about NGOs, their policies, their staff and their projects. This has led one prominent New Materialist, Karen Barad, to use the neologism: ethico-onto-epistemology (2007) to suggest the inseparability of ontology, epistemology and ethics in research.

Before turning to trace how one strand of New Materialist theory – that of assemblage – will be put to work in this chapter, I want to situate the proposed conceptual turn in this chapter as emerging from my encounters with the work of the following NGO scholars: Dorothea Hilhorst; Helen Wadham, Cathy Urquhart and Richard Warren; and Saida Hodžić. Hilhorst (2003) suggests that one way out of the impasse of poststructuralism is for researchers to turn their attention to the everyday politics and realities of NGOs. Drawing on the 'Actor Network Theory', which shares some of the same ontological concerns as New Materialism, Hilhorst encourages us to think of NGOs as 'open-ended processes' rather than 'things' and suggests that 'instead of asking what an NGO is, the more appropriate question then becomes how NGO-ing is done' (2003: 4–5). Not only does NGO-ing disrupt the idea of a coherent and stable NGO entity, Hilhorst's articulation of an NGO as an 'open-ended process' also suggests the possibility of agency in the everyday and the disruption or subversion of dominant systems of power/knowledge by NGO staff and beneficiaries.

Wadham et al. (2019) have also suggested that we might look at NGO actors for developing more complex understandings of relationships between macro-scale systems and the everyday. For Wadham et al., 'NGOs are constituted within a contingent field of economic, political and social relationships (Dempsey, 2012). However, there is a gap in our understanding of how NGO actors—in practice—balance the inherent tensions this creates' (2019: 1264). This has led Wadham et al. (2019) to propose 'a paradox perspective', which again disrupts the idea of an NGO as an entity or 'social unit' with a pre-existing essence. Instead, for Wadham et al. (2019: 1265), an NGO comes into being as a consequence of competing and at times contradictory demands and obligations. These paradoxes create tensions and blur boundaries between people and organisations, and between communities and donors, and are therefore a 'defining, ontological feature' of NGOs and the authors claim they should therefore shape how NGOs are conceptualised (Wadham et al., 2019: 1266).

Hodžić (2014) offers a different way out of the poststructural impasse of NGO research by drawing attention to Donna Haraway's (1991) posthuman metaphor of the cyborg. Haraway (1991) uses the cyborg – a human/technological being – to develop a critique of human-centred or anthropocentric ontologies. The aim of Haraway's critique, and the aim of posthumanism more broadly, is to expose the failure of anthropocentric ontologies to encapsulate the 'interdependence of the human, the body and its historical others' (Braidotti, 2006: 203). Braidotti (2006) has argued that these humanist ontologies can only make sense of a world that has already ceased to be, because reality and what we can know about the world are deemed to be the product of discourse. Instead, Haraway (1991) shows us that discourse may well produce human-centred ideas about the world (e.g. neoliberalism, patriarchy and imperialism), but these discourses do not constitute the world because the world and all of its interdependent elements are always in the process of changing. Hodžić applies this thinking to NGOs to suggest that while they are undoubtedly sites where political, social and economic discourses may flourish, they are also sites where boundaries between the material and discursive are confounded and where new possibilities might emerge. Hodžić (2014) therefore suggests that NGO research should take up Haraway's suggestion and revel in the 'confusion of boundaries', the 'leaky' and the 'transgressed boundaries, potent fusions and dangerous possibilities' (1991: 150–154) to develop a conceptual approach to NGOs that is more than human. Like the authors discussed above, this chapter seeks to contribute to an ontological turn in NGO research by foregrounding the importance of process, the blurring of boundaries and the material (more than human) world. To this end, the next section of this chapter will begin with a close excavation of the Deleuzio-Guattarian assemblage in New Materialist theory

as well as its interpretations (DeLanda, 2006; Tamboukou, 2010; Fox and Alldred, 2015a; 2015b). This theory will then be put to work to show how it might be used to conceptualise NGOs and generate research about them.

Theorising the NGO research assemblage

Part 1: the NGO assemblage

The notion of 'assemblage' used in this chapter emerges from the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1988) and their book *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. However, there are two important caveats I wish to acknowledge before beginning to discuss this conceptual idea in more detail. The first is that *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* is an English translation of the French book: *Mille Plateaux: Capitalisme et Schizophrénie (*Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). In the English-language version, the term 'assemblage' is used as a translation for *'agencement'*. Yet, as DeLanda *(2016: 1)* has argued, this translation

> fails to capture the meaning of the original *agencement,* a term that refers to the action of matching or fitting together a set of components (*agencer*), as well as the result of such an action: an ensemble of parts that mesh together well.

If we return to the discussion of ontology in New Materialism for a moment, then we can begin to see why this translation is so problematic. While assemblage may well account for the complexity of relations, it fails to capture the action that *agencement* infers and may subsequently return us to an idea of a fixed and closed configuration of reality. Therefore, this translation risks us slipping back to conceptualising NGOs as pre-assembled and coherent entities rather than opening new possibilities to think of them as ongoing dynamic articulations. To this end, using the translation of 'assemblage' has the potential to lose the ontological commitment to the nature of being constantly in process.

The second caveat is that when Deleuze and Guattari (1980; 1988) wrote about the idea of assemblage, they did not provide one unified definition of the concept (DeLanda, 2006), and since then the term has been taken up and used by a wide range of authors (e.g. DeLanda, 2006; Puar, 2007; Fox and Alldred, 2015a; 2015b). To complicate matters further, there are similar concepts, albeit with different genealogies, that are intertwined with theories of assemblage, such as Karen Barad's 'apparatus' (2007) and Foucault's *dispositif* (1980). For the purpose of this chapter, the English word 'assemblage' will be used. Although assemblage may not quite connote the same meaning of *agencement*, assemblage is more commonly used in English, and I hope that the above exegesis will provide enough context for this translation to be read with caution. In what follows, I will also take care to elaborate on the morphogenesis of what I am calling the NGO assemblage. DeLanda (2006) describes an assemblage as an emergent phenomenon that is defined by the coming together of heterogeneous components but never fully defined by them. These components 'should not be regarded as ontologically-prior essences occupying distinct and delimited spaces, but as relational, gaining ontological status and integrity only through their relationship to other similarly contingent and ephemeral bodies, things and ideas' (Fox and Alldred, 2015a: 125). This is an important feature of Deleuze and Guatarri's theory of assemblage, which they term 'relations of exteriority' (1988), and which DeLanda summarises as implying that 'a component part of the assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its interactions are different' (2006: 10). Relations of exteriority provide us with a way of thinking about the challenge of exploring

relationships between components at different scales, between humans and non-humans and between discourses and matter.

So, what would it mean for us to consider an NGO as an emergent phenomenon that emerges from the coming together of heterogeneous components? Perhaps the easiest place to begin is to question what might count as a heterogeneous component of an NGO. Heterogeneity can refer to components in different states and scales and can include human, non-human, material and discursive components. Therefore, the NGO assemblage comes into being – emerges – as people, funding, programmes, buildings, discourses, policies, etc., interact. However, this NGO assemblage is not fully defined by the components we have identified because it will always escape the process of signification. We must also remember that these components do not possess 'ontologically-prior essences' (Fox and Alldred, 2015a: 125). For example, a programme within the NGO assemblage is also an emergent phenomenon with its own heterogeneous components. Elements of this programme exist – come into being – within the NGO assemblage, but there will also be elements that interact elsewhere. A person may emerge as a beneficiary of the NGO programme, but this is a relation of exteriority and they may emerge elsewhere into a different assemblage where it is possible to become something other than a beneficiary. Tamboukou (2010: 691) suggests that:

> If we can remember that these multiscaled social realities can never be reducible to their components, it derives that they can causally affect their components in limiting and enabling ways, but also that their interactions cannot be simply attributed to their components.

By interrogating what Tamboukou (2010: 691) has described as 'multiscaled social realities', the possibility for agency emerges within an NGO assemblage and challenges the notion that NGOs have become little more than a technology of neoliberal development (Ferguson, 1994) or that NGOs have been entirely 'co-opted by the powers they once criticised, such as the state and transnational capital and their agents' (Castro, 2001: 17). Instead, the NGO assemblage leaves open the possibility of capturing the 'ambiguities and variations in and among NGOs' (Alvarez, 2014: 286) and the possibility that NGOs are 'continually reconfigured by a mix of internal and external forces and have shifting centres of gravity' (Alvarez, 2014: 299).

There may also be times when an assemblage appears more or less coherent or tangible. Deleuze and Guattari refer to this phenomenon as 'territorialisation' and 'deterritorialisation'. Tamboukou writes that the etymology of these terms should not be overlooked, because the Latin word *terra* encourages us to imagine 'processes of grounding or uprooting' the assemblage (2010: 687). With this in mind, territorialisation might occur when we focus on spatial aspects of the assemblage, such as the boundaries of a body or an organisation, which are well defined and endure for a period, giving them the appearance of stability and unity, or what DeLanda has called 'internal homogeneity' (2006: 13). To this end, the territorialisation of an NGO might involve the processes by which it becomes materially located in time and space. A member of staff going to work each day at an NGO is contributing to its territorialisation. A poster advertising an event hosted by the NGO, or a t-shirt provided to volunteers at a project site, is an act of grounding. Each of these processes of territorialisation gives an NGO the appearance of stability. Territorialisation might also come about as a function of an assemblage, or its ability to 'affect' a physical, psychological, emotional or social change (Fox and Alldred, 2015a; 2015b). Thus, territorialisation offers a way to make sense of the ways an NGO is intimately bound up in producing certain effects, such as the production of a person as a 'beneficiary'. This beneficiary effect is understood by Deleuze and Guattari (1988) as an embodied process that is brought

into being between the affected component (e.g. a person) and another affecting component (e.g. the NGO). Deleuze and Guattari (1988) also offer deterritorialisation as an antagonistic partner to territorialisation.

Deterritorialisation is what makes the boundaries of the assemblage appear fuzzy and less coherent. This process of deterritorialisation or detachment from the assemblage involves a simultaneous (re)territorialising elsewhere in ways which may have similar or completely different functions. An interesting and productive feature of territorialisation/deterritorialization (and reterritorialisation for that matter) is that any analysis of the NGO assemblage is not limited to a focus on the social processes that occur at the micro (e.g. individual) or macro (e.g. organisational) scale but provides a way to interrogate the interrelationships between multiscaled social realities (Tamboukou, 2010). Furthermore, theories of assemblage also introduce the possibility of agency and new ways of being for a component (e.g. a subject or object), which may be 'both limiting and enabling' (Tamboukou, 2010: 691) because a component will always have an existence in a different scale in space, time or function that is apart from the assemblage.

Part 2: the NGO research assemblage

Having developed the notion of an NGO assemblage, the next conceptual step taken in this chapter is to suggest that the research process also needs to be (re) thought with this conceptualisation in mind. How do research and academia interact (or perhaps intra-act) with the NGO assemblage? To answer this question, I draw on research by Fox and Alldred (2015b: 404), who coined the term 'research assemblage', which they define in the following way:

> The relations in a research-assemblage include the events to be researched, research tools such as questionnaires, interview schedules or other apparatus; recording and analysis technologies, computer software and hardware; theoretical frameworks and hypotheses; research literatures and findings from earlier studies; and, of course, researchers. To this are added contextual elements such as the physical spaces and establishments where research takes place; the frameworks, philosophies, cultures and traditions that surround scientific inquiry; ethical principles and ethics committees; and the paraphernalia of academic research outputs: libraries, journals, editors and reviewers, and readers.

By conceptualising NGO research in this way, I am suggesting that research processes have their own set of historical, discursive and material relations 'which are all the paraphernalia of academic inquiry such as the researcher, methodologies, research instruments, theories and so on' (Fox and Alldred, 2015a: 126). Furthermore, when this research assemblage encounters the NGO assemblage, it produces its own set of relations, which I will call the *NGO research assemblage*.

This conceptualisation provokes questions about the micropolitics of NGO research, such as the interactions between researchers and the researched, the generation of data and our understanding of ethics. In the next part of this chapter, I will flesh out an understanding of the NGO research assemblage by giving examples of its potential application to research practice. For many of us, our interest in researching NGOs comes about because we have a background working for or with NGOs. In research that is framed by constructivist or poststructuralist epistemologies, we might be encouraged to attend to our positionality in relation to our

research. Are we an insider or an outsider, and how might this status and other intersections of identity influence the data we generate and the conclusions we reach? However, thinking about positionality in this way requires us to make sense of research from fixed subject positions and may forever fail to capture the fluidity of lived experience as a researcher. Therefore, I offer the notion of an NGO researcher assemblage as an alternative. This is an assemblage that comes into being via the interaction of the NGO assemblage and the research assemblage, as well as wider socio-cultural relations of the entities involved. Our NGO researcher assemblage is no longer a set of stable subject positions with an internal essence, or entirely the product of discourse, but a 'subject that emerges as relations of exteriority are established' (DeLanda, 2006: 47). The NGO researcher assemblage foregrounds what is taking place in the moment of interaction rather than sense-making that relies on pre-existing categories. To this end, conceiving of an NGO researcher provides a way of also capturing the turn to the everyday in NGO research and may provide a complementary approach for researchers interested in researching NGO-ing (Hilhorst, 2003) rather than NGOs.

Although there may be some territorialisation to this NGO researcher assemblage, which gives the appearance of a stable researcher identity, we are always more than the sum of these heterogeneous components. For example, some components that bring the NGO researcher assemblage into being might reterritorialize across different research events (e.g. interviews) to create similar effects for the researcher (e.g. gendered effects), while others will not. The NGO researcher assemblage might also provide a way of thinking through shifting subjectivities because, rather than worrying about how boundaries between different subject positions become blurred over time (Wadham et al., 2019), we accept that different positions emerge as relations of exteriority change (e.g. friendships develop). To this end, it is incumbent upon us to take these changing relations of exteriority into consideration when thinking about what constitutes data, analysis and ethics. This is akin to the ethico-onto-epistemology of Barad (2007).

The NGO researcher assemblage, therefore, requires us to consider what Haraway (1988) termed 'situated knowledges'. Haraway moves us away from concerns about 'bias' in research, which conjures the idea that it is possible to achieve an impartial 'view from above, from nowhere' (1988: 578). She also refuses to allow us to slip into nihilistic relativism, where all standpoints are equal (ibid). Situated knowledges provoke us to carefully attend to our own role in the processes of knowledge production because the 'knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole … it is able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another' (Haraway, 1991: 193). For the NGO researcher who encounters other 'entities' in their research, whether these are people, organisations, policies and so on, what they might come to know is inherently relational and emergent, and never totalising. Therefore, if we can begin to trace these situated knowledges within the NGO researcher assemblage, then we might also develop a sensitivity to the micropolitics of the research process itself, 'of what happens when events are transformed into "data", and who gains and who loses in the process' (Fox and Alldred, 2015a: 126).

Working with New Materialism and the NGO research assemblage encourages us to move away from the idea of data collection and towards data production. The reason for this is that data collection suggests an ontology where data are understood as a (more or less whole) representation of a research event. Instead, I am arguing that the production of data should be understood as the process by which different components of the NGO research assemblage interact. Data emerge from this interaction. For example, what counts as data produced in an

interview should be understood as the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee, the interview approach adopted, the technology used to record the interview, transcription, translation, the wider context in which the interview takes place and so on. Furthermore, the data that are produced are not static entities but are also caught up in further analytical processes (e.g. thematic analysis), as well as the process of selection and re-narration by a researcher, and the reading and interpretation of the data by others. Two interconnected questions we might ask ourselves are: when do data start becoming data and when do data stop becoming data?

The turn to data production as an ongoing and emergent process has the potential to help us develop a better understanding of the micropolitics within the NGO research assemblage. To this end, Savage (2010: 16) encourages researchers to develop and make public their personal research archives so that we and others might 'get inside the research "boiler room"'. The aim is to make research decisions (and omissions) explicit and to risk revealing what Law (2004) termed the 'messiness' of our research. Savage (2010) argues that by opening the 'boiler room' to critique, the contingencies that arise in the production of data are revealed, and we can begin to see the spaces of potentiality for other data to emerge. Using a similar metaphor of the 'black box', Stanley (2016: 66) also encourages us to take note of how we respond to emotional and aesthetic encounters in our research and to make 'visible and audible – the sight and noise' of our research work. In sum, a key ethical aim of the NGO research assemblage is to make explicit the intentional and unintentional acts of curation in our research.

The NGO research assemblage: possibilities for decolonising NGO research

In this chapter, I have argued that it is not just the researcher who is situated, but also the academic fields our work emerges from, the research methodologies we use and the philosophical commitments of our research. I have drawn on the work of Fox and Alldred (2015a; 2015b), who remind us that the research assemblage has its own situated knowledges and that this fact is often hidden from us. Thinking about what is hidden is particularly significant for those of us interested in decolonising our research with and about NGOs. Savage (2013: 8) has suggested that methodologies that have originated in Western knowledge systems 'hide their own traces' yet they both shape and delimit what it is possible to know. Therefore, looking inside and inviting others into the 'boiler room' or 'black box' of our research seems to be a vital first step towards decolonising our research with and about NGOs (Savage, 2010; Stanley, 2016). Working with the concept of the NGO research assemblage is an invitation to open ourselves up to the partiality of the empirical knowledge we produce and to reveal how (colonial) systems of knowledge are complicit in producing this partial perspective.

This acceptance of partiality has the potential to create a new ethical space for engaging with the micropolitics of NGO research, irrespective of the scale of our analysis. It also requires us to open ourselves up to the pluriversality of knowledge systems (Mignolo, 2011; 2018) and to recognise that if we are to decolonise NGO research, including the NGO research assemblage, then we are required to do more than simply ask different empirical questions. To do this, we must interrogate and make explicit the ethico-onto-epistemological entanglements of our work and take steps to decolonise our research practices.

So, how might we begin such a project? I believe our first step must be to ask what this means for the researcher in the NGO research assemblage, particularly if this researcher has been

educated or otherwise inducted into colonial knowledge systems. Deleuze and Guattari's (1988: 239) concept of 'becoming' provides one possible way-marker because it describes the process by which a component of the assemblage – let me suggest this might be the NGO researcher – might be deterritorialised and become reterritorialised elsewhere.

> Becoming is certainly not imitating or identifying with something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, 'appearing,' 'being,' 'equalling,' or 'producing'. *(Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 239)*

Tamboukou suggests that the process of becoming 'is set in motion by the will to lose the self, leave the grounds on which you think you stand, follow lines of flight, deterritorialise and disperse the self ' (2010: 694). If this is true, then an NGO researcher seeking to decolonise their research must be willing 'to lose the self ' and 'leave the grounds' on which they (perhaps unknowingly) stand. It places an onus on the transformation of the researcher and does not allow for an easy retreat into the safety of reflexive sense-making. There is hope in 'becoming' for the NGO researcher because although they might have been inducted into colonial knowledge systems and must acknowledge that these systems will have influenced the morphogenesis of our NGO research assemblage, they are not restricted to forever reproducing or being entirely subject to them. Instead, if they can come to know something of their situated knowledges and the grounds on which they think they stand, then perhaps they can take steps to deterritorialise our colonial ethico-onto-epistemological commitments? In this attempt, although they risk the reterritorialisation of coloniality elsewhere, Deleuze and Parnet (2002: 38) assure us that 'we will not rediscover everything we were fleeing', there will always be the possibility for the disruption and for the NGO research assemblage to take a more ethical pluriversal shape.

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