Graduate School of Development Studies

TAKING SERIOUSLY THE VOICES OF THE POOR: DOES REPRESENTATION MATTER?

ANALYSIS OF THE PANOS INSTITUTE APPROACH

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List of Acronyms

IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
OT	Oral Testimony
OTP	Oral Testimony Programme
PAR	Participatory Action Research
VoP	Voices of the Poor
WB	World Bank
WDR	World Development Report

Abstract

This research deals with the increasing use of the rhetoric of *the voices of the poor* by different development organizations and institutions, claiming the authenticity of these voices and the empowering role their communication to external audiences (policymakers, academics, development workers, general public) can have for the poor involved.

This research challenges the simplifications and assumptions characterizing approaches based on this rhetoric, by investigating one such approach, its claims and practices of representation of the voices: the Panos Institute Oral Testimony Programme and its project Desert Voices. I investigate it by means of specific tools of Discourse Analysis: Narrative Analysis, Argumentation Analysis and Analysis of Representation.

I argue that these approaches do not simply engage in the process of communication of *the voices of the poor*, but rather in the representation of the poor and their voices. Hence the need to problematize them as "discursive coalitions" (Hajer 1995) that partake into a process of reproduction of dominant development discourses on poverty, although still claiming to provide a counterpoint to the same by giving the poor the opportunity to express themselves in their own terms.

Relevance to Development Studies

According to Wilkins (2000:197) "Power should be a central consideration in reconceptualising the theory and practice of development communication". Escobar (2000:163) notices that "the link between power, development, and communication has not yet been built from critical development perspectives".

This research - by discussing these approaches within the framework of the 'politics of representation' - gives to power a central position, thus in part contributing to fill the gap above mentioned.

Foucault stressed the importance of language and representation in mediating socio-political relations or, in other terms, power relations. I argue that representation is one of the multiple - and often overlooked - forms through which power circulates in development discourses, studies and practices.

Keywords

Politics of Representation, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Analysis,
Development Discourse, Power and Knowledge

1. Introduction: The 'phenomenon of the voice'. Authenticity, Empowerment and Change

In a recent research commissioned and published by Oxfam, it's argued that the current development thinking makes use of only a narrow range of possible approaches to change (Oxfam 2007:5). Among other limits, Oxfam states that development strategies "overlook the importance of personal relationships and of promoting mutual understanding between those who have and those who have not as a strategy of change" and that they "lack a multidisciplinary agility to draw on the broad range of approaches to change that exist outside the narrow confines of development studies".

I was rather surprised to see how a simple Internet search provides plenty of examples of approaches in development that seem to promote 'mutual understanding' as one of the keys of change. I am referring to the use of the rhetoric of the *voice of the poor* [1], by different development institutions and organizations, claiming the authenticity of such voices, and the participation and empowerment of *the poor*, with the final aim of providing policymakers with a better understanding of poverty. In all of these approaches the word *voice* is not used just as a metaphor, but is directly and concretely visible, readable, audible with a simple click on the mouse.

1.1. The World Bank's and other 'Voices of the Poor'

The most famous attempt to bring the *voice of the poor* on the table of policymakers has been the World Bank (WB) study of 'Voices of the Poor' (VoP), whose aim was to enable a wide range of poor people in diverse countries and conditions to share their views on poverty as a contribution to the World Development Report 2000/2001.

Stating that "There are 2,8 billion poverty experts, the poor themselves" the study "used open-ended participatory methods to engage poor women and men to express *their own perspectives and experiences* of poverty[2], its causes and how it can be reduced" (Narayan 2000). Beyond providing "*unique insights* into the complexity, diversity and dynamics of poverty", the use of open-ended and participatory methods "can *give policymakers* a deeper, richer and ultimately better understanding of economic problems, resulting in a *more effective poverty alleviation strategies*" (ibid:25). In the words of the former WB President Wolfensohn "the study presents very *directly*, through poor people's *own voices*, the *realities* of *their*

[1] I place the *voice of the poor* in italic to indicate the representational nature of both terms. While the concept of *the voice* will be addressed in details in this research, the concept of *the poor* will be given less emphasis. Here I wish to stress that this category is based on ill-defined assumptions and increasingly contested within the field of development studies (see Laderchi et al. 2003, Sen 1992, Hulme and Shepherd 2003, Hulme and Cooke 2002).

[2] I put in italic those words and concepts which characterize the language of VoP, as well as of other approaches of the 'phenomenon of the voice'; such concepts will be extensively discussed in the following chapters.

lives"; thus the work is commended for its "*authenticity* and significance" (ibid:1). And, of course, "Our hope is that the voices in this book will *call you to action* as they have us".

Enjoying the multimedia opportunities provided by internet, the WB is accompanying the written accounts of *the poor* with images and sounds both in its own website[3] and in the website Development 360[4], where the reader is invited to "see and hear for yourself how people around the globe are tackling *real* problems with practical solutions that contribute to *real* development".

The explicit and implicit claims of this exercise are that the voices of the poor are *authentic*, that by adding their voice the poor are *participating* (together with policymakers) in solving the problem of poverty, that this participation *empowers* the poor and contributes to *understanding* of poverty by policy-makers, and that all this together ultimately leads to *social change*.

Due to the fast development of audio-visual technologies, the improvements in digital communications, the growing case made in the social sciences against the hegemony of the written text and the incorporation of audio-visual languages into our everyday lives (Ramella 2005), many NGOs are producing their personal version of the use of *the voice of the poor*. For examples, NGOs such as PhotoVoice uses the tool of *participatory photography*, while INSIGHT uses the one of *participatory video* [5]*;* there are also initiatives undertaken by NGOs in collaboration with intergovernmental actors such as the EU[6]. These approaches share the same language and the same narrative as the WB (see Appendix 1). The fact that the voice is recorded, written, audible, visible (through the image of the narrator) and personalized is taken as a guarantee of its authenticity. The audience is given the impression that *the poor* are enjoying an opportunity to express their 'concerns and hopes' in their own words, without the traditional mediation and interpretation of field-researchers. The dichotomy between the 'expertise' of *the poor* and those who are taking decisions on their behalf without experiencing poverty is emphasized. The opportunity for *the poor* to communicate their version of poverty and solutions is welcomed as an empowering chance, and the audience is supposed to take more informed decisions after having heard their voice.

These approaches are broadly referred to as belonging to the growing field of Development Communication, defined as "the strategic application of communication technologies and processes to promote social change" (Wilkins 2000:197). According to one development communication specialist, images and recorded voices are considered "trustworthy" (Dagron 2001:24)

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[3] http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/0,,contentMDK:20622514~menuPK:336998~pagePK:148956~piPK:216618~theSitePK:336992,00.html

[4] http://dev360.worldbank.org/dev360_english.html

[5] This approach is currently widely recognized to the extent that the IDS (Participation, Power and Social Change Team) has prepared in 2007 a list of "Resources on Participatory Video".

[6] For instance 'African Voices'. http://practicalaction.org/?id=africanvoices

and the "democratization of communication" is deemed to "put decision making in the hands of the people" (ibid:34). Although there is a recognition that the term *voice* is "overused in the context of development" (ibid:2), each of these approaches claims its uniqueness and insists on its claims.

1.2. Research Problem and Hypothesis

I found the claims made by these approaches problematic at several levels, from the claimed authenticity of *the voice*, to the participatory and empowering/emacipatory nature of the process, to the function of deepening understanding of poverty for policy makers.

Thus the objective of this research is to examine and challenge the claimed authenticity of the voices of the poor and the participatory and empowering role the communication of these voices through such projects is supposed to have – by analyzing one such approach. My starting hypothesis is that the issue here is not of *communication* between the poor and the policy makers and/or the audience, but rather of the *representations* of the poor, and the creation of specific "discursive coalitions" (Hajer 1995:53) among policy makers, development experts and institutions: in such coalitions, producers of these approaches "not only try to make others see the problems according to their views, but also seek to position actors in specific ways" (ibid). My research will examine this process of positioning *the voices of the poor* within these approaches vis-à-vis their claims of authenticity, participation and empowerment.

The organization I will use as case study is the Panos Institute (in further text: Panos) and the project I will focus on is Desert Voices, carried on within the broader framework of Panos Oral Testimony Programme (OTP). Panos claims that strategies of change can be promoted through processes of communication[7]. If this is so, the problematization of power has to be central. Indeed, as stated by Wilkins (2000:197), "Power should be a central consideration in reconceptualising the theory and practice of development communication". Escobar (2000:163) notices how - although power has been discussed in development studies from various perspectives - "the link between power, development, and communication has not yet been built from critical development perspectives". My research considers the problematization of power, but it moves beyond discussions on development communication. I adopt a perspective that the approaches dealing with the *voices of the poor* belong to specific *politics of representation* within contemporary development thinking and practice. I argue that these are problematic approaches, whose ultimate success is not in contributing to the participation of the poor in social change, but rather in appropriating lived realities of poverty for institutional gains.

[7] "[…] communication processes are fundamental to sustainable development and lies at the heart of change" (Panos 2007b:7)

1.3. Research Site: Panos, "Illuminating Voices"

1.3.1 Panos and the Oral Testimony Programme

Panos is a worldwide network of independent institutes in 15 countries whose aim is "to promote the participation of poor and marginalised people in national and international development debates through media and communication projects[8] ". Panos notes that "The use of participatory communication tools is widespread, and there is an increasing use of 'voices' in the communication of development issues[9] " - adding that in this multitude of approaches "Our oral testimony methodology is unique" (ibid). Panos believes that "Poverty, marginalization and voicelessness are mutually reinforcing problems" and that "by ensuring that poor and marginalized people have a say in the policies that affect their lives, the cycle of poverty can be broken[10] ".

Ten years before the publication of the WB 'Voices of the Poor', Panos released the book 'Listening for a Change' (Slim 1993) and paved the way for its *Oral Testimony Programme* (OTP) by identifying the value of oral history methodology in the context of development. So far Panos worked with more than 50 partners on 30 country projects, generating around 1000 testimonies. It has supported local and national information activities based on these testimonies, and produced a range of material – print, radio and online – for international audiences.

Though the OT methodology is continuously being improved and might vary according to the context and purpose of the collection, its aim remains unchanged: it is supposed to help that "those involved in development can gain a *better understanding* of the concerns and priorities, culture and experiences of the people with whom they wish to work" (Slim 1993); above all, oral testimonies "can give those communities more *power* to set *their own agenda* for development" and "challenge the generalisations of development literature and enlighten planners and policymakers about how it feels to be at the sharp end of development[11] ". The testimonies are gathered within those communities often marginalised by illiteracy, gender, disability, caste, religion or ethnic identity. They are the result of open-ended interviews around a series of topics, drawing on direct personal memory and experience of the interviewees.

A lot of attention is paid to the process of dissemination. The methodology is indeed based on the notion of "applied oral testimony" which gives "the listening process a particular relevance to development and differentiates it from purely academic study" (Slim 1993:2); otherwise listening to people and recording can too easily become "a purely archival or voyeuristic pursuit, or an exercise in knowledge extraction" (ibid).

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[8] http://www.panos.org.uk/aboutus
[9] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=99
[10] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=99
[11] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=433

Slim (1993) notes various ways in which the testimonies can be used practically in development work: reclaiming indigenous technical knowledge; cultural preservation and consciousness raising; oral artistry; human rights; development education; rights to self-definition. In order to "make the most of the testimonies" (Warrington 2006) Panos goes through several steps:

- At the local level, testimonies are returned to individuals and communities. Local partners are supported to find appropriate ways to share the testimonies to local audiences in order to stimulate discussion and debate.
- Nationally, the partners employ different strategies such as roundtable meetings with policy-makers, quality media coverage, national language booklets.
- At the international level, Panos invests in translating testimonies to be used in radio docudramas, booklets and online archives; and as resource in key debates, events and publications.

1.3.2 Desert Voices: humanizing the desertification story

The project Desert Voices (financed by IFAD under the title grant of 'Advocacy for Rural Poor Affected by Desertification and Land Degradation) has been undertaken in 2006, the International Year of Deserts and Desertification. Starting from the consideration that "the current debate on desertification does not include the voices and experiences of those living in desert environments[12] ", its goal was "to increase understanding and awareness of the impact of land degradation and desertification by amplifying the voices of the rural poor who live in desert environments in Sudan and Ethiopia". Print journals and Internet were identified as the main channel through which "make the voices and experiences of those living in desert environments heard in order to present the human face of desertification".

Indeed this was the first project from Panos that explicitly supported newspaper journalists to use oral testimony interviewing techniques to gather material for feature writing, and was designed as a pilot project. A website was created "to promote testimonies, photographs and features to a large international audience including media, policymakers, NGOs and researchers/academics". Next to four newspaper journalists and two photographers from each country (i.e. Sudan and Ethiopia), the project also involved as interviewers four development workers already operating in the areas. Half of journalists and development workers were female. The interviewers transcribed the testimonies immediately after their collection, and translation to English was consequently arranged. The translated testimonies were then analyzed and "carefully edited" by Panos (in cooperation with the local partners) "into accessible first-hand stories for the on-line resources".

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12 All the quotes related to the project Desert Voices are taken from internal documents. See table1.

The interviewers collected 29 testimonies – of which 10 from Sudan and 10 from Ethiopia were published on Desert Voices website, and are accessible through two search tools: by individual narrator or by theme. The journalists also produced seven articles, four of which were published and promoted internationally through the website. Photographers produced over 100 photographs, of which 40 are on Panos website, and seven were published alongside features in local newspapers. Exhibitions of the photographs were arranged in the communities and copies of the same presented to all the individuals featured.

1.3.3 Discursive Coalitions: Panos and the World Bank

I have decided to focus my attention on Panos for different reasons. Firstly, because of the centrality given to *the voice*. This is evident from the banner of the website, which has been recently[13] changed into "Illuminating Voices"; the project Desert Voices remarks such centrality. Secondly, the fact that the methodology has been pioneered more than 10 years makes it interesting in comparison to approaches developed only recently; at the same time, its evolution along the years led to the inclusion of journalists, photographers, Internet and other media – conferring it that multidisciplinary character that Oxfam considers to be lacking from current development strategies. Thirdly, Panos in two occasions gives authority to the claimed need to 'listen to the voices of the poor' by quoting the WB 'Voices of the Poor' and its finding that for the poor "having a voice came second only to improving their income" (Warrington 2008a, Panos 2007b). I will argue that quoting the WB cannot be considered as just a way to stress the importance of the approach; rather, it is a signal of the presence of discursive coalitions and of the use of similar representational strategies.

My interest in this research was prompted by this striking – and for me quite unexpected - similarity between the claims made in the WB study and Panos' projects. I see the WB as an institution characterized by a mainstream, neo-liberal development philosophy, and expected Panos to be critical of such philosophy, and thus not to partake to the same discursive coalition. Hence this research, in certain ways, addresses my own assumptions and expectations.

In the introduction of 'Voices of the Poor', Narayan (2002:3) observes that "The study was influenced by the WB research paradigm, which is quantitative in nature. *To be taken seriously in this environment*, a study based on participatory methods would have to be conducted on a sufficiently large scale to reduce the probability that it would be *dismissed as producing merely interesting anecdotes*". The WB finally deemed necessary to complement the voices with quantitative data: the statistics proved to be especially valuable "because they helped *frame, affirm and add credibility* to the economic and social trends the poor reported" (ibid: 7; italic S.F).

[13] As stated in the Annual Report 2006/2007

Talking about Panos OTP, Warrington (2006) expresses similar views: "Although we strongly feel that the testimonies speak for themselves, there is a need to communicate their value to different target audiences (media, policy-makers, NGOs) to encourage them to read and *take seriously* these personal first-hand accounts, alongside other more 'formal' documentation sources". Panos is also concerned with a "*tendency to dismiss testimony as purely 'anecdotal'* and lacking the substance of facts and figures" (Slim 1993:102; italic S.F).

The rational behind 'Voices of the Poor', however, has been sharply criticized. Pender argued that the WB had used the voices "to gain a powerful moral credibility and to legitimize its pre-existing agenda" (Pender 2002:112), while claiming "to be acting on behalf of the poorest" (ibid:98). Similar concerns about the instrumental use of the voices, the justification of a pre-shaped development agenda and the subsequent lack of empowerment for the marginalised have been expressed by Laderchi (2003:260) and Cornwall (2003:1327). Chambers stressed the fact that VoP had a limited impact on the contents of the WDR 2000-2001, since many aspects coming out from the exercise were missing (ODI 2000); while Cornwall raised the issue of the authorship of the voices: since they are "refracted through multiple layers of mediation, […] questions might well be asked about *whose versions emerge* in the final analysis" (Cornwall 2000:63; italic S.F.).

A more general concern has been raised about the hybridisation through which mainstream versions of poverty have selectively incorporated concepts generated by alternative development discourses. Brock (2001:8) noticed how "dominant narratives are constantly reshaped by the absorption of elements of counter-narratives" with the final result of *depoliticizing* such counter-narratives and shaping "the way new actors are accepted and included" (ibid:21).

Another criticism was about the appropriation of the participatory discourse in such projects, showing many examples of cosmetic participation of *the poor* in research performed for extractive purposes and without a commitment to empowering local people to have a greater say in policy processes. It is noticed that "the opportunities of engagement that these processes offer need to be set in a broader context than their emphasis in listening to the 'voices of the poor'"(Brock 2001:42).

I will argue in this research that the broader context is evident in the discursive coalitions and networks formed around the representations of *the poor* and their *voices*. Gunew (1990:23) also argues that the voices "of the marginal are mediated by other institutionally based discursive networks and intellectuals" (Gunew 1990:23), raising important questions on whose version of poverty is finally deemed worthy of being listened to. She draws a poignant conclusion that it is possible to read this desire to hear the marginal "as nothing more than an alibi to excuse intellectuals elitist practices" (ibid: 23).

1.4 Politics of Representation: Language, Discourse, Power

In the light of the above critiques, this research assesses whether and to what extent points made about the WB might apply to Panos too. I investigate Panos approach – particularly its claims of authenticity, participation-empowerment and change – starting from the perspective that various projects

using *the voices* do not simply engage in the processes of communication and dissemination of the interview material, but rather in the processes of representation. Following Hall (1997:16) by representation I mean "the production of meaning through language". Hall argues that this process is linked to power relations, and is thus ultimately a political process. Taking 'politics of representation' as my analytical framework, in this case means that even the most accurate record of any voice cannot be authentic *per se*, but is represented according to the purpose of the collection and the audience it is addressed to. The *voices of the poor* - supposed to be the direct and immediate reflection of their experiences and realities - need to be 'framed' in order to become accessible to a wider (socially, politically, geographically diverse) audience.

In this particular research, my aim is not to test or measure how close to 'reality' is the version of the voice edited for the web. Instead, my aim is to investigate how is this need to 'represent' justified and/or problematized. Representation is the production of meaning through language, but "language is neither a neutral tool nor transparent reflection of reality" (Gunew 1990:19). Foucault stressed the importance of language in mediating socio-political relations or, in other terms, power relations. Thus, I argue that representation is one of the multiple - and often overlooked - forms through which power circulates in development studies and development practice.

1.5 Research Questions and Structure of the Study

My main research question is: what is the use of the 'phenomenon of the voice' – of *the poor* – in development discourses and projects telling about contemporary development thinking and practices about poverty, marginalization and social change?

Sub questions are:

- What is the value assigned by Panos to the realities of poverty as told by *the voices of the poor*?
- Which claims are made about the use of *the voices of the poor* as an element of social change, and how is this use justified?
- Which linguistic and representational strategies are used to give credibility to these claims?

As to the structure of this paper, I start with situating the 'phenomenon of the voice' in contemporary disciplinary and theoretical traditions of development, addressing empowerment, participation and social change (Chapter 2); in particular, I will introduce and focus on two main elements of my critical discussion on the representation of *the voices* and *the poor*: the dichotomy of the poor and the experts, and the claimed counter-discursive power of life narratives.

Chapter 3 starts with the analysis of Panos' approach to reality and language as a neutral reflection of reality, and moves to challenge such view by

examining concepts of reality and truth in the context of their relationship to power. This chapter helps me answer the first sub-question.

Chapter 4 focuses on Panos' justificatory narratives of its own actions. I show how Panos justifies the need to represent the voices, and how it makes the claims that support this justification. I argue that these narratives actually define what is worthy of being listened to, thus shaping the boundaries of participation in its project and in broader development debates. This chapter will help me answer the second sub-question.

Chapter 5 goes into the details of Desert Voices analysing specific linguistic and representational strategies Panos used in editing and presenting the collection of the testimonies in the website. Giving pertinence to Cornwall (2000:63) I ask: "whose versions emerge" and situate this question in the context of power relations. This chapter helps me answer the third sub-question.

Chapter 6 reflects on the previous analysis from the perspective of power/knowledge, and offers final answers to the main research question.

1.6 Data and Methodology

Table 1 reports the data analysed and the methodologies used. As I am interested in unveiling how the claims sustain or are contradicted by the practice, I rely on two sets of data:

- the **claims** advanced by Panos (both public and internal[14]) about the need to listen to *the voices of the poor* (as integrated into the value and rationale behind OT);
- the **practice** of representation, i.e. the process ranging from the collection of the interviews to their presentation in the website.

Both sets of data are analysed relying on three tools of Discourse Analysis: Narrative Analysis, Argumentation Analysis, Analysis of Representation, with explanation and justification of these choices in the respective chapters.

[14] I have kindly been given access to the internal documents and the original interviews by the Head of the OTP.

Table 1
Data and Methodology

DATA				ANALYTICAL TOOL
CLAIMS	Public	Manuals on OT	'Listening for a change' (Slim 1993)	Narrative Analysis
			'Giving Voice' (Bennet 1999)	
		Articles on OT	'Listening to individual voices' (Warrington 2006)	
			'Celebrating the uncelebrated' (Warrington 2008a)	
			'Listen carefully' (Warrington 2008b)	
		Annual Reports	AR 2004/2005 (Panos 2005)	
			AR 2005/2006 (Panos 2006)	
			AR 2006/2007 (Panos 2007)	
		Publications	'Making poverty the story' (Panos 2007a)	
			'At the hearth of change' (Panos 2007b)	
	Website	Website general [and related links]	http://www.panos.org.uk/	
		Website OT	http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=433	
			http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=20020	
		Website Desert Voices	http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=20026	
	Internal		Project proposal to IFAD	
			Mid-term review of the project	
			Final report	
			Independent Evaluation	
			Proposal for a photo-exhibition	
			Topic list	
			Document on process of edition	
Relation CLAIMS - PRACTICE				Argumentation Analysis
PRACTICE	Internal	Original interviews (questions, answers, comments)		NarrativeAnalysis & Analysis of Representation
	Public	Edited testimonies	10 edited testimonies from Sudan, divided by narrators. http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=19974	

2. Theorizing the 'phenomenon of the voice'

In this chapter I discuss the disciplinary and theoretical shifts that may have contributed to the raise of the 'phenomenon of the voice'. In particular, I will introduce and focus on two main elements of my critical discussion of representation: the dichotomy between the poor and the experts, and the claimed counter-discursive power of life narratives.

2.1 Life Narratives: "Speak Truth to Power"

Though it's not easy to pinpoint the rationale behind the collection of individual narratives within a single approach, we can say that this kind of practice probably would not have been considered without the increasing legitimacy – gained in the past 30 years – of subjective experience as an area of academic enquiry. Beginning in the late 1970s, subjective, individual, biographical narratives contributed to ways of understanding history and humanity, and to doing research.

Socio-anthropologists, sociologists, oral and life historians have become interested in how individuals experience their own lives and perceive the world, developing the stream of 'history from below'[15]. In the words of Mintz, a pioneer of the method, life history should provide an understanding of the way "people are laid open by the course of important changes to new perceptions, […] new ways of seeing what is happening to them" (Mintz 1974: 253). A related social-policy outcome of this attention to the subjective is that became more common to ask people what kind of changes they want. Moreover, "through their narratives people experiencing underdevelopment […] can provide a basis for formulating policy" (Coetzee 2006:23).

Taking subjective narratives seriously seems to help understand to what extent people consider themselves restricted by structural forces, and to what extent they can exert agency and motivate change on both an individual and socio-political level. As a method, narrative rhetoric also gained prominence next to traditionally more valued methods such as argumentation (Johnstone 2001). Many researchers have aimed to produce explicit models for understanding and analyzing how people make and comprehend stories. The advocates of Narrative Analysis consider it a valid 'hermeneutic' and 'exploratory' tool which allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of what language and social life are all about (Labov 1997) and make sense of "how the past shapes perceptions of the present, how the present shapes perceptions of the past, and how both shape perceptions of the future"[16].

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[15] A pioneering book was 'London Labour and the London Poor' (Henry Mayhew, 1851), followed by many others such as ' The children of Sanchez: autobiography of a Mexican family' (Oscar Lewis, 1961); 'Worker in the cane: a Puerto Rican life history' (Sidney Mintz, 1974); 'Working: people talk about what they do all day and how they feel about what they do' (Studs Terkel, 1975).

[16] http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/pa765/narrativ.htm

An important contribution in analysing the political impact of the dissemination of individual life stories has been given by Shaffer and Smith (Shaffer 2004). The authors mainly argue for the counter-discursive role of such stories, as they circulate beyond local contexts: "they enable claimants to 'speak truth to power', to invoke Foucault. The stories they tell can intervene in the public sphere, contesting social norms, exposing the fiction of official history" (Shaffer 2004:4). Thus the authors stress the broader social impact of the personal narratives in challenging dominant relations of power. They underline how stories - especially when circulated through international websites - can serve as a form of "moral suasion […] to persuade the governments to honour their commitments" (ibid:3), often by means of the "inclusion of provocative and personalizing visual images" (ibid:39).

However, the authors also warn about a series of risks implicit in what may be the political strength of such stories. The wide on-line circulation raises important questions about how disperse circuits affect the way the stories are framed and finally reinterpreted or misinterpreted in "arenas far from the immediate locus of meaning" (Shaffer 2004:6). Another risk is that life-narratives become commodified, as they enter the infotainment format of websites, and may be turned into "web suffer spectacle" (ibid:39), thus undermining consistently their potential counter-discursive role. A similar concern has been raised with regards to participatory video approaches (Olmos 2005): once the video leaves the context within which it was made, it tends to take on new meanings and runs the risk of being re-framed and re-interpreted.

2.1.1 The Context of Policy-Making: Mutual understanding for social change?

From the discussion above it follows that the potential of a personal(ized) narrative to 'speak truth to power' has to be situated both in the larger context of social relations, as well as in the context of its more immediate use; and both of these contexts have to be seen as contexts of power relations. I suggest that policy-making can be seen as one of these more immediate contexts. The collection of life narratives and individual experiences such as 'Voices of the Poor' and Panos Oral Testimonies are explicitly made and disseminated to wider audiences in order to influence, enlighten and bridge the gap with policy-makers, and – using Oxfam words - promote "mutual understanding between those who have and those who have not".

Such attempts at creating understanding, together with the attention to the subjective, in my view recall particularly two views of social change and the way it may be brought about. One is Malcolm Gladweell's cross-disciplinary approach to the *tipping point*. He argues that some phenomena spread rapidly when they reach a tipping point of social participation and popularity. It may happen because some people are better than others at making something spread, by having better social connections or more enthusiasm; or because there are specific ways to present or structure information to make it more memorable and effective. Another is Theodore Zeldin's view that the most important changes in human histories have occurred through individuals developing deeper understanding of the perspectives and experience of others. A method of achieving such understanding is to create conversations between

strangers where they get beyond superficial talk and speak about their lives on a personal and emotional level.

Some questions could be raised here: who is likely to be better equipped and have better connections? What happens to 'mutual understanding' if the 'strangers', in order to spread their views, have to rely on those better connected and able to structure information so that to make it more effective? How such a process can interfere with or be undermined by existing power relations? These questions will be addressed in the following chapters.

2.2 Standpoint Epistemology: "start thought from marginal lives"

Much feminist research has used subjective narratives and life-story approach to "bring to light buried or repressed experiences and to create a space for marginalized voices" (Keller 2008:240). Feminists have most fully articulated a particular kind of theory of knowledge that deals with marginalization and power - the standpoint epistemology – and contributed to the stream of the so called 'liberatory knowledge projects'. Standpoint epistemology recalls the attempt to create 'mutual understanding' based on the consideration that "Understanding ourselves and the world around us requires understanding what others think of us and our beliefs and actions" (Harding 2005:231). However, central to this understanding of the world and individual's place in it is power.

The basic argument of standpoint theory is that, in stratified societies, the activities of those at the top both organize and set limits on what persons who perform such activities can understand about themselves and the world around them. In contrast, "the activities of those at the bottom of such social hierarchies can provide starting points for thought" (Harding, 2005:221). To achieve social change, it is necessary to "start thought from marginal lives", as only such a start can challenge members of dominant groups to "learn to think from the lives of marginalized people and to act on what they learned" (ibid:229). A strong emancipatory role can be read in the claims that listening to marginal lives stories can "increase our ability to understand the distorted way the dominant groups conceptualize politics, resistance, community and other key notions" (Harding, 2005:223) and "question the adequacy of dominant conceptual frameworks" (ibid:226). For Harding, furthermore, subjectivity and objectivity are not oppositions: rather, 'strong objectivity' grows from documenting and taking into account the history of the subjugation. It is from this perspective that individual narratives of the excluded and marginalized contribute to the production of scientific knowledge and political strategies that are more accurate – and thus more objective – that the narratives of the powerful.

Although this language of marginalization-exclusion and emancipation is close to Panos' view of the *voices of the poor* as enlightening for policymakers and counter-discursive for development theories and practices, there are fundamental differences. While the standpoint epistemology demands recognition of contradictory and conflicting relations of power, social histories and political projects of differently situated subjects of knowledge (Harding

2005) as a starting point of any claim of voice and representation, Panos believes that oral testimony "does not replace more formal quantitative research, but it complements and illuminates it" (Bennet 1999:7); it is considered "illustrative, vivid, often challenging and breathes life into more precise statistics" (ibid:7). I will argue in chapters to come how this view of the voices as 'complementary' can eventually render them illustrative and cosmetic, thus undermining - or rather depoliticizing - their claimed counter-discursive function.

2.3 Participatory Action Research: "Empowerment Through Knowledge"

Resonating with the feminist critique of objectivity, scholars of participatory research emphasize the importance of listening to different versions and voices. For the advocates of Participatory Action Research (PAR), the knowledge that affects people's lives is seen as being monopolized by 'expert' knowledge producers, who exercise power over others through their expertise. Thus they argue that "participatory knowledge strategies can challenge deep-rooted power inequities"(Gaventa 2001:70).

The positivist method is seen as distorting reality, by distancing "those who study reality (the experts) from those who experience it in everyday life" (Gaventa 2001:74); traditional research methods are seen as making powerless groups the objects of research rather than the subjects. Finally, "other forms of knowing and voices" are considered to be obscured in so far as "legitimate knowledge relies largely within the hands of privileged experts" (ibid:74). Hence the main claim of this theoretical perspective is that those who are directly affected by the research problem must participate in the research project "thus democratizing the power of experts" (ibid:74).

As we will see, Panos' claims recall PAR writers' epistemological critique of the ways in which power is embedded and reinforced in the dominant positivist knowledge production system. However, the question here is: what is Panos calling participation in the production of knowledge? Is giving interviews, taking and recording them by the members of the local community in itself participation? Can this set of actions be separated from the process of planning, editing, disseminating and using the interviews? Can the local participation be separated from geo-politics of power in designing, and using such a project? Finally, can this individual project be extracted form the larger sets of social and political structures of development discourses and interventions?

2.4 Participatory Approaches: "involvement in decision making"

Issues at the core of some of these questions have been discussed during the 90's, as Participatory Approaches became leading principles in development, to the extent that "participation had become an act of faith in development, something we believe in and rarely question" (Pijnmburg 2004:1). The aim of Participatory Approaches was to "increase the involvement of marginalized

people in decision-making over their own lives" (Cooke 2001:5). As the focus of this research is more on discourses than on practices, I will not spend time on the numerous critiques of the practice of participation. Instead I will focus on the 'discourse of participation' and especially its appropriation.

Cooke and others warn about the participatory development's potential for tyranny, showing how it can lead to the unjust and illegitimate exercise of power. They wanted "to address how the discourse, and not just the practice, itself embodies the potential for an unjustified exercise of power" (Cooke 2001:4). Others, criticizing the appropriation of the participatory discourse, have stressed many examples of cosmetic participatory research, performed for extractive purposes and without a commitment to empowering local people to have a greater say in policy processes (Laderchi 2001). In the context of poverty, Brock notices that "the current rhetoric of poverty reduction relies heavily on [WB] Voices of the Poor" (Brock 2001:20), whit a narrative whose "distinguishing feature is the notion of 'empowerment' and its linkages with 'participation'" (ibid:20). Laderchi (2001:15) furthermore believes in the impossibility of solving some fundamental doubts on "whose voices are being recorded and what it means to be listening".

2.5 Post-Development: "The poor, the experts and the development regime"

Starting in the 1980's a growing number of critics in many parts of the world questioned the very idea of development, and the so-called post-development emerged "as a result both of general post-modern trends within the social sciences and the impasse of development after half a century of flawed interventions" (Lie 2007:53). Theorists analysed development as a discourse of Western origin, operating through two principal mechanisms in the construction of the Third World (Escobar 2007): the professionalization of development problems and the emergence of 'expert knowledge'; the institutionalization of development through multiple structures of power. This post-structuralist analysis pointed at the processes of "exclusion of the knowledges, voices and concerns of those whom development was supposed to serve" (Escobar 2007:20). At the same time, Escobar argues for the possibility of "creating different discourses and representations that are not so mediated by the constructs of development" (ibid) and stresses the need to multiply the centres and agents of knowledge production and to "change the 'political economy of truth' that defines the development regime" (ibid).

These discussions have further sharpened already posed questions on empowerment and participation, on production of knowledge and strategies of social change. I will use them to explore Panos' claims, the way these claims are justified and finally supported by the representation of *the voices*. In the next chapter I will use these theoretical insights to address two major Panos' claims:

- the *dichotomy* between *the poor* and *the experts*, the former assumed to be the holders of experience, reality and solutions – but interpreted, framed and studied by the latter, whose decisions finally will affect their lives;

- the claimed *counter-discursive power* of life-narratives (or any other means of conveying the voice and expertise of the poor) in challenging expert knowledge, with the final effect of redistributing power in favour of the 'real experts of poverty'.

Both of the claims will be situated in the context of production of knowledge on the reality of poverty, and the language that conveys the truth of poverty.

3. Real people, untrue stories: whose reality counts?

In the first chapter I have argued that the 'phenomenon of the voice' builds on the claim of bringing the reality of poverty on the table of policy-makers, by means of the immediate voices (and images) of the poor which experience it everyday and are now given the opportunity to share their concerns and solutions in their own words. This is supposed to overcome the silence the poor are confined to by the development expertise and help them meaningfully participate in the decisions affecting their lives. A similar need to overcome the 'tyranny' of the expert knowledge and make the poor the subject (rather than the object) of knowledge is claimed by most of theories illustrated in the previous chapter. One of Panos' manuals on OT methodology is introduced by the words of the American feminist Spender, which visibly echo such approach: "Reality is constructed primarily by those who talk…those who control the talk are also those who are able to control the reality" (Slim 1993:6).

Starting from the premise that *who speaks* is fundamental to Panos' projects, in this chapter I analyse Panos' claims about the authenticity of the *voices* and the *reality* conveyed by them. Then I discuss such claims in the light of their inherent contradictions.

3.1 The value of reality

3.1.1 Breaking down stereotypes

The least controversial value assigned to 'reality' is in the claims about the potential role of OT in challenging stereotypes; such claims are based on the assumption of the 'realness' of the reality the collection of testimonies presents.

Panos warns about the fact that much of NGO advocacy still "draws on rather opportunistic or superficial life story work", often built around "negative images of disaster-ridden third world […], powerless and trapped people with no culture, achievements, innovations" (Slim 1993:55). Panos' OT is conversely presented as "working against this trend, its strength being that it breaks down stereotypes and represents the voice of individuals and the complexities of *real life*" (ibid:155). The dissemination of personalized and first-hand accounts of poverty showing the complexities of real life and the agency of those facing it, is considered relevant in order to communicate the reality of poverty to those who do not experience it.

These stories seem to be significant in three regards: for development workers, for the poor, and for the impact on the audience.

3.1.2 Reality and Development Workers: "the difference between rhetoric and reality"

OT are supposed to be beneficial to development workers who "so focussed on the task in hand, can lose sight of the *real needs* of a community" (Warrington 2008a); furthermore the interviewer can better assess the

"difference between *rhetoric and reality*, which is usually illuminating" (Bennet 1999:50).

The dichotomy reality of poverty/rhetoric of development expertise is well highlighted by the claim that OT "help us to understand the *reality of everyday life,* the personal stories behind the broad development issues […] that are often lacking from development debates" (Warrington 2006). The media (that indeed have been chosen as main channel in Desert Voices) seem to play a relevant part in this regard, as they can "cover stories showing how the issues at stake in poverty discussions affect the *real people*[17]" and help to convey "testimonies [that] bring to life the *reality of poverty*[18] ". Such claims also recall what have been identified as two features of participatory video (Olmos 2005): providing 'contextualized evidence' and 'humanizing data'.

3.1.3 Reality and the Poor: "not an outsider's view"

The dichotomy between the poor and the experts gains even more emphasis when the counter-discursive role of OT is claimed. *Voices of the poor* as 'counter-discursive' mean that they are given status of an action that allows its performer to contradict or deconstruct what has been said by those claiming to speak on his/her behalf. Indeed OT are presented as being "a particularly powerful way for people to assert *their own reality*, showing how partial are the view of outsiders" (Slim 1993:55); "enabling *their version of reality*, not an outsider's view, to be heard" (ibid:53); "speak out in *their own words*, rather than having their views defined or interpreted by others" (Bennet 1999:4).

More directly, "At the heart of this principle of OT is a challenge to the development establishment" (Slim 1993:2). This is mainly because OT "represent the firm voice of experience and provide a counterpoint to uncertain assumptions of other people speculating on their behalf" (Slim, 1993:103). Much of the information gained with OT "contradicts received development wisdom and provides ample evidence of many conference generalisations" (ibid:130).

These claims visibly resonate with the words of Shaffer about life-narratives that are supposed to "enable claimants to 'speak truth to power' […] and exposing the fiction of official history" (Shaffer 2004:4).

3.1.4 Reality and the Audience: "Powerful impact"

The words of Shaffer are recalled also with regards to the role that 'reality' can have in catching the attention of the audience, often by means of the "inclusion of provocative and personalizing visual images" (Shaffer 2004:39). Gasper too (Gasper 2000a) analysed the important role that the emotional, personal and human side of individual first-hand accounts is assumed to play in strengthening their potential impact.

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[17] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=103

[18] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=20184

Panos does not hide that the "collection of authoritative OT, well presented, can catch the attention of those in power. It shows how compelling the words of *real people* can be" (Bennet 1993:27).

The word 'powerful' is frequently used in many claims, such as "Transcribed word-for-word will always be more powerful than a set of notes" (Warrington 2006) and "The immediacy and authenticity of people's own life stories, expressed in their own words, can be powerful and inspiring" (Warrington 2008a).

Indeed a lot of emphasis in Panos' texts about its OTP is paid to the 'realness' of the people speaking, particularly by stressing their emotional and human side, the "colour, individuality and oral character" (Bennet 1999:63) of their testimony. The fact that the 'reality' conveyed by the voices is considered no longer simply the object of communication, but actually a tool to make an impact and stimulate the audience to listen, has important consequences in terms of representational strategies[19].

3.1.5 Granting authenticity: "the speaker's real meaning"

Given the importance assigned to 'reality' just exposed, the OT methodology is designed to preserve the authenticity of the spoken word, and make sure that that the process between the collection of the testimony and its publication does not affect too much the "speaker's real meaning" (Bennet 1999:63).

The fact that the interview is recorded "makes sure that the interviewer is able to check and repeat exactly what the narrator says" (Warrington 2006). The basic rule of transcription is "to render the original speech into written text as accurately as possible, by including hesitation, repetition, dialect…" (Slim 1993:87). In translation "paraphrasing the meaning is NOT acceptable" (Bennet 1999:65). And in edition it is important to "respect the flavour of the original testimony and retain the subjective viewpoint of the narrator[20]". Most important of all is to keep a master copy of the original interview "to ensure that a quote used out of context does reflect its original meaning" (Bennet 1999:65).

3.1.6 Many realities, no factual truths

Notwithstanding all the claims about the 'reality of everyday life' and 'real needs' of the poor, the measures to preserve the authenticity of the voices that speak of that reality, and the insistence on the dichotomy between the reality of poverty known to the poor and the rhetorical knowledge available to the development experts, Panos seems to have major doubts how real this reality is. Many passages of Panos' documents reveal an ambiguity in the notion of reality, more specifically about the 'truth' of the words of the poor.

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[19] More on these consequences later, in the analysis of representation.

[20] Internal document.

For example, Panos cautions "not to start an OT project if you want to uncover *facts* and *irrefutable truths*" (Bennet 1999:1). Indeed OT is better used to "understand what people *believe* to be important and true" (ibid:1). Furthermore, "many of the stories are *not factually or literally true*, [they are] '*untrue'* stories" (Slim 1993:145).

On the one hand, this position is actually consistent with the normative assumption that "perceptions are just as important as facts" (Bennet 1999:7) and that "development which does not reflect people's imagination and desires, […] local values and knowledge, is unlikely to succeed" (Slim 1993:156).

On the other hand, however, in dismissing the factuality of the 'reality' it claims to bring forward, Panos creates an ambiguity that de-legitimizes the 'truth' that poor bring into the equation of development processes and in so doing opens up the space for the re-interpretation of their voices, and the reality they speak about, while nominally still asserting the value of oral testimonies.

The epistemological position of defining what is true and what is not, what is close to reality and what is not, is in itself a political process that may produce the effect of reinforcing existing relations of knowledge/truth production and power. According to Foucault, when power operates so as to enforce the 'truth' of any set of statements, then such a discursive formation produces a 'regime of truth' (Gaventa 2001). Thus Panos, while defining ambiguously the 'truth' and 'reality' of *the voices of the poor* as opposed to *facts,* is also implicitly framing what counts as true and "conferring it authority and legitimation" (Gunew 1990:17).

3.2 Language, representation and reality

3.2.1 Language and meanings

I believe that, from the analysis just exposed, several contradictions emerge. First, there is a simplification in the idea that the reality of the poor, instead of being mediated by the frames imposed by the experts, may be more effectively conveyed by reporting the very words of the poor, who are meanwhile given the opportunity to express themselves 'in their own terms'[21]. The attention paid to the process in order to "present material which is as close to the narrator's original words as possible" (Bennet 1999:65), confirms the idea that – in this case – Panos is assuming a "*mimetic* approach to language" (Hall 1997:15). This approach assumes that there is an intrinsic, real meaning in the object, person, idea - on, in this case, the reality of poverty - and language functions like a mirror to reflect such real meaning. By reporting the words of the poor as close as possible to the original ones, the reader can easily access their reality.

[21] Because of the fact that OT are recorded in local language, with long open-ended interviews and in familiar and relaxed settings.

At the same time, a very different approach seems to be assumed in those claims concerning the fact that what is reported is "what the narrator believes to be true" (Bennet 1999:51). According to the "*intentional* approach to language" (Hall 1997:15), words mean what the author intends they should mean, and do not have direct relationship to any other reality but the reality of the speaker. That is why Panos stresses that it is important not to lose "the speaker's real meaning" (Bennet 1999:63).

However this research is based on what is considered, in cultural studies, the "*constructionist* approach to language" (Hall 1997:15) – which is also the idea at the roots of the notion of 'representation'. I have already introduced representation as "the production of meaning through language" (ibid:17). Representation means using language to represent meaningfully the world to other people: it is not the material world (the voice as close as possible to reality, the original word as little mediated as possible) which conveys meaning, but "the language system or whatever system we are using to represent the concepts" (ibid:15). In order to understand each other and communicate meaningfully, people "need to share broadly the same conceptual maps and thus make sense or interpret the world in roughly similar ways" (Hall 1997:18). For OTP, this broadly means that the poor, the development experts, and the audience need to share (or at minimum understand) each others' meanings of poverty, participation-empowerment and change.

I assume that the narrators and the audience of OT projects do not necessarily share these meanings. On the one hand this is because OT projects are addressed to a socially and economically privileged audience that does not know "how it feels to be at the sharp end of development". On the other hand it is because of power relations within the domain of development interventions, and the ways these power relations produce the language and meanings of poverty.

3.2.2 Whose language, whose meaning? Representing the voices

If in order to communicate meaningfully there is a need to share the same conceptual maps and "a common language so that we can correlate our concepts and ideas with certain written words, sounds and images" (Hall 1997:18), what happens with the testimonies of rural poor from Sudan and Ethiopia, when they appear in the websites of organizations based in London or Washington?

Obviously, Panos is in charge of making "the meaning of the words as clear as possible to the reader [while] remaining as true to the original as possible" (Bennet 1999:72). In other words, Panos is in charge of choosing a system of representation that makes the words of the poor meaningful and translates them "into accessible first-hand stories for the on-line resources".

Panos recognizes the relevant constraints that limit the poor to express themselves in their own words, and stresses that the poor are "further disadvantaged by having to conform to the language and communication methods of those who hold power" (Slim 1993:9). This is why OT are presented as a method that tries to overcome such limits since the moment of the collection of the testimonies, finding ways for the poor "to articulate their

concerns and needs in ways that are culturally appropriate to them[22] ". In this way, OT "begin to balance the scales in the communication processes" (ibid:9). However, further limits appear in the process of dissemination of the voices. In the next chapter I examine both of these limits in the light of Panos' claims of authenticity (of the *voice*), and participation and empowerment (of the *poor*).

[22] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=20020

4. The story of poverty: narrating causes and solution

In this chapter I will set the stage for analyzing Panos web-based oral testimonies, by first examining in detail how is the need to 'represent' the voices introduced, justified and finally unproblematized by Panos; how it became a technical issue, without questioning the eventual contradiction of this need and the ensuing practice with the claim to "give those communities more power to set their own agenda for development" (Slim 1993:1).

4.1 Narrative Analysis: why and what

4.1.1 Discourse in poverty policy

I start by reflecting on discourses within poverty policies. 'Discourse' as a concept is understood in a range of different ways. I refer to it as something that "governs the way a topic can be meaningfully talked and reasoned about, influencing how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others" (Hall 1997:44).

Gasper and Apthorpe (Apthorpe 1996) identified two approaches that have particular salience in making sense of discourses in poverty policies. The first one derives from the analysis of texts and utterances and involves the deconstruction of terms, concepts, stylistic devices (good/bad binaries, metaphors, normative rather than descriptive terms, key words and slogans) used in the language of policy. This analysis offers a productive entry point for understanding how particular versions of poverty come to gain hegemony (Brock 2001). A second approach pays attention to the ways in which particular concepts or storylines frame what and who is taken into consideration in, and excluded from, policy deliberation. The analysis of discourse and framing devices used in poverty policy can "provide an important backdrop for making sense of the 'participation' of the poor" (Brock 2001:7).

For this research, following these approaches means analyzing the ways poverty is spoken about, and who is speaking. My starting hypothesis is that – while Panos suggests it is the poor who are speaking (and that in so doing they participate in the definition of poverty reduction strategies) – it is Panos who speaks, as all the interviews are selected and edited by Panos. I will start by looking at narratives of poverty as told by Panos: any discourse indeed involves one or more narratives, and the two are sometimes used interchangeably.

4.1.2 The narrative of Panos: poverty and voicelessness as mutually reinforcing problems

Broadly speaking, a narrative is an overarching rationale or logic that explains events and their sequences, that involves a certain set of identified characters and types of interaction, gives meanings to and explains links between actors and actions. More specifically, it is an account of why and how are the characters and their interactions related to each other. A narrative may have many stories, belonging to the same rationale. The sequence in which the stories are told and the way characters are positioned within the stories and

given subject or object positions can help reveal the assumptions of the narrator about them. Narrative Analysis – "the analysis of a chronologically told story, with a focus on how elements are sequenced, why some elements are evaluated differently from others[23] "– is thus relevant in this regard. It is important to note that the narrator is not always one who tells the stories. In this case, the poor are telling the stories about poverty, but Panos is the narrator, as all these stories belong to a narrative of poverty that Panos wants to convey to its audience[24].

I will specifically focus on how the need to 'listen to the voices of the poor' is introduced; how a quite different need to 'represent the voices of the poor' is justified; finally, how both needs belong to a narrative that claims the participation and empowerment of the poor, and ultimately, social change. Thus my focus will be on three kinds of narrative[25]:

1. Focalisation[26]: who is supposed to say what to whom, why and how?
2. Change: who is helping whom to change, why and how?
3. Participation and Empowerment: who is supposed to take part in these processes, why and how?

The analysis of focalisation will allow me to show that the 'storyteller' is not the same as 'the narrator'. This is important since the 'phenomenon of the voice' starts from the assumption that the storyteller – the poor - is also the narrator of poverty. More importantly, Panos actually prefers to "use the term narrator rather than interviewee to reflect the fact that they are narrating the story" (Warrington 2006). To clarify the difference between Panos' definition of the narrator, and my own, I will characterize Panos' one as 'poor-narrator'.

The link among the three narratives is analyzed by means of another tool of Discourse Analysis: Argumentation Analysis and the consequent Synthesis Table based on it (Appendix 10). Argumentation Analysis is typically used as part of a broader investigation, with the main purpose to highlight the inconsistencies among claims and generate questions to use in further analysis[27]. Such table also provides a useful tool to expose how Panos claims

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[23] http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/pa765/narrativ.htm

[24] The strategy of securing that audience will hear and see the story (about poverty) from the perspective of the narrator (Panos), regardless of what the story-teller (poor) says, is called focalisation. Focalisation is discussed by Meijer (Meijer 1993) in the analysis of photography and written material and defined as "The connection between the subject of vision and that which is seen". I will come back to it in the following chapter.

[25] For each of these narratives I have designed specific tables with the relevant claims. The tables are reported in Appendix 2-9 and are commented in this chapter.

[26] See note 24.

[27] Notes of 'Discourse Analysis' Session 5 – 'Discourse Analysis: Argument Structure and Quality'.

are linked to practice: in this case, the practice of representation of the poor and their voices.

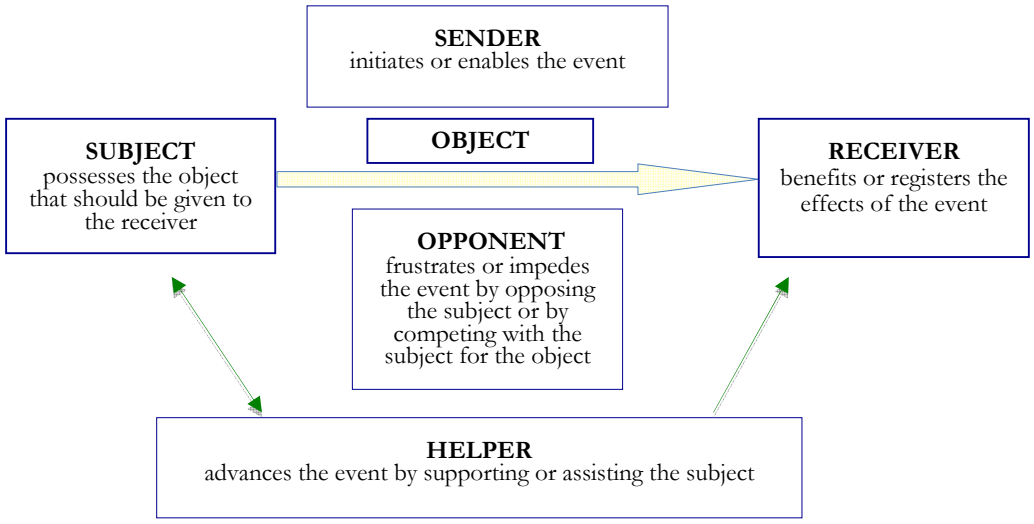
4.2 Analysis of the Narratives

4.2.1 Focalisation

In the article "Folktale Development" (Roe 1989), Roe attempts to link the literature on folktales - in particular Propp's schemata (Propp 1968) - to development policies, showing that much development planning employs a narrative structure comparable to the archetypal folktale: a problem is encountered and it will be solved through the epic endeavour of a hero who faces and overcomes a series of constraints. Instead of Propp's schemata, I found more appropriate to refer to Greimas (Greimas 1966) in order to analyse Panos' narrative of focalisation (Figure 1). Greimas is interested in seeing how any specific instance of narrativity relates to a larger process of general meaning-making[28]. According to him, six basic *actants* can be found in all narratives, working in sets of three interrelated pairs: sender/receiver, helper/opponent, subject/object (Franzosi 1998:523). A single character can at different times in the narrative serve different actantial roles, and one actant can be manifested by several actors.

In what follows, I will situate Panos OTP in the grid proposed by Greimas, and show how actant roles are divided among actors. The most important actors here are *the poor* – represented by their *voice* – and Panos.

Figure 1
Greimas' framework (own construction)



[28] www.cla.purdue.edu/academic/engl/theory/narratology/modules/greimasplot.html

The Subject

I have already argued that the claimed counter-discursive role assigned to OT is basically based on the assumption that the poor themselves are given the opportunity to "assert their own reality, showing how partial are the view of outsiders" (Slim 1993:55). I have also argued that this aspect echoes more general theories and epistemological positions which strive to make the poor the subject of knowledge, rather than the object defined by development experts.

According to my interpretation, many passages[29] in Panos' narrative could lead to conclude that the actual narrators of the testimonies are the poor. This is evident in the emphasis given to "the knowledge and experience of narrator, not the interviewer" (Bennet 1999:3) and in the fact that the narrator is encouraged "to dictate the direction of the interview" (Warrington 2006). Such priority is further increased by the definition of OT as a method that "gives people the opportunity to express themselves in their own terms" (Slim 1993:9) and respects their "communicative repertoire" (ibid:63). All these aspects make that the "narrators [are given] the opportunity to tell their stories in the way they wish, rather than being interpreted by others" (Warrington 2006).

Moreover, Panos declares that the narrator *should* be the poor - thus including that normative dimension which is characteristic of the language of poverty policies (see Synthesis Table, Appendix 11). This is evident in the claim that "the voices of the poor *should* re-write development" (Warrington 2006) and "*must* illuminate our thinking and actions[30] ".

The Object

Broadly speaking, the **object** - possessed by the **subject** and addressed to the **receiver** – in this case is *the voice*. The voice is articulated as bringing a sense of "how it feels to be at the sharp end of development[31] ", and has two dimensions: the human/emotional side of the subject; and the real-life experience of the subject, who faces poverty daily. Both the dimensions are indeed emphasized in the web-based testimonies. In addition, following the claim that 'the poor should re-write development', the **object** – *the voice* - is central in supporting the assumption that the narrator is *the poor*.

[29] For details see Appendix 2
[30] http://www.panos.org.uk/aboutus
[31] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=433

The Receiver

The **receiver** is the intended audience, benefiting from the **object** *(the voice)*. Panos identifies three kinds of audience: local, national and international. More precisely: media, policy-makers, development workers and researchers/academics. The main benefits have been mentioned earlier: insights into the reality of poverty, as lived and spoken about by the poor. But these insights are not there just for general knowledge – they are there because they are supposed to have an impact on the **receiver**: on policy-makers to change their policies; on academics to change their research; on media to change the way they write about poverty; on the general audience to change the way it perceives certain issues. And all this together is supposed to lead to social change. This aspect thus links focalisation with the narrative of change. Indeed, most of the claims are based on the assumption that the benefits should prompt the **receiver** to act and bring about change – for the poor!

The Opponent

According to Greimas' framework, the **opponent** frustrates or impedes the **subject** (*the poor*) to convey the **object** (*the voice*) to the **receiver.** The more general obstacle posed by the opponent has already been mentioned: that the poor are "further disadvantaged by having to conform to the language and communication methods of those who hold power" (Slim 1993:9). The oral testimony project is there to remove this obstacle.

But there are other obstacles, each requiring different strategies in order to be overcome. Specifically, I expose here three of them. First of all, poor people are limited in their capacity to voice out their concern because they lack basic access to communication channels and technologies. Secondly, too often their voices go unheard as the receivers are not willing, or lack the patience, to listen. Lastly, "the bias of the educated and political elite" (Slim 1993:150) makes the oral accounts of the poor to be dismissed as anecdotal, and as lacking the substance of facts.

Hence, according to Panos, the obstacles are to be found among the potential receivers of *the voice*: *the voice* is directed to the receivers precisely because they have not taken it into account earlier. The presence of an **opponent**, therefore, requires and justifies the intervention of the **helper**.

The Helper

The **helper** assists the **subject** (*the poor*) by encouraging the **receiver** to "read and take seriously" *the voice* (**the object**). The obstacle of access to communication may be overcome through the creation of spaces of communication and inclusion of the voices, and through the involvement and training of journalists. The risk that the voices go unheard may be overcome by enabling the poor to make their voices more powerful – i.e. 'amplifying the voices'. Finally, the bias of the elite may be overcome by framing the voices in "formats which are familiar to the professionals [the project] seeks to

influence" (Slim 1993:102) and by the combination of "this locally root approach with the production of high quality information output for international audiences" (Panos 2005).

Not surprisingly, Panos is the helper, and its OTP a strategy that is supposed to overcome all three obstacles. What could come as a surprise – given the claims of the realness of *the voice* - is the need to 'format' it. To translate what was claimed as a powerful-human-true-to-everyday-life story into a language familiar to the professionals – a language earlier referred to as rhetoric (thus emptied of realness).

The Sender

The strategies used by the **helper** in order to overcome the obstacles posed by the **opponent** require the intervention of a **sender** who takes the **object** of the **subject** to the **receiver**. Moreover, the intervention of a sender is backed by the normative assumption that "The role of listeners comes with certain obligations. A reciprocal exchange is required in which what is heard is both given back and carried forward" (Slim 1993:2). The senders can be classified in individual persons (journalists, photographers, development workers), the media in general and, again, Panos itself.

Clearly, the **helper** performs also the role of **sender**. What is essential here is that the **subject** (*the poor*) - whose priority was emphasised at the beginning of the narrative - does not coincide with the **sender**. In other words, the helper (Panos) 'formats' *the voice* and only then sends it to the receiver. It is this process of formatting that I address in the next chapter, as central to the representation of *the voice of the poor*.

4.2.2 Narrative of Change

Throughout Panos' documents one can find claims where 'change' is mentioned, as well as the actors and actions associated with it (see Appendix 8). Though the meaning of 'change' is never explicitly defined, two broad categories can be identified.

Firstly, 'change' is seen as an improvement of the current situation of the poor. The actors involved in this process are supposed to be the poor, through the general claim that "marginalised people should drive and shape the changes needed to improve their lives". Next to the poor the actors are also the outsiders, those "who have the power to make changes", or - I would suggest - the **receivers** to whom the voice should be addressed. Finally, communication itself, which "lies at the heart of change". Secondly, 'change' as alteration of the initial situation of stability (McCloskey 1997), which in the testimonies of the poor appears as a reflection on - or a nostalgic reminiscence of - the past that was better then the present.

The narrative of change proves to be linked with the focalisation. The narrative of change – for better or for worse – is directed to the **receivers** (outsiders, development workers, policy makers…) and is supposed to move them to action. But – as mentioned earlier - in order for the receivers to gain

the most benefit from the narratives of change, Panos 'formats' the testimonies. Thus, ultimately, the focalizer of the narrative of change is Panos, not the poor.

4.2.3 Narrative of Participation and Empowerment

Claims about 'participation' and 'empowerment' are advanced several times, both separately and in relation to each other (see Appendix 9), and in different ways. First, there is a set of straightforward claims about the power oral testimony is supposed to bring to the poor-narrators, "to set their own agenda for development" and "take meaningful part in debates […] relevant for their lives".

However, it is also stated that "all forms of participation are essentially communication processes" (Panos 2007b:8). Following my analysis of focalization, processes of communication (according to Panos) require the intervention of the helper-sender. The process of participation of the poor in the debates is mediated by the helper (Panos) in order to enable this participation. Thus the testimonies are better seen as "powerful entry points" (Slim 1993:57) or, recalling the standpoint theories' view of marginal voices, as "starting points for thought" (Harding 2005:221).

The fact that the **subject** (*the poor*) does not coincide with the **sender** (Panos) and that *the voice* is just an 'entry point', strengthens the claim that oral testimony is a "way of giving volume and power to the voices" (Slim 1993:4), thus assuming the poor to be indirectly empowered by the power given to their voice by the **helper-sender.** I would argue, then, that it is *the voice* – italic stressing its modification by Panos (i.e. the modified voice) - that is taking part in the debates, not *the poor*. So, given the need to frame *the voice*, what is participation and who is participating?

Panos places significant emphasis on the participation of the poor-narrators in the very process of collection and dissemination of oral testimonies (see Appendix 9). Indeed OT methodology is considered a "meaningful participatory work with the communities" (Warrington 2008a). But, as I show, once the testimonies are collected, they are transformed into *the voice* – and those who have spoken it have little influence on how will this voice be framed, whose perspectives it will focalize, how it will be interpreted and used.

4.3 Arguing the Need for Representation: Producing *the Voice*?

4.3.1 Problematizing the Narratives, Examining Discourses

I consider the narratives just analyzed a form of expression of a broader set of discourses. In these narratives, Panos presents specific causes and solutions of poverty, establishing "frames of references that define and bound what forms of knowledge count, and whose versions, claims and interest are legitimate" (Brock 2001:8). Panos partakes in a process of production of knowledge about specific realities. In other words, it partakes into the larger set of development discourses on poverty, participation and empowerment. And – despite all its

claims to the uniqueness of its approach – Panos appears to be taking part in producing rather mainstream kinds of discourses. This is evident through its definitions – or lack of definitions - of the main issues at stake, as well as through the shifts these definitions go; and through choices of highlighting and obscuring specific processes.

In examining participatory development discourses, Pijnmburg (2004:164) noted several "discursive characteristics" which seem to be applicable to Panos too: the *vagueness* and the *positive connotations*. Such characteristics, Pijnmburg argues, serve to reinforce the dominance of the discourse and leave its controversial nature unquestioned. Indeed we can notice how both 'participation' and 'empowerment' are barely defined in Panos narratives. They are rather "container concepts" (ibid) which can be adapted to the audience and context of interaction.

We also see that participation is used with reference both to participation in the process of collection and dissemination of oral testimonies, and as a broader process of participation in development debates. And we see that, eventually, the former all but replaces the latter. This replacement hides an implicit assumption that the participation in oral testimonies (by giving *the voice*) is the same as a participation in the development debate. At the same time, the fact that *the voice*, in order to be considered within the debate at hand, must be mediated by the helper-sender, is left unquestioned.

Such lack of problematization might be explained in the lights of other discursive characteristics emerging from Panos' narratives: the creation of "an *image of ownership*" (Pijnmburg 2004:188) and the use of a normative language that makes participation and empowerment to be "regarded as inherently good and non-contested" (ibid:21).

4.3.2 Empowerment for what?

Panos' notion of empowerment emerging from the above analysis is close to what is known in the literature as "the second dimensional view of power" (Gaventa 2001:71). According to this view, the powerful use control over the production of knowledge as a way of setting the public agenda, and for excluding certain voices, participants and actions upon it. The mobilization of the relatively powerless to act upon their grievances and to participate in public affairs becomes the strategy to counter such situation: "empowerment through knowledge means […] expanding who participates in the knowledge production process" (ibid).

It may appear that Panos' oral testimonies are contributing to such a form of empowerment. However, my analysis of Panos' narratives indicates that Panos overlooks two questions that have been raised in the literature regarding the discourse of empowerment:

1. The question that should be asked "is not how much people are empowered, but for what" (Cooke 2001:13). Henkel and Stirrat argue that participatory approaches tend to empower participants to take part in the modern sector of societies, thus opening them to what, in Foucauldian terms, is called 'subjection' to the dominant discourses. Similarly, I believe

that Panos' methodology – whatever its aim of participation and empowerment – while enabling *the poor* to take part in communication processes - poses limits to participation, because in order for the voices to "gain discursive power" they have to be modified, so that they 'sound right' to the intended audience (Hajer 1995).

2. While claiming to "*enable* people to speak out and be heard[32] ", Panos is in a way reproducing power – as "power is reproduced in discursive networks at every point where someone who 'knows' is instructing someone who doesn't know" (Gunew 1990:22).

Thus Panos is producing the category of *the poor*, and their *voice*, as well as the modes of participation and empowerment by which these can be used for change. This is evident in the fact that Panos starts with statements about giving *the poor* the opportunity to express themselves in ways which are "culturally appropriated to them[33] ", but then shifts to the statement of changing them into the "formats […] familiar to the professionals" (Slim 1993:102). Further, while replacing participation in development interventions by participation in the OT project. Finally, by implying that this participation is empowering, and at the same time positioning itself as the main protagonist of that empowerment.

4.3.3 Criticism from within: opening spaces, anchoring framings

Notwithstanding the claim that "the poor should re-write development" (Warrington 2006) and "drive and shape the changes needed to improve their lives[34] ", I believe we are still confronted with the presence of a discourse that frames "what counts as knowledge and whose voices count in particular political and institutional contexts" (Brock 2001:1), with important implications for the way in which "information and knowledge come to be represented in the policy process" (ibid:6). By producing *the voices of the poor*, Panos partakes in a discourse that circumscribes "the boundaries of action for 'the poor' and for those who seek to intervene in their lives" (Brock 2001:6). Finally, by defining and defending the need to produce *the voices*, Panos contributes to "the construction of a particular reality – one that justifies [development professionals'] existence and intervention within it" (Cooke 2001:15).

Another difference with standpoint epistemology emerges here. Panos seems to overlook an aspect relevant to such theoretical stream: the "critical examination of the dominant institutional beliefs and practices that systematically disadvantage the marginalized" (Harding 2005:229). Though Panos claims to "strive to include the voices of poor and marginalized

[32] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=15
[33] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=20020
[34] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=15

people[35]", the very process through which they are included as well as the context within which they are included is left almost unquestioned; thus I believe Panos is not sufficiently criticizing the role its practices can ultimately have in the reproduction of dominant narratives of poverty and in the depoliticization of the supposed counter-discursive role of the testimonies.

Although Panos places itself in a critical position with regards to the generalization of development debates and the intrusion of expert-knowledge, it could be better regarded as a 'critique from inside': as some post-development advocates noticed, many self-claimed alternative approaches to development formulate "their criticism of mainstream development policy only within the limits of this discourse" (Ziai 2007:4). As Brock (2001) observed, there may be moments where policy spaces opened up by other actors or events enables advocates of otherwise excluded alternatives to challenge pervasive orthodoxies; however such spaces are very likely to "remain bounded by previous understanding and framings" (Brock 2001:7). Panos is claiming to "create new spaces for people often sidelined from policymaking to be heard at local, national, and international levels[36] ". However I believe that its justification of the need to present the voices in formats that are familiar to and more readily acceptable by the audience, resonates the notion of 'anchoring' introduced by Moscovici (1984): the process through which potential breach of the familiarities of existing procedures are assimilated and elements of the new are rendered comfortable.

In the following chapter I address empirically the impact that the need to frame *the voices* in accessible and familiar formats has on the narratives told by the poor; and how such impact could ultimately undermine their claimed counter-discursive function.

[35] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=24010
[36] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=15

5. The representation of poverty: humanizing the story

This chapter goes into the details of Desert Voices analysing specific linguistic and representational strategies Panos used in editing and presenting the collection "into accessible first-hand stories for on line resources[37] ". Giving pertinence to Cornwall (2000:63) I ask: "whose versions emerge" and situate this question in the context of power relations.

The analysis focussed on the ten testimonies collected in Sudan and their presentation by narrator: this involves the selection of "what seems to be the most interesting, eloquent, powerful or representative sections" (Bennet 1999:70) of the original interviews, beyond providing "human detail and sense of personality" (ibid:71). As other media, Internet is considered an "important outlet for local people to express themselves and make their views known in their own terms[38] " and "maximizing their potential for wider impact outside the communities" (Panos 2007a:49).

5.1 Framing meaning: who is the narrator?

For the purpose of this analysis, the question 'whose versions emerge?' could be paraphrased into 'who is the narrator?'. In order to answer this question, I have focused on what Meijer (1993:371) calls "levels of framing" – which in this case separate the poor-narrator and the final audience. I start from the assumption that the "distinction between the immediate contexts of telling and subsequent contexts of reception becomes important to the process of production" (Shaffer 2004:5); the process of production of the testimonies turns out to be influenced by the purpose of their dissemination: basically, "present the human face of desertification" and "encourage inclusive and informed debate on desertification". Moreover, all the general purposes of OT collection are applicable to this project too.

As I had access to the original interviews (translated in English), with questions and answers, I have started my analysis since there – following all the levels of framing I was able to detect. A detailed analysis of such levels of framing and their impact on the narrative, with plenty of examples from the interviews is presented in Appendix 12. I will go through this analysis by splitting it into two phases I consider relevant in the production of the meaning of the narrative and in finally answering the question 'who is the narrator?': collection and editing.

5.1.2 Framing meaning in collection

The assumption that the narrative is shaped since the act of the collection is confirmed by Johnstone (2001:640), who mentions Watson's approach of

[37] Internal document.

[38] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=21168

storytelling as embedded in its interactional context – i.e. the structure of stories is affected by the social contexts in which they are performed. The interview itself is described as a "discursive act" [39] in which the interviewer and the respondent "are engaged in creating the meaning of the questions and answers that constitute the narrative" (Alvarez 2002:40). According to my analysis, the **interviewers** play a role in shaping the narrative in many regards:

- the focus of the questions vary according to their professional background and interests (journalists or development workers);
- some questions tend to bring in the bias of people living out of the community;
- they can interrupt the narrator, deciding which aspects of the interview to leave unquestioned;
- they can raise the expectations of the narrator and influence the content of the narrative by the way the project is introduced (e.g. "We came here to convey your voice so that to help you");
- inevitably, the hugest impact is brought by the type of questions asked (that I have classified in four main categories).

Table 2
Impact of questions on the narrative

TYPE OF QUESTION	IMPACT ON THE NARRATIVE	EXAMPLES
PERSONAL	Narrator prompted to tell details and moving stories, emphasising the negativity of the condition and the language used (emotionally charged)	How is your feeling when you were far from your family?'; 'Were you uneasy?'; 'What was the feeling of your wife?'; 'Does the father send letters?'; 'What is the content of the meal?'
TECHNICAL	Narrator asked for technical details and possible solutions	Why you stopped the cultivation of dura?'; 'How was the shape of the forest?'; 'How did you make use of Qdaim trees?'
LEADING	Answer suggested implicitly or explicitly by the interviewer	That means there is an economic deterioration that affects the social side, do you agree with me?'; 'Can we say the problem is economic?'; 'Let's talk about the woman: does she suffer?'
WHY	Narrator solicited to unveil cause-effect links otherwise not spontaneously underlined	What's the reason behind that?'; 'Why did you leave the school?'; 'Why migrants do not return?'; 'Why is the sesame cheap?'

5.1.3 Framing meaning in editing

The narrative turns out to be further structured in the edited version in order to "make the meaning as clear as possible to the reader" (Bennet 1999:72), hence we can consider editing as a practice of signification (Hall 1997) – the practice involved in the production of meaning. In other words: representation. By comparing the original content and sequence with the

[39] http://www2.chass.ncsu.edu/garson/pa765/narrativ.htm

edited content and sequence, I was able to identify different levels of framing and representational strategies (Leudar 2004, Zarkov 1997, Hall 1997, Meijer 1993, Hansen 2006), and their impact on narrative and meaning.

Every testimony is introduced by a **headline** (reporting the first name of the narrator and few 'representative' words), a simple head-and-shoulders **photo** with a **photo-caption** quoting the narrators' words, and split into small chapters by short 'representative' **titles**. Each of these elements seems to respond to precise representational strategies and carefully chosen in order to: emphasize the overall (pitiful, optimistic, fatalist…) spirit of the original interview; stress the emotional and human side of the narrator; summarise the main issues discussed in the interview concerned.

Table 3
Headlines, photo-captions and titles: main representational strategies

REPRESENTATIONAL STRATEGY	EXAMPLES
Quoting powerful narrator's words as photo-caption	I'm carring their burden, and I'm so tired…'(FA); 'The sands will bury them, just as they have buried my house' (NA); 'No man remains' (EE)
Quoting powerful narrator's words as headline	Nothing the same' (NA); 'Inside my heart' (EN); 'Women are exhausted' (FA)
Quoting powerful narrator's words as title	Not a cow or goat was left' (NA); 'Before I was busy, now I have nothing..' (FA); 'Nothing take education away from someone' (ME)
Building headlines and titles with powerful words not pronounced in the original interviews	Uncertainities and difficulties' (EE); 'Attempts to protect the village fail' (NA); 'The pain of absence' (EN); 'Forced to buy milk' (FA); 'People live in despair' (ME)
Quoting passages emphasing the commitment of villagers as headlines, photo-captions or titles	The land here is fertile, but we lack the essential' (OS); 'We can stop desertification' (OS); 'The need for investments' (OS); 'We have the workforce and experience' (IS)
Building headlines and titles with words suggesting optimism and commitment, but not pronounced by the narrators	Efforts to halt desertification' (WI); 'Taking the initiative' (WI); 'Make land productive' (IS); 'Broader horizons' (IS); 'Fighting environmetal decline' (IS); 'Progress is possible' (MA); 'The future' (MA)

Each testimony is accompanied by an **introduction** that presents the narrator, quotes some of her/his words and summarises the content of the interview – thus inevitably suggesting the reader an interpretation of the narrative to come. The quotes are often selected in order to stress the humanity and character of the narrator – further emphasised by precise lexical choices. The conjunctions used tend to affect the reading of the narrative to come, by suggesting specific cause-effect links originally absent.

Table 4
Introduction: main representational strategies

	EXAMPLES
QUOTES	Now I have nothing. This is in fact, and I feel shame to say that' (EN); 'I'm not willing to neglect their education' (ME); 'Whatever income we find, we spned it on food and clothes for our children' (FA)
LEXICAL CHOICES	Mekki is hopeful…proud...worries a great deal'; 'Osman talks with nostalgia'; 'El Nour find hard to leave behind his wife'; 'They need money straightway'; 'Lives are dominated by the need to migrate'
CONJUNCTIONS	*However* women today have more choice'; *'Despite* receiving help…'; *'Although* it was resolved…'

As for the testimony itself (*the voice*), many elements seem to suggest an answer to the question 'whose versions emerge?'. Several theorists have identified the requirements for a good story – internal consistency, a logical flow and other elements like the wealth of detail - that persuade the reader or listener (Yanow 2000). In particular, Labov and Waletzky propose an approach to the study of first-person narratives based on the "identification of a variable surface structure and an invariable deep structure" (Johnstone 2001:637). According to them, a narrative may include clauses which serve the double purpose of making reference to characters, feelings, events and structuring the interaction in which the story is being told by insuring the events are comprehensible. The analysis of the testimonies indeed shows how these are characterized by both:

- a **variable surface structure**. Each narrator is an individual, thus what emerges are subjective and personalized narratives, characterized by different anecdotes, whose protagonists come from different social backgrounds and offer different views of the problems;
- a **common deep structure**. The narratives are given an accessible and logical format originally absent; they are sequenced in order to focus initially on a first-person account, then move to the contrast between past abundance and present scarcity, and end with possible solutions and optimism for the future[40].

In order to make the testimonies acquire both these features, the editor has to intervene on several aspects, with an inevitable impact on the narrative: change in the narrative sequence, addition or change of words, omission of paragraphs or attention to report regularly some of them.

Change in the narrative sequence can result by grouping originally scattered paragraphs under specific titles or moving them in order to provide the narrative with logical and anecdotic fluency. This aspect is quite relevant if we consider that "a rearrangement of narrative clauses typically results in a change in meaning" (Franzosi 1998:522).

[40] This sequence recalls Labov (1997) identification in each narrative of: abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, evaluation, coda.

Table 5
Change in the narrative sequence: impact and examples

IMPACT ON THE NARRATIVE	EXAMPLES
Issues risk to be overlooked	FA's list of solutions is reported under two inconsistent chapters ('Poor health','Pests and problems'); SA's opinion on the failure of IFAD projects is reported at the end of a chapter on women, though the opinion is an technical one
Issues given emphatic positions (very beginning or end of chapters), while originally scattered	There is no income here' (EE); 'We have no other destination to go' (EE); 'We will contribute' (MA); 'A husband shall never divorce his wife' (ME)
Aquired logical and anecdotic fluency	IS's account of the need to migrate is followed by the chapter 'The reality of migration'; OS's chapter 'We can stop desertification' is constructed in a way to provide initially a description of the past environmental condition and end with OS's proposal of solution

Sometimes words are added in square brackets in order to clarify local idioms or proverbs; but it may happen to find **words added or changed** not signalled by square brackets, with a consequent impact on the narrative as shown in table 6.

Table 6
Words added or changed: impact and examples

IMPACT ON THE NARRATIVE	EXAMPLES
Changed original emphasis or meaning	ME's statement 'they travel to town isolated' becomes 'they move to the towns, feeling isolated from modern life' - thus emphasising (or suggesting) a view of migration as a hostile experience
Emphasized original spirit or humanity of the narrator	But we *always* return to our family' (EE); 'There were *so many* trees' (EN); *'But* we *also* depend on our men' (SA); 'I was *extremely* worried' (ME)
Addition of conjunctions changes meaning	SA is talking about the fact that lack of money increases celibacy among the youth *'yet* every mother insists on having everything that her daughter should have'. The addition of *yet* sheds on the mothers an implicit blame not perceivable in the original interview

Beyond those parts too rich in details, some **passages are omitted** (though not regularly) such as unexpected answers, answers contradicting the overall spirit of the interview or the general trend reported by other narrators. What is regularly omitted are the critiques to local authorities and the quests for help addressed to outsiders.

Table 7
Passages omitted

PASSAGE OMITTED	EXAMPLES
Answers unexpected	There isn't any change in children's behaviours' (EE)
Answers contradicting the overall negative spirit of the interview	Thanks to God that we remain safe ans peaceful til now in the village' (ME)
Answers contradicting the general trend as expressed by other narrators	Cutting trees didn't affect much' (OS)
Quests for help	You didn't promise us to deliver any help…but the village has many poor, weak and orphan people' (EN); 'It is as well an assistance if they pay us money' (FA); 'If Allah will, we could get benefit from your help…' (NA); 'We hope you contribute with a number of trees and take part in providing some necessary services...' (SA)

Conversely, some passages (like statements evoking the commitment of the villagers and their solutions, anecdotes, local and religious aspects) are regularly reported in the edited version: this obtains the effect of emphasising the colour and personalisation of the testimony - conferring it a variable surface structure - and of presenting the narrators as agents of change.

Table 8
Passages regularly reported: impact and examples

ALWAYS REPORTED	IMPACT ON THE NARRATIVE	EXAMPLES
Statements on commitment of villagers and proposed solutions	Emphasis on knowledge and agency of villagers, rather than on passivity and victimism	We want to restore the village'; 'We will work on that'; 'We can stop desertification'; 'We can build clubs'; 'We have the workforce and experience'
Anecdotes and religious aspects	Emphasis on the humanity of the narrators, colour and personality	Grandfathers used to pour milk on the ground'; 'Ancestors used to break the hooves of animals with their own hands'; 'The Almighty bless him'

5.2 Problematizing representation

The analysis of Focalisation in the previous chapter already revealed how, eventually, the subject does not coincide with the sender of *the voice*, and how such discrepancy is justified. The analysis of the testimonies confirms this by showing how, though we readers "have the illusion that the events are displayed to us in an unmediated way" (Meijer 1993:375), the levels of framing actually impact the shape and the meaning of the narrative – raising reasonable doubts on 'whose versions emerge'. If a narrative is "a way of constructing events and giving them meaning" (Johnstone 2001:644), but at the same time the authorship of the same is challenged, a question may be raised about 'whose meaning is being conveyed'. This consideration turns out to be particularly relevant if we consider we are dealing with an approach claiming to give the narrator "the opportunity to tell their own stories in the way they wish, rather than being interpreted by others" (Warrington 2006).

5.2.1 Make it real and human

Hall discusses the notion of 'authentication' as a technique to encourage the audience to accept the events portrayed as authentic, by means of practices which are considered authentic[41]. Many elements underlined in the analysis seem to be part of such practice: the headline reporting the narrator's name, the photo accompanied by a powerful quote, the titles reporting the 'narrator's own words', the variable surface structure which makes the narrators appear in their diversity, individuality and contradictions – thus recalling the usefulness

[41] http://dspace.ruc.dk/bitstream/1800/2103/1/final%20version.pdf

of the 'personalisation' of life-stories as mentioned by Shaffer (Shaffer 2004), but also by Panos itself [42].

Under the general assumption that "first-person testimony is simply more engaging than impersonal commentary" (Slim 1993:1) and the aim to "present the human face of desertification[43] ", testimonies are constructed since their collection as to emphasise both the human-emotional side and the commitment-expertise of the poor-narrators. This finally contributes to the definition of a common deep structure, and confirms the view of representation as 'constitutive' of the events - rather than a neutral reflection of reality. I believe this aspect should be problematized in the light of the claimed role of OT in breaking down stereotypes.

5.2.2 Challenging or constructing stereotypes?

Stereotyping can be defined as the act that "reduces people to a few, simple, essentialized characteristics" (Hall 1997:257). The consideration that in much advocacy work the poor are often represented negatively as "powerless and trapped people with no culture, achievements, innovations" (Slim 1993:55) and that much development debates are broadly characterized by "received development wisdom" and "conference generalisations" (ibid:130), prompts Panos to assert the strength of individual voices in "working against this trend [by representing] the complexities of real life" (ibid:155). Indeed the representational and narrative strategies above mentioned seem to confirm such attempt and build a 'positive representation' of the poor-narrators, by means of showing them in their humanity, complexities and commitment.

However, I believe that the levels of framing at the same time contribute to the construction of a 'positive stereotype' – reducing narrators to few, essentialized characteristics. First of all: the very fact that the narrators are generally referred to as *the poor and marginalised* without ever questioning the assumptions behind such generalisation, is an evident contradiction of the overall approach (as well as of the 'phenomenon of the voice'[44]). Secondly: the attempt to build a positive representation through the omission of the quests for help to outsiders advanced in the original interviews, may raise some questions as far as the focalisation is concerned: who is supposed to break down stereotypes? The poor-narrators or Panos? Thirdly: the attempt to deconstruct the "one-dimensional images" (Slim 1993:155) of poverty by showing the poor in their humanity, complexities and commitment, risks to produce another homogenized representation. The similarities of the titles attributed to the female narrators (which underline women's sufferance), the gender-dichotomy emerging from the narratives (the depiction of men as the heroes migrating for the sake of women and children waiting at home), the majority of headlines, titles and photo-captions stressing the pain and the

[42] "Experience has shown that one of the most successful way to make an impact is to personalize specific issues" (Slim 1993:55).
[43] Internal document.
[44] See note 1.

negativity of the situation – all contribute to the construction of another essentialized image of *the poor* and poverty.

This is further confirmed and enhanced by the eventual emergence of a common deep structure characterizing the narratives, as already argued. Shaffer notices that, although life-narratives provide evidence of a range of experiences, the fact that they are formatted in "standardized structures and thematics of presentation" increases the risk that the juxtaposition of multiple narratives "cast a patina of anonymity (even if names are included) and uniformity, […] reducing differences to sameness" (Shaffer 2004:47) [45]. Such standardization - I would add - opens the possibility for these testimonies to be turned into "web suffer spectacle" (ibid:39), thus undermining consistently their claimed counter-discursive role.

5.2.3 Positive stereotype, unquestioned inequality

Hall (1997) analysed a number of different strategies designed to intervene in the field of representation, to contest 'negative' images and transform representational strategies in a more 'positive' direction; he posed the question whether a dominant regime of representation could be challenged. He argues that 'bad stereotypes' cannot be challenged simply with 'good stereotypes', because this strategy does not eventually lead to change or contest the unequal social structure that favoured the emergence of that stereotype[46]. Similarly, I argue that Panos is trying to challenge the stereotypes and generalisations of development debates claiming to let the versions of the poor emerge; however the testimony is actually structured by precise narrative and representational strategies which contribute to construct the meaning of the same, thus undermining the claimed closeness to 'the meaning of the poor'. Moreover, in the light of the narrative justification of the need to 'represent *the voices*' illustrated in the previous chapter, I believe that Panos is neither questioning the unequal social structure which governs the production of 'knowledge about the poor' and the consequent stereotypes – but simply trying to encourage such structure to complement its views of poverty by 'taking seriously' the first-hand accounts of the poor.

This consideration is further confirmed by the role assigned to 'development experts' in the process of representation of *the voices*. The dichotomy between *the poor* and *the experts* characterizing Panos' claims presents the latter as mis-interpreting the reality of poverty and taking decisions based on such mis-interpretations; in this assumption lies the need to let the poor "speak out in their own words, rather than having their views defined and interpreted by others" (Bennet 1999:3). However it is interesting to note how the experts intervene throughout the process, somehow with the function of

[45] Even more attention to this aspect should be paid of we consider the similarity in format characterizing the 'phenomenon of the voice': whether it is a video, audio or written account, there is always the portrait of the 'narrator' with his/her name and a quote from the speech.

[46] http://it.youtube.com/watch?v=aTzMsPqssOY

'validating' the reality of the poor[47]. For instance, the project coordinator usually "arranges for the review of the interviews by a local organisation, researchers, specialists" (Bennet 1999:13); in the training workshop is encouraged to participate "any people with specialist knowledge of the locality/society/topic" (ibid:27); finally, "it can be a good idea to bring in another contributor, perhaps a specialist in a relevant topic" (ibid:28); the role of these contributors may be "to read the testimonies later and draw out the significance of, for example, the botanical information" (ibid:29).

If stereotypes "tend to occur when there are gross inequalities of power" (Hall 1997:258), without questioning conceptually and in the practices such inequalities – that manifest themselves also in the production of 'knowledge about the poor' – stereotypes risk to be reproduced, even in their 'positive' version.

5.3 The power of representation

Framing, as language, in not neutral. Framing could be defined as "the process of selection and organisation of knowledge, and the attribution of meaning" (Pijnmburg 2004:29). Frames determine "what counts as a fact and what arguments are taken to be relevant and compelling" (ibid). Who has the power to frame, has the power to circulate meanings.

In Appendix 11 are shown in detail the levels of framing actually recognized by Panos: I believe it becomes evident how these levels are presented more as technical issues, sometimes unavoidable filters for the sake of clarification. In the light of what stated above, I argue that it is not enough to recognize the "inevitable degree of filtering" (Bennet 1999:65) interviewers, translators and editors bring in; what should be considered more attentively is the justification of the 'need' to frame *the voices* to make them familiar to the audience, and how this action actually undermines the claimed counter-discursive role of the testimonies. Such problematization is missing in Panos' claims and practices, which overlook the power of framing: ultimately, the power of representation.

Foucault contributed to shift the attention towards the many localized circuits, mechanisms and effects through which power circulates; he saw power "as something that is incorporated in numerous practices" (Barret 1991:136). I consider representation one of the forms through which power circulates: the power to mark, emphasise some elements rather than others, select which sections of the interviews are more "interesting, eloquent, powerful" (Bennet 1999:70), define, determine the meaning, make a discourse true. As Panos' narrative of poverty eventually defines what is worthy of being listened to and shapes the boundaries of participation, I argue that Panos'

[47] This intervention is actually consistent with the de-legitimation of the 'truth' brought by the poor into the equation of development processes, as argued in chapter 3.

representation has the power to shape the way *the voices* could eventually be taken into consideration.

The emerging stereotyped and homogenized image of the poor, the consideration of the testimonies as "powerful entry point into discussion" (Slim 1993:57) because of the stronger impact personal stories of poverty are supposed to gain, the identification of their complementary role with regards to more formal and quantitative forms of data collection – in my view contribute to the risk of a cosmetic, aesthetic and instrumental use of such voices. Ultimately, to the risk of being dismissed as 'merely interesting anecdotes'.

6. Conclusions

In this research I have challenged what I have considered two main simplifications of the 'phenomenon of the voice': the claimed authenticity of *the voices of the poor* and the empowering and counter-discursive role their communication is supposed to have. Taking as case-study the Oral Testimony methodology developed by Panos, and one of its application (Desert Voices), I have shown how such simplifications are far from working smoothly as would be suggested by the claims.

I have started from the hypothesis that approaches belonging to the 'phenomenon of the voice' do not simply engage in the process of communication of *the voices of the poor* to the audience they seek to influence, but rather in the process of representation of the poor and their voices. Hence the problematization of power relations became a point of reference for this research, addressing what Wilkins (2000) and Escobar (2000) considered a gap in contemporary debate on communication and development.

Panos claims that strategies of change can be promoted through processes of communication; marks the uniqueness of its Oral Testimony methodology that gives the poor the opportunity "to assert their own reality, showing how partial are the view of outsiders" (Slim 1993:55) and challenge the generalizations of development debates; gives centrality to the voices of the poor and the need to listen to them so that "the cycle of poverty can be broken". All these aspects prompted me to go deeper into such claims (especially of authenticity, participation and empowerment) and discuss them within the framework of the 'politics of representation' and power relations in development discourses and practices. This allowed me to assess the inconsistency between claims and practices (of representation).

The analysis of Panos' approach to the realities of poverty (chapter 3) shows that, notwithstanding all the claims about the 'reality of everyday life' and the 'real needs' *the voices of the poor* can convey, the measures to preserve the authenticity of these voices, and the insistence on the dichotomy between the reality of poverty known to the poor and the rhetorical knowledge available to the development experts - many passages reveal an ambiguity in the notion of 'reality', more specifically about the 'truth' of the words of the poor.

I have argued that, in dismissing the factuality of the 'reality' it claims to take forward, Panos creates and ambiguity that delegitimizes the 'truth' the poor bring into the equation of development processes, while nominally still asserting the counter-discursive value of oral testimonies and their 'realness'. By being in the "discursive position" (Ziai 2007:9) of defining what counts as true and "conferring it authority and legitimation" (Gunew 1990:17), Panos implicitly engages in a political process that may produce the effect of reinforcing existing relations of knowledge/truth production – thus contradicting the potential for oral testimonies to "speak truth to power" (Shaffer 2004:39).

The engagement in such process is confirmed and further developed in the analysis of the claims made about the use of the *voices of the poor* as an element of social change (chapter 4). I have considered Panos' narratives - that define specific causes and solutions of poverty, and position specific actors and

actions within this process – as a form of expression of a broader set of development discourses on poverty, participation, empowerment and change. Notwithstanding the claim that "the poor should re-write development" (Warrington 2006) and "drive and shape the changes needed to improve their lives[48] ", the discourse analysis of its texts reveals how Panos partakes into the reproduction of dominant development discourses that define "whose voices count in particular political and institutional contexts" (Brock 2001:1), with important implications for the way in which "information and knowledge come to be represented in the policy process" (ibid:6). Finally, by defending the need to produce the voice, Panos contributes to "the construction of a particular reality – one that justifies [its] existence and intervention within it" (Cooke 2001:15).

I have also argued that Panos, marking an important difference with standpoint epistemology, is neither involved in the "critical examination of the dominant institutional beliefs and practices that systematically disadvantage the marginalized" (Harding 2005:229). Though Panos claims to "strive to include the voices of the poor and marginalized", it is not sufficiently problematizing the practices (of representation) justified in order to make these voices included; neither it is problematizing the institutional and political structures the voices will be included in. By maintaining unquestioned the very structure that tend to dismiss *the voices of the poor* as anecdotal and by simply trying to encourage it to complement its views by taking seriously the voices (represented in 'familiar' and accessible formats), Panos is actually contributing to the depoliticization of the counter-discursive role the testimonies are supposed to have.

This process of depoliticization is finally confirmed by the analysis of the linguistic and representational strategies used in editing and presenting the voices "into accessible first-hand stories for online resources"(chapter 5). This analysis also addresses empirically the other simplification characterizing 'the phenomenon of the voice' – the *authenticity* of the voices – by showing how different levels of framing actually impact the shape and the meaning of the narrative – raising reasonable doubts on 'whose versions emerge'. I have argued that the practice of representation can be considered one of the forms through which power circulates: the power to mark, decide what is more "interesting, eloquent, powerful" (Bennet 1999:70), make a discourse true and authentic. Those who have the power to represent, have the power to circulate meanings. I have shown how the claimed role of oral testimonies in challenging stereotypes ends up producing (through representation) another essentialized image of the poor – turning their accounts into "web-suffer spectacle" (Shaffer 2004:39) and contributing to the risk of a cosmetic, aesthetic and instrumental use of the voices.

The last consideration recalls the attention to the need recognized both by the WB and Panos to 'frame' *the voices of the poor* in order for these to be taken seriously and not be dismissed as "merely interesting anecdotes" (Narayan

[48] http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=15

2002:3). While the WB deemed necessary to use statistics to "frame, affirm and add credibility to the economic and social trends the poor reported" (ibid), Panos seems to use *the voices of the poor* to add credibility and a closer sense of 'reality' to what the statistics (and the generalisations of development debates) say; moreover - unlike the WB that used external experts and questionnaires since the collection - it seems to strive for creating the conditions that allow the poor to express themselves in culturally appropriate ways.

Despite this main difference, I believe that the WB and Panos share in this regard the same language and narrative, which ultimately shapes the way *the voices* are represented and considered. Panos gives authority to the need to 'listen to the voices of the poor' by quoting the WB study (Warrington 2008a, Panos 2007b). At the same time, the WB's stress on the "authenticity and significance" (Narayan 2000:1) of the work, the identification of the poor as "poverty experts" (ibid:1), the "unique insights and understanding" (ibid:25) brought by the voices, and the hope they "call you to action" and result in "more effective poverty alleviations strategies", clearly resonate with the narratives analysed throughout this paper.

The existence of "discursive coalitions" (Hajer 1995) involved in the representation of the poor and their voice is the broader context within which the 'phenomenon of the voice' should be investigated and problematized. It is in the light of this that I can affirm that representation matters: it matters not only because (as would be suggested by Panos' claims) it helps make the words of the poor meaningful for an audience that does not share their same conceptual maps. It matters mainly because it has the power to shape the way the voices are included (taken seriously or dismissed) within the debates they aim to influence. In this case, representation might be regarded also as "the fact of standing for another, especially with authority to act on that other's account[49] ". By holding a "discursive position" that justifies its intervention in the process of framing the voices, Panos is actually assuming the authority to act on (behalf of) the accounts of the poor.

If "discourses can be questioned [as] they can be revealed to be constructions and therefore changeable" (Hall 1997:56), it is important to ask first who is in the discursive position to change discourses and by means of which strategies. I consider the "discursive power" (Hajer 1995) these voices are expected to gain because of the intervention of Panos to be finally undermined also by the very practice of representation that reduces them to standardized accounts of poverty, and opens up spaces for their mis-appropriation, reinterpretation and underestimation.

Approaches belonging to 'the phenomenon of the voice' cannot be considered inherently good, but need to be discussed in the light of the problematization of the "institutionally based discursive networks" (Gunew 1990:23) they are created by and later included in. Their ultimate success, I argue, is not in contributing to the participation of the poor in social change, but rather in appropriating their lived realities of poverty for institutional gains.

[49] Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, Fifth Edition. Oxford: University Press 2006

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Linguistic and Narrative similarities within the 'phenomenon of the voice': some examples

Narrative	**VOICES of the POOR** (WB)	**PHOTOVOICE** (Participatory Photography)	**INSIGHT** (Participatory Video)
The poor (the only and real experts of poverty) are given the opportunity to express themselves in their own terms. By giving their voices, they can assert their perspectives on poverty and present themselves as agents of change, thus readdressing outsiders' views of poverty and the poor.	There are 2,8 billion poverty experts, the poor themselves	[…] by enabling [the poor] to have control over how they are perceived by the rest of the world	[…] provides the opportunity for rural people to document their own knowledge and to express their wants and hopes from their own perspectives
	[…]focusing directly on the perspectives and expertise of poor people	[…] these individuals find confidence in their voices and are enabled to speak out about their challenges, concerns, hope and fears	[…] enable people to develop greater control over their own development and the decisions affecting their lives
	Conviction that […] any policy document on poverty should be based on the experiences, aspirations and priorities of the poor themselves	Opportunity […] to see them as active individuals rather than as helpless victims	
		[…] enables people in need to document their lives, as only the can really know them	
		[…] offers extraordinary insights into ways of life captured by the very people that live them on a daily basis	
		[…] enabling participants to become advocates for change	
		[…] giving a voice to those who are too often ignored or silenced	

The voices (readable, audible, visible) give the audience the opportunity to get closer to the poor and their realities. The concreteness of the voices makes them more authentic, immediate and appealing	The study presents very directly, trough people's own voices, the reality of their lives	Opportunity to really glimpse their lives	[…] presents an inside view in a lively way. The films can be easily understood and stimulate the interest of people
	We commend you the authenticity and significance of this work	We get closer to truly understanding their lives and needs	
The voices, given their authenticity and immediacy, are supposed to move the audience to reflect and act on what heard and seen	Call out all of us to rethink our strategies	[…] and perhaps move ourselves to help bring about change	[…] used for lobbying and advocacy purposes by showing them to policymakers
	We are prepared to make the effort to try to respond to these voices	[…] enabling participants to inform and affect policy	
	[…] hope that the voices in this book will call you to action as they have us	[…] are used to raise awareness on local and international levels, amongst policy makers and the general public	

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PhotoVoice: http://www.photovoice.org

Insight: http://www.insightshare.org

Appendix 2
Focalisation: the Subject

EMPHASIS ON NARRATOR and minimization of the role of the interviewer	We use the term narrator rather than interviewee to reflect the fact that they are narrating their story, rather than answering the interviewer's questions (Warrington 2008b) It places emphasis on the knowledge and experience of the narrator, not the interviewer (Bennet 1999:3) This involves […] encouraging the interviewee to dictate the direction of the interview (Warrington 2008a)
COMMUNICATIVE REPERTOIRE OT attempts to respect the 'communicative repertoire' of the narrator in the phase of collection	OT is a method that allows people who are marginalised to communicate their views in unstructured, informal, open-ended, in-depth interviews (Panos 2007a:62) It gives people the opportunity to express themselves in their own terms, employing their language, relating their history, their stories… (Slim 1993:9) […] encounters that recognize them as the active subjects of the interview, free to act as narrators in their own idiom (Slim 1993:76)
DICHOTOMY their reality/outsiders' interpretation strengthens the assumption that the narrator is supposed to be the poor	Giving these groups their own voice through the collection and communication of their personal testimony is an important way of […] enabling their version of reality, not an outsider's view, to be heard (Slim 1993:53) For the narrator, the opportunity to tell their own story in the way they wish, rather than being interpreted by others (Warrington 2006)

Appendix 3
Focalisation: the Object

VOICE		The goal is to increase understanding and awareness of the impact of land degradation and desertification by amplifying the voices of the rural poor who live in desert environments (Internal Doc)
VOICE conveys	EMOTIONS FEELINGS HUMANITY	To amplify the voices and experiences of those living in desert environments in order to humanise the desertification story (Internal Doc) The collection of testimonies […] helps us understand how the impact of desertification is felt by individuals (Internal Doc)
	INSIGHTS FOR DEVELOPMENT	To ignore these voices is to ignore a formidable body of evidence and information (Slim 1993:1) […] people's view of interventions that are being made (Bennet 1999:18) It can lead to a critique of development policies (Bennet 1999:2) The testimonies […] increase our understanding of certain issues by providing new learning and viewpoints (Warrington 2008b) […] leading to new questions and answers, and new puzzles and potential solutions (Slim 1993:137)

Appendix 4
Focalisation: the Receiver

INTENDED AUDIENCE	**Local**	Partners are supported to find appropriate ways to share the testimonies to local audiences in order to stimulate discussion and debate (Warrington 2008b) In Sudan, regional government and NGO representatives were invited to this community dialogue and pledged their support to the communities (Internal Doc)
	National	Nationally, our partners employ different strategies to engage national audiences in the outcomes of the testimonies (Warrington 2008b)
	International	Panos works with English translations to reach international audiences who we believe should read the testimonies (Warrington 2008b) The programme developed a website to promote the testimonies, photographs and feature stories to a large international audience of media, policymakers, NGOs and researchers/academics (Internal Doc)
BENEFITS RECEIVED		It may be more on the benefit of others, as in the case of the people who gave their time in the hope that the relevant authorities might improve their understanding and so develop more appropriate responses (Slim 1993:154) Support for communication in the context of sustainable development […] involves a dialogue in which power-holders listen to, consider, respect and use the knowledge and views of the poor (Panos 2007b:8) As people's testimonies begin to require answers and as their voices force the development establishment to be more accountable for their actions (Slim 1993:2) Hearing ordinary people's voices and opinions on development issues can change the way decision makers think about a situation or process (Panos 2006b) Testimonies…enlighten planners and policymakers about how it feels to be at the sharp end of development. (http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=433)

Appendix 5
Focalisation: the Opponent

ACCESS TO COMMUNICATION	The capacity of poor people of making their voices heard is limited: they often lack access to powerful people and to costly communication technologies, as well as the skills to use them (Panos 2007b:8) The current debate on desertification does not include the voices and experiences of those living in desert environments (Internal Doc) In many countries, media outlets tend to focus on the views and experiences of a select few, particularly politicians and elites. As a result, the people most affected by development processes and decisions have no voice and cannot articulate their concerns and perspectives, or actively engage in debate (http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=20020)
NOT LISTENED	All too often planners and policy makers hear only what they want to, and adopt methods of listening which ignore the more challenging or awkward views and testimonies (Slim 1993:3) They may lack patience and then willingness to listen with openness, to learn the unexpected or the uncomfortable, to unravel or accept the confusing or the contradictory (Bennet 1999:17) […] but on the Internet, many people will be speaking with nobody listening (Panos 2007b:24)
BIAS of educated and political elite	[…] tendency to dismiss testimony as purely 'anecdotal' and lacking the substance of facts and figures (Slim 1993:102) One of the reasons why poor communities are so seldom heard is because of the documentary bias – the bias of the written word – which exists at all the key stages of development planning, implementation and evaluation. (Slim 1993:3) Part of this tension [between quantitative and qualitative information] is created by the bias of the educated and political elite, which tends to exaggerate the objectivity of something which is 'down on paper' (Slim 1993:150)
Unstated Conclusion [Need for Helper]	Although we strongly feel that the testimonies speak for themselves, there is a need to communicate their value to different target audiences (media, policymakers, NGOs) to encourage them to read and take seriously these personal first-hand accounts, alongside other more 'formal' documentation/information sources (Warrington 2008b).

Appendix 6
Focalisation: the Helper

OPPONENT	STRATEGY TO OVERCOME	
ACCESS TO COMMUNICATION	Creation of spaces of communication and inclusion of the voices	Panos promotes the participation of poor and marginalised people in national and international development debates through media and communication projects (http://www.panos.org.uk/aboutus) We create new spaces for people often sidelined from policymaking to be heard at local, national, and international levels (http://www.panos.org.uk/aboutus) We have helped create, facilitate and develop communication mechanisms and processes that allow poor and marginalised people to enter and engage in policy debates and decision making at local, national and international levels (Panos 2007c) We shed light on ignored, misrepresented or misunderstood development issues (http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=15) Panos strives to include the voices of poor and marginalised people (http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=24010)
	More specifically, involvement and training of journalists	We offer assistance, including funding, so that journalists can gather the opinions of people living in areas remote from urban centres in order to produce more balanced and well-rounded stories (http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=99) Panos supports print and radio journalists in developing countries to produce news, features and analysis about the most critical global issues of today. Their work fosters debate and provides new perspectives on development challenges (Panos 2007c) Panos has trained journalists to collect the OT of poor people and broadcast these as widely as possible in an attempt to reach the people who have the power to make changes (Panos 2007c)
NOT LISTENED	Make the voices heard	OT work serves to amplify the voices of those living in the 'underside of development', ensuring that they are heard and become increasingly influential in the shaping of development (Slim 1993:158) We enable people speak out and be heard (http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=15)

BIAS	Representation and framing of the voices	[…] presenting their views in formats which are familiar to the professionals it seeks to influence (Slim 1993:102) […] make the report convincing and acceptable (Slim 1993:102) Combine the qualitative material of OT with the quantitative forms of information more readily acceptable to planners and policy makers (Slim 1993:102)

Appendix 7
Focalisation: the Sender

Normative Assumption	The role of listeners come with certain obligations. A reciprocal exchange is required in which what is heard is both given back and carried forward (Slim 1993:2)
PHYSICAL PERSONS	The trained journalists/photographers/community workers will act as multipliers of information on the needs of the communities (Internal Doc)
PANOS	At the same time, Panos works with English translations to reach international audiences who we believe should read the testimonies (Warrington 2008c) Panos will use its extensive network to widely promote the 'microsite' to an international audience of policymakers, NGOs, media and researchers/academics (Internal Doc)
MEDIA	The projects outputs – national and international features and the 'microsite' – improved the quality and quantity of media coverage on desertification and contributed to the debate being more informed and inclusive (Internal Doc) By […] including the voices of poor people and those working to support them, the media can extend the range of views in the public domain (Panos 2007a:20) The media are also an important outlet for local people to express themselves and make their views known, on their own terms (http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=21168) Media coverage of issues revealed in testimonies can amplify poor people's voices, maximising their potential for wider impact outside the communities (Panos 2007a:49) It is also important to generate debate at the local, regional and – if possible- national levels, amplifying the voices to make sure they are heard by policymakers and the general public. The most effective way of doing this is through the mainstream media (Panos 2007a:64)

Appendix 8
Narrative of Change

NARRATORS	[Claim 1 in Synthesis Table]	We believe that poor and marginalised people should drive and shape the changes needed to improve their lives (http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=15)
OUTSIDERS	Linked to benefits of the RECEIVERS Linked to HELPER/SENDER who conveys the voice	Words can change lives, but only if people can be persuaded to listen and to act (Slim 1993:94) […] getting more effective at communicating the testimonies in order to influence change and development (Warrington 2008b) […] ensuring that ordinary people's views and perceptions begin to exert influence in development staff, governments, donors, policy makers and academics (Warrington 2008b) […] to listen in order to bring about change means communicating what has been heard to those who can facilitate change (Slim 1993:94) Panos has trained journalists […] in an attempt to reach the people who have the power to make changes (Panos 2007c)
COMMUNICATION		Information and communication processes are fundamental to sustainable development and lie at the hearth of change (Panos 2007b:7)
AMBIGUOUS	Change from an initial situation of stability (McCloskey 1997)	OT as a way for ordinary men and women to articulate and communicate their perspectives on development and change (Panos 2005) Oral testimony is well suited to exploring some of the more complex and longer term changes undergone by communities and individuals as they adapt to new environments (http://www.panos.org.uk/?lid=433)
	Unclear/not stated what happens next (Unstated Conclusion: change brought by outsiders)	Narrators are asked about past experience and their hopes for the future, as well as about the current situation: this long-term view can provide a deeper understanding of change (Warrington 2008b) OT allows such groups to document and record their memories and understanding of the past, and reflect upon its relation to the present. This can strengthen their articulation of their priorities and concerns for the future (Bennet 1999:7)

Appendix 9
Narrative of Participation and Empowerment

STRAIGHTFORWARD CLAIMS ABOUT POWER BROUGHT BY OT	
AIM	How do we access the stories and voices of the most marginalised people in a respectful and empowering way? (Warrington 2006)
ASSUMPTION	Speaking out is an act of power (Slim 1993:3) Many so called 'ordinary people' rarely have the opportunity speak out and contribute to development decisions and change (Bennet 1999:2)
STRATEGY	Above all, OT can give those communities more power to set their own agenda for development (Slim 1993:1) Concentrating more resources on fostering better communication and information processes among people – and between people and governments – will increase the power and ability of individuals to take a meaningful part in debates and decision-making processes that are relevant to their lives (Panos 2007b:7) It's a way of giving volume and power to the voices of people who are outside the development establishment and of ensuring that they are heard (Slim 1993:4)
It means recognising that, while not all forms of communication include participatory processes, all forms of **participation** are essentially **communication** processes (Panos 2007b:8)	
NEED for HELPER in order to participate	Panos promotes the participation of poor and marginalised people in the national and international development debates through media and communication projects (http://www.panos.org.uk/aboutus) We have helped create, facilitate and develop communication mechanisms and processes that allow poor and marginalised people to enter and engage in policy debates and decision making at local, national and international levels (Panos 2007c) Its aim is to ensure that the perspectives of the people whose lives are most affected by development (mainly the poor and marginalised) are included within decision-making (Warrington 2008b) The projects outputs – national and international features and the 'microsite' –contributed to the debate being more informed and inclusive (Internal Doc)

OT as ENTRY POINT thus implicitly influencing representation	The collection of individual life stories can prove a powerful entry point into discussion and understanding of current conditions (Slim 1993:57) The launch event and workshop at national and regional level will empower the concerned communities to participate in debates about the issues which affect their lives (Internal Doc) A launch event for NGO, media, government, research/academic representatives will create an opportunity to promote the exhibition and to facilitate a dialogue that includes presentations from community representatives (Internal Doc)
PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCESS	
COLLECTION	One purpose of a workshop is to ensure that all project participants are involved in the development and design of the interview collection and related activities (Bennet 1999:27)
PRESENTATION	If you are producing a booklet, involve the community as much as possible in the selection of testimonies and format (Bennet 1999:56) The best thing is to discuss these ideas with all concerned, and see which format they would prefer (Bennet 1999:71)
DISSEMINATION and FOLLOW UP	Towards the end of the workshop, interviewers are involved in planning the project and outlining initial ideas for dissemination (Warrington 2008b) Methods of dissemination need to be agreed, so that the narrators are aware of the nature of the transaction (Slim 1993:153) Discuss some of the follow-up activities with the narrators and other members of the community (Bennet 1999:38) Send letters of appreciation if appropriate, and when it comes to follow-up activities, make sure everyone is informed and as involved as they wish to be (Bennet 1999:56) To determine the outputs and activities you wish to base around the testimonies, you should consult the communities concerned and other participants (Bennet 1999:68)
EVALUATION	Consultation with those involved in the project is the key to measuring qualitative objectives. […] participatory discussion and reflection with those involved. As a guide, the following groups should be consulted to obtain their feedback and opinions on different aspects of the project (Bennet 1993:78)

Appendix 10
Synthesis Table (paraphrased and simplified)

The table consists of 4 columns; I advice to read it from WARRANT to DATA to CLAIM, and then to consider the REBUTTALS. The rebuttals of the first table (realm of Discourse) become the data of the second one (realm of Practice), providing the ground to justify the need to frame the voices.

The design of the table (also known as Toulmin-George format) and its rational are based on the paper 'Structure and Meanings' (Gasper 2000b).

CLAIM	DATA	WARRANT	REBUTTAL
I propose that…	Given that…	And given the priciple that…	Unless these conditions…
Conclusions	Grounds supporting the conclusions	General and/or theoretical ideas Normative statements	Counterarguments

[The table is reported in the following page]

REALM OF DISCOURSE			
CLAIMS 1	**DATA**	**WARRANT**	**REBUTTAL**
	[OBJECT]		[OPPONENT]
The poor should re-write development, drive and shape the changes affecting their lives.	They can offer solutions and criticize the pitfalls of current develpment policies.	The poor are the real experts in development, as they experience it daily.	The development expertise tends to dismiss the voices of the poor as anecdotal and lacking the substance of facts and figures.
If the poor have a say in poverty policies, the cycle of poverty can be broken.		Poverty and voicelesseness are mutually reinforcing problems.	
The poor must be able to participate in debates and be heard.		The poor want the space to voice out their experiences and want to be heard.	The poor lack access to powerful people, skills, communication methods and technologies to make their voices heard.
			Words can change lives only if people are persuaded to listen and act.
			Policy makers often hear what they want to hear and ignore the voices of the poor.
"We believe that poor and marginalised people should drive and shape the changes needed to improve their lives" (www.panos.org.uk/?lid=15) "We believe that those most affected by change should be enabled to drive and shape that change" (www.panos.org.uk/?lid=14)			
REALM OF PRACTICE			
CLAIMS 2	**DATA**	**WARRANT**	**REBUTTAL**
[HELPER]	[OPPONENT]		
Audiences need to be encouraged to read and take seriously the testimonies. The voices should be framed in formats familiar to the professionals and more readily acceptable.	The development expertise tends to dismiss the voices of the poor as anecdotal and lacking the substance of facts and figures.	If these voices are ignored, development interventions will continue by default to increase and create inequalities.	
There is a need to become more effective at communicating the testimonies.			
OT can amplify the voices of the poor and ensure they are heard and become increasingly influential.	Policy makers often hear what they want to hear and ignore the voices of the poor.		
The poor should be included in debates, be enabled to speak out and be heard.	The poor lack access to powerful people, skills, communication technologies and methods to make their voices heard.		

Appendix 11
Levels of Framing as recognized by Panos

GENERAL		It's better to remain honest about the difficulties of achieving completely equal power over process, content and outcome (Bennet 1999:21) It's important to be realistic, and honest, about the inevitable degree of filtering through others that the narrator's account is likely to undergo – from the interviewer to transcriber to translator – and to do your best to keep this to a minimum (Bennet 1999:65) The variety of formats in which OT can be presented will involve what the British historian Rebecca Abrams has regretted as the inevitable 'injury' to the original testimony (Slim 1993:149) Be honest – and transparent – about your aims and intentions. Otherwise, your audience (and even you) may not realize the extent to which any selection you make is presenting a particular aspect of the material – reflecting your own interests, for example – rather than the whole range of concerns contained in the interviews. (Bennet 1999)
INTERVIEW	**Narrator shapes the interview more than the interviewer**	A considerable part of any OT reflects the memory, opinion and culture of the narrator – and, to a lesser extent, the influences of interviewer and editor (Slim 1993:150) The interview is also guided by the personal knowledge and experience of the person being interviewed (Warrington 2008b) This need not be a list of specific questions, but rather a logical grouping of the topics to be covered (Slim 1993:76) The majority of the questions in an OT interview are open-ended; as well as encouraging narrators to do most of the talking, such questioning also allows the unexpected to emerge (Warrington 2008b) This involves 'active listening' and encouraging the interviewee to dictate the direction of the interview (Warrington 2008a)

	Recognition of the non-neutral role of the interviewer	Any OT you collect is material which you have not just discovered, but in one sense have helped to create (Slim 1993:148) The very word interview, that literally means 'seeing between', embodies this idea of a particular perspective worked out or created between two parties (Slim 1993:149) […] the role of the interviewer is by no means neutral (Bennet 1999:20) Their questions, the leads they choose to pursue or to leave, all these influence the shape of the narrative (Bennet 1999:20) The skills and motivation of the interviewer will affect the character of the narrator's testimony. The interviewer's special interests, and ability to question and to prompt will determine the interview's flow and direction (Slim 1993:147) The power relationship will affect its content and tone. The interviewer also brings a particular knowledge base, which is more or less suited to follow up particular leads (Slim 1993:147)
	Frames brought by the interviewer, but not explicitly recognized as such	An element of 'lateral listening' is required – looking beyond or around elusive replies, and listening between the lines. This can help to identify what is being left unsaid and to assess the significance of pauses and silences. (Bennet 1999:17) Although respect is the priority, occasionally it might be appropriate to challenge or press the narrator a little on a subject (Bennet 1999:51) To uncover this kind of qualitative information [values, perceptions, experiences, priorities], certain kinds of questions are very useful for exploring the meaning and significance of events described or information given (Bennet 1999:44) We were able to read these and provide feedback to the interviewers before their second visit to the communities (Internal Doc)
TRANSCRIPTION TRANSLATION	**Unavoidable framings**	Even [the original language transcript] will be the product of someone one stage removed from the narrator, with the inevitable omissions and confusions (Slim 1993:89) Meaning is held not simply in the words, but between the words, in the pauses and

		hesitations, in the emphasis, inflection, intonation. These things are hard to translate from the spoken voice to the written word. Translation and editing inevitably involve tinkering with the original text, and it is these changes and their impact on the meaning of a testimony which make it essential to keep a master copy of the original (Slim 1993:149)
	Responsibility of transcriber and translator	Spoken languages may not have a written form, and interviewers' language skills may prevent them from preparing an accurate transcript in the national language (Warrington 2008b) If a translator decides to cut corners, and puts down what they think the narrator must have meant, there is a real danger of misinterpretation (Bennet 1999:65)
	Importance of keeping a master-copy	But even OT, in translation, has been filtered. Without access to the original tapes, readers are advised to exercise the usual caution. To keep a master copy of the original […] will act as an important point of reference and provide a critical authority for all future interpretations (Slim 1993:149)
EDITING	**General**	Presentation by narrator […] involves more substantial editing, whereby you select what seems to you and other participants to be the most interesting, eloquent, powerful or representative sections (Bennet 1999:70) The editor's skill in comparing and contrasting the material is crucial in giving the collection its shape and message (Slim 1993:91) Equally, the editor can misinterpret or 'correct' perceptions. Ideally, although this can be difficult in practice, the edited versions should be checked with the sources (Slim 1993:91) While the aim [of editing] is to make the meaning of the words as clear as possible to the reader and/or listener, it is also on the basis that one should remain as true to the original as possible (Bennet 1999:72). We have edited lightly - mainly to remove repetition or confusion and, in many cases, the interviewers' questions. We also sometimes moved text to ease understanding. Sometimes, losing the preceding question or text has meant we had to insert some additional text for clarification, which we indicate with square brackets (Bennet 1999:72)

		Many layered process that draws on different skills, perspectives and backgrounds (Internal Doc) It is important to establish what you want your audience to learn or gain from the material. […] this will influence any selection and editing decisions you make (Bennet 1999:69)
	Importance of editing to improve the quality of the material	A selection of the best testimonies will be analysed and carefully edited into accessible first-hand stories for the on-line resources (Internal Doc) Considerable work is done in any OT collection to prepare it for international dissemination. On receipt of the translated testimonies, they were all read, improved grammatically and summarised (Internal Doc) Partners were again consulted about the thematic analysis and other background information on the areas being prepared for uploading, and the web content was adjusted accordingly (Internal Doc)
	Purpose of collection influences types of presentation	It's important to ensure that [the type of presentation] builds on the comparative advantage of oral evidence and plays to its strengths: on hidden undocumented worlds; on the reality of family lives, village lives, minority lives; on making connections between sectors which single disciplines can often miss; and on exposing the inadequacy of generalisations and revealing the rich variety of human experience (Slim 1993:90)

Appendix 12

Narratives Analysis and Analysis of Representation of the testimonies

The analysis covers the ten Oral Testimonies collected in Sudan and edited for the website (www.panos.org.uk/?lid=19974), grouped by narrator. They have been confronted with the original interviews which were collected by two Sudanese journalists and two Sudanese development workers – both men and women.

The overview, carried out by relying on specific tools of Narrative Analysis and Analysis of Representation, covers a broader range of aspects than those summarized in chapter 5; this is because its purpose was to assess how the claims on the value and uniqueness of OT are put into practice. The capital letters refer two the initials of the name of the narrators.

Oral Testimonies: a range of views

According to what is stated in the web page summarising the project, "these accounts have been chosen to represent as far as possible the range of concerns and experiences found in the testimonies collected".

The **original imbalance** of 26 narrators, out of which 17 were men and 9 women, 10 interviewed by the journalists and 16 by development workers, has been addressed in the selection of the testimonies for the web: 5 men and 5 women, 5 interviewed by the journalists and 5 by the development workers. Even the age of the narrators contributes to such balance: 4 are less than 30 (3 women, 1 man), 4 (3 men, 1 woman) are middle-aged (45 – 67), 2 are over 68 (1man, 1 woman).

The **social position** too is an element that unveils the intention to present, as far as possible, a heterogeneous range of view and to include what Panos considers 'marginal voices'. The importance of this aspect is confirmed by the fact that the social position of each narrator is always emphasised **since the introduction**: EE 'started to migrate for many years in many countries', FA 'is separated from her husband', MA 'is an agricultural extension worker', IS 'has personal experience of the difficulties of migration', SA 'does voluntary work as a teacher' and so on. This contributes a great deal to the **personalisation** of such accounts.

Framing meaning in the collection

Common questions

Notwithstanding the different background of the narrators, they are asked a set of **common questions**. This choice is due to the need to uncover basic information (about the family life, the daily practices..) and to follow a topic-list previously arranged. This may produce the effect of providing the testimonies with both a **common deep structure** and a **variable superficial structure** (by unveiling contradictions/different perceptions among the narrators on a same topic).

Role of the interviewer: background, questions, bias, language

Beyond the individuality of the narrator, what may contribute more to the production of heterogeneous testimonies is the **role of the interviewer**, that with his/her questions, attitude or bias may shape the form and the content of the narrative.

The first important aspect to point out, since it's clear in its effect on the narrative, is the fact that the **background** of the interviewer (journalist or

development worker) - thus his/her **interest** in the collection of the testimony – strongly determines the kind of questions asked. Indeed I have observed that, as a constant pattern, the journalists never ask questions about possible solutions and the development workers never ask questions about personal feelings.

On the contrary, **journalists** explicitly look for the narrators to voice out their **feelings** by explicit questions such as 'How is your *feeling* when you are far from your family?', 'Where you *uneasy*? What was the *feeling* of your wife?' (ME), 'Describe your *feeling* when you are away from your family' (EE), 'Tell us something about your *feelings* while you were a migrant' (EN).

Furthermore, their questions seem to solicit the narrators to provide personal anecdotes that may later on turn useful in order to build a **(moving) story**: 'Does the father send letters? Are pupils sitting on chairs or on the ground?' (EE), 'But the school is distant, do the children go there daily? Sand dunes are very closed to your house, will you continue to live near them?' (FA).

Finally, the same purpose might justify the search for **details** that may seem irrelevant but which finally contribute to enrich the picture of the story narrated: 'On what month this happened? To what towns they migrate? Did he leave the school? What did he learn? What is the content of the meal?' (ME).

Some of the interviewers' summaries confirm how the choice to insist on personal feelings and detailed stories belongs to the purposes of the interview since its conception: 'The interview is inclusive of all issues, in addition to *human aspects*' (ME), 'I succeeded in convincing the narrator to talk inner *personal feelings*' (FA). The **lack of questions about possible solutions** makes that the sense of fatalism and resignation expressed by the words of the narrators is reinforced.

On the other hand, the questions asked by **development workers** are mainly **technical** ones, such as: Why you stopped the cultivation of dura? How was the shape of the forest? How did you make use of Qdaim trees? What's alwahish? Where do you get the building materials? Are the prices of crops cost-effective? Development workers are also the only ones to ask explicitly about possible **solutions**, as I will extensively explain later on.

Beyond the main difference just analysed, we can identify numerous other ways by which the interviewer may shape the narrative. The most evident case is given by the **leading questions.**

These are questions whose answer is implicitly suggested by the very words or statements of the interviewer: Is it man made? If the land is productive, can the people produce? That means that there is an economic deterioration and that affects the social side, do you agree with me? Can we say the problem is economic? Let's talk about the woman, does she have a role? Does she suffer?

Or questions introduced by a sentence in which the interviewer makes explicit his assumption on an issue: After the organizations and government came to you…; The problem now is desertification…; The men migrate and the woman bears the responsibility…; Notably the people were closed and had their own tradition…

Another example is given by what I call the **'Why Questions'.** These are questions asked to go deeper into what may be relevant aspects of the interview and to make the narrators giving their perspective about the causes of phenomena just mentioned: 'What's the reason behind that? What is the problem?' (EE), 'Why did you leave the school? Why does the water become so deep?' (WI).

Sometimes such questions are rhetoric in the sense that an answer was already given by the narrator, who now is simply asked to make it explicit: Why you travel so much? Why is the sesame cheap? Why there are no occupations? Why migrants do not return?

Interestingly, such questions serve later on the purpose of giving the editing version a logical flow, emphasising a **cause-effect link** not originally given by the narrator: 'there is no guarantee of harvest *because*…', 'Lack of employment is *due to*…', 'They are trapped *because*…', 'The *reason* I travel is…'.

But the interviewer may shape the content of the narrative even in more subtle ways. The interviewer may bring into the interview his/her own **bias** and insist in order to view this bias confirmed. For instance ME is repeatedly asked about the impact of migrants returning to the village, the journalist assuming they have changed their behaviour while living in towns: Did they affect you after their return? Did they bring tobacco to the village? Did they smoke cigarettes in the town? How they treat you?

The interviewer has furthermore the possibility to **interrupt** the narrator or leaving some issues **unquestioned**. For instance, during OS detailed overview of the possible solutions to land degradation, he starts to speak about the issue of access to land – but the interviewer leaves it unexplored and goes on introducing a different topic. SA introduces the issue of female circumcision. However, despite the relevance of the issue and the fact that nobody else had mentioned it, the interviewer doesn't investigate further and asks a question about household furniture's.

Finally, the way the interviewer introduces the project and its aims might raise the **expectations** of the narrator or influence the choice of the content and the language used. OS is told that the aim of the interview is 'to *convey* your message to the concerned bodies so as to *help* you'. FA is told that the journalist 'came to reflect her personal experience' that will be reviewed in booklets and 'published on the Organization's website'. FA seems to seize the opportunity she thinks she has been given by underlining her personal misfortunes, using a language of pietism and self-victimisation.

Despite the direction explicitly or implicitly given by the interviewer, **unexpected answers** – contradicting the explicit or implicit assumption of the interviewer – may come. Some of them are reported, as in the case of EN denying that he observed any change in his daughters' behaviours when he was away. Some of them are not reported, as in the case of EE stating that 'There isn't any **change** in children's behaviour' and that he finds 'impossible to reflect the culture gained (during migration) on people'.

The interviewer may also have an **influence in the language** used by the narrators, who are sometimes pushed by specific questions about personal feelings to adopt an **emotionally charged** language – as the case of EN, FA, and EE shows. However, even though not pushed by the interviewer (as in the case of development workers), some narrators naturally perform a narration full of colourful images, words and anecdotes – as the case of NA, WI, SA and IS shows (*Poor* people who *suffer*, Our youth are *good*, I myself don't recognize our chief, I can see from here till the tower of Sudatel, There is a *great suffering*, He *sacrifices* for us, He is *heart-broken*, Life is *difficult*, They have *no choice*, We are the *victims*, We *suffer* a lot…). Interestingly, such expressions are **always reported**, even in **emphatic** positions as titles or quotes in the introduction.

Framing meaning in editing

Headlines, titles and photo-captions

The choice of the headlines, titles and photo-caption associated to each narrator in the edited interview, seems to respond specific representational requirements:

- to maintain or emphasise the **overall spirit** of the original interview (be it characterised by negativity or positivity);
- to **stress** the **emotions** and the **humanity** of the narrator;
- to summarise the **main issue** dealt with in the interview concerned.

In order to meet such requirements, some specific and **standardized strategies** are used:

- quoting the narrator's words as photo-caption: 'I'm carrying their burden and I'm so tired…' (FA), 'The sands will bury them, just as they have buried my house' (NA), 'No man remains' (EE), 'The one who travels…comes back with new notions' (MA);
- quoting the narrator's words as headline: 'Nothing the same' (NA), 'Inside my hearth' (EN), 'Women are exhausted' (FA);
- quoting the narrator's word as title: 'Not a cow or goat was left' (NA), 'Before…I was busy; now I have nothing' (FA), 'A good son', 'Nothing takes education away from someone' (ME), 'We have the workforce and experience' (IS), 'We can stop desertification' (OS).
- repeating these selected quotes in the introduction too;
- building headlines and titles with powerful words not pronounced by the narrator: 'Uncertainties and difficulties' (EE), 'Nothing the same', 'Attempts to protect the village fail' (NA), 'The pain of absence' (EN), 'Forced to buy milk' (FA), 'Migration for survival', 'People leave in despair' (ME), 'Broader horizons' (IS), 'Progress is possible', 'The future' (MA).

Notwithstanding the intention to stress the emotional and human character of the interview relying on the representational strategies just mentioned, some of the titles are also **simply descriptive**: 'Family education', 'Family economics', 'Water scarcity', 'Social implications', 'Work in towns', 'The Zakat Bureau', 'Changing costumes', 'School drop out'.

Introduction to the testimonies

The introduction's purpose is to introduce the narrator and give the reader a taste of the interview underneath reported. Though each introduction is too short to be analysed in the light of any tool to unveil the narrative structure, there are many elements worth-mentioning as far as representation is concerned.

The **quotes** reported are selected – as the quotes in the headlines and titles – in order to stress the emotional and human character of the interview; they may repeat what already quoted in the headline or in the titles, or present other powerful expressions of the narrator: 'Now I have *nothing*. This is a fact, and *I feel shame* to say that' (EN), 'I'm not willing to neglect their education' (ME), 'Whatever income we find, we spend it on food and clothes for our children' (FA).

The choice of the **words** too responds to precise representational purposes. Some words reinforce the **overall negativity** or resignation expressed by the narrators: 'Lives are *dominated by the need* to migrate' (EE), 'Women workload has *greatly* increased' (SA), 'Her brother was *forced*', 'They need money *straightaway'* (WI). Some words address the narrator's features that emphasis his/her **humanity**: 'Mekki is *positive'*, 'He's *proud'*, 'He *worries a great deal'* (ME), 'He's *hopeful*', 'He talks with *nostalgia*' (OS), 'He finds it *hard* to leave behind his wife' (EN). 'Widad is determined' (WI).

The use of certain **conjunctions** may produce an impact on the meaning and interpretation of the interview, focusing the attention of the reader on specific aspects or links that probably may be not so relevant for the narrator, or adding logical

connections not present in the original: '*However* women today have more choice…' (MA), '*Despite* receiving help', '*Although* it was resolved' (NA), '*Despite* this…', '*Although* his education was interrupted…' (IS).

Another important impact on the meaning and interpretation of the interview is given by the **relevance** assigned in the introduction to issues not so much relevant in the original interview. This is the case of the issue of health problems in NA's introduction, where it's reported that 'their health has *suffered*, and malaria has become *common'* though in the original the only words pronounced by NA at this regard are 'There are diarrhoea among children and malaria'. Again, while in the original ME focuses on the material benefits brought by migration, in the introduction equal emphasis is given to the immaterial ones; furthermore, the editors immediately clarify '*but* he worries a great deal about his family when he's abroad', thus readdressing the attention on the human face of the phenomenon.

Finally, a similar impact on the meaning may be produced by the fact that the narrator's **words are only partially reported**, with the effect of emphasising the negativity of the narration. Though in the original NA recognizes that 'yes (there are crops with high yield), but the sand would bury it', in the introduction it's stated that 'few crops can be cultivated and productivity is low' – and then the expression "The sands will bury them" is quoted.

Surface and deep structure

Being the narrators individuals belonging to different backgrounds and bringing their personal lives in, it's clear how the narratives are characterized by a **variable surface structure**. Furthermore we have already seen the role played by the interviewers in giving the narrative a more factual or emotional content. The results are different and subjective narratives, whose protagonists are different, whose anecdotes are different and whose narrators identify different causes of/solution for desertification.

However, as we approach the analysis of the edited interviews themselves, it's worth-mentioning as premise that all the interviews are also characterized by a **common deep structure**. Part of such deep structure reflects Labov's (Labov 1997) identification of abstract, orientation, complicating action, resolution, evaluation, coda as elements characterizing every narrative structure.

The first part of every interview (broadly corresponding to orientation) reports the **first-person narration** of the interviewee, summarising his/her experience and social position. Then follows a paragraph explicitly **contrasting the past** rich condition with the present of poverty (corresponding to complicating action). The contrast is even more evident for the 6 narrators whose first chapter's title contains a clear reference to the past: 'The past was richer' (EN), 'A richer past' (EE), 'Before I was busy; now I have nothing' (FA), 'Past abundance' (MA), 'Looking back' (ME), 'Times of plenty' (OS). Finally, the sequence of the chapters is such that the initial emphasis in the negativity of the present situation is solved in the end, as highlighted by the positive and onward looking tone of the **last chapters** (corresponding to the resolution).

Every female narrator is attributed a chapter or a headline dealing with **women**. Out of 5 testimonies by women, 2 are given a headline specifically mentioning women ('Women are exhausted' FA, 'Women's lives' MA) and 3 presents one chapter dealing with gender issues ('Women increased burden' MA, 'Impact on women' SA, 'The burden of collecting water' WI). This consistency is not necessarily the output of a natural tendency of women to talk about women issues as main focus. Indeed in the case of MA, NA and SA the category 'Women and women issues' has been firstly introduced by the interviewer with the assumption that, being the narrator a woman, she may provide more insights: Has desertification affected the women, notably in the

kitchen and their needs? How long does it take a woman to collect firewood? What about fetching water? Is education available for girls?

Finally, each interview is characterized by a **balance of anecdotes and more factual information** (being these concrete proposals or descriptions of the current environmental, social and economic situation).

Change in narrative sequence

Since Narrators not structured speaking, a process of editing is needed in order to make the narrative structured in such a way. The most evident editing intervention consists in **moving paragraphs**. This operation may be done in order to **group**, under a same chapter, issues originally scattered throughout the interview. FA's reference to the separated husband not helping the family economically has been located under the chapter 'Family economics'; MA's fragments about the past are located under the chapter 'Past abundance' and solutions under 'The future'; NA's accounts of projects' failures, under the chapter 'Attempts to protect the village fail'…and so on.

Sometimes, single sentences are extracted from the original position and moved under other paragraphs to **reinforce its content** (EN, EE), or simply because they were not sufficiently articulated to stand on their own (OS).

Sometimes sentences are moved under chapters **whose content doesn't match** with the original context which the sentence was pronounced in. For instance, EE's "The government did not deliver any aid" is put under the title 'Declining production' while in the original it referred to the issue of school fees.

A problem may emerge when relevant (in my view) opinions are reported under chapters whose title and content is inconsistent, with the **risk of overlook** the opinion itself. For instance, FA's list of solutions is reported under the chapters 'Poor health' and 'Pests and problems'; SA's opinion on the failure of IFAD's projects is reported in the end of the chapter 'The impact on women', though the opinion is an agricultural/technical one.

On the other hand, some sentences are purposefully put in **emphatic positions**, while in the original version were scattered. They may be located at the very beginning of a chapter: 'There is *no income* here', 'We have *no other destination* to go' (EE), 'We will contribute' (MA); or also in the very end, as to give it a moral status: 'I'm diligent about that', 'A husband shall never divorce his wife', 'Nothing takes education away from someone, only death' (ME).

The original narrative sequence may be re-arranged also in order to gain **logical and anecdotic fluency.** OS's chapter 'We can stop desertification' is constructed in a way that reports firstly the detailed description of the past environment and finally ends with OS's statement emphasising the agency of the villagers and proposing his own solution. ME's statement 'I have for sons and four daughters' is immediately followed by a new chapter quoting ME's words 'A good son'. IS's account of the need to migrate is followed by a chapter entitled 'The reality of migration'. WI's episode of the villagers building the house for her, is followed by a paragraph about where people get the building material from.

Even though not always, the changes in the narrative sequence may produce a **change in the original meaning or emphasis** as given by the narrator. For instance, MA's passage about the new notions brought by migration is originally followed by the statement about the right for women to choose their husband, while in the edited version the chapter is interrupted and followed by a new one about 'Women's increased burden'. The issue of the right for women to choose their husband is postponed to another chapter generally about 'Social implications', thus it's not given particular attention.

On the contrary, sometimes the sequence of the paragraphs reflects the sequence of the questions asked in the original, thus revealing the usefulness of posing **sequential questions** for purposes of later dissemination of a clear, logic and complete speech. For instance, after WI's says "so the people rely on forests…", she's asked from where people collect firewood; the edited version cuts the question, but reports the subsequent answer who logically follows her statement.

Words added or changed

The process of editing may affect the original narrative also through the change or addition of words. Such operation can be justified by the need of **clarify** what stated by the narrators, as also stated: under each interview in the web: 'square brackets indicate 'inserted' text for clarification'; in Panos' manual: "we had to insert some additional text for clarification, which we indicate with square brackets" (Bennet 1999:72).

However not always the purpose of clarification is neutral as far as the respect for the original spirit and meaning in concerned; furthermore, not always the words added are signaled by square brackets. For instance, ME's statement that "they travel to the towns isolated" becomes "They move to the towns, feeling isolated from modern life". This addition obtains the effect of emphasising the view of migration as a hostile experience as was not so explicit in the original.

Sometimes, the words added obtain the effect of **stressing the original spirit**: "But we *always* return to our family" (EE), "there were *so many* trees and grasses" (EN), *"But* we *also* depend on our men" (SA), "I was *extremely* worried" (ME). In the case of MA and ME, powerful words such as *progress*, *future*, *development* – not been originally pronounced – are even put in emphatic position.

The most evident change in the meaning due to the addition of words, regards the use of adversative **conjunctions**. This is the case of SA's narrative. She is talking about the fact that lack of money increases celibacy among the youth, "*yet* every mother insists on having everything that her daughter should have". The addition of *yet* sheds on the mothers an implicit blame not perceivable in the original statement.

Passages omitted

As words can be added, some passages may be omitted. This can happen without distorting the original meaning, as in the case of anecdotes characterized by an excessive level of details (EE) or issues not extensively talked to deserve being mentioned (WI, OS).

But it may also happen when the narrator gives an **unexpected** answer (EE saying that "There isn't any change in children's behaviour"), an answer **contradicting** the overall spirit of the interviews (ME's positive view of the life in the village: "Thanks to God that we remain *safe* and *peaceful* till now in the village"), an answer contradicting the general trend expressed by other narrators (EE who migrates before, and not after, the drought; OS stating that "Cutting of trees didn't affect much").

Another set of statements regularly omitted are some of the **quests for help**. Indeed – as we will see in the paragraph about solutions – not all of them are omitted, but only those not sufficiently backed by argued justifications or that would increase the risk of stereotyping the narrator as *beggar* or passive recipient: "You didn't promise us to deliver assistance…But the village has many *poor*, *weak* and *orphan* people" (EN), "It is as well an assistance if *they* pay *us* money" (FA), "If Allah will, we could get benefit from your help and reconstruct the village from the beginning" (NA), "We hope you contribute with a number of trees and take part in providing some necessary

services such as a hospital" (SA). Finally, in two occasions the negative opinion about the lack of assistance delivered by the Zakat Bureau is not reported (EN) or even left unquestioned since the original interview (ME, SA).

Though some **contradictions** among interviewers are not reported (OS, EE), others are: EN stating that he prefers the new resettled village to the old one, WI claiming that there are no diseases in the area.

Passages regularly reported

As there are things regularly omitted, there are aspects **regularly reported**. This is the case of the **anecdotes** told by the narrators, occasionally cut if excessively detailed. The anecdotes strengthen the subjective and individual character of the narratives, and provide them with colourful or moving images: the migrant father sending letters to the children, the son walking 5 kms to reach the school, the old woman who "can see from here till the tower of Sudatel", grandfathers pouring milk on the ground, the mother taking care of the children while the father is away, ancestors "used to break the hooves of animals with their own hands"…and so on.

Any reference to **religion** is reported too ("Thanks to God", "The Almighty bless him", "But Glory be to Allah", "In the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful") as well as any reference to the local botanical or **traditional knowledge** (EN, OS, IS).

Even though not prompted by the interviewer, many narrators mention the **commitment of the villagers** and their attempts to halt desertification without waiting passively. Also this kind of statements is always reported, maybe in order to challenge the stereotype of the villagers as passive recipient of external aid. Such statements are particularly frequent among those narrators (IS, OS, WI, MA) who present the most onward looking attitude, and are characterized by the use of the pronoun *we*: We want to restore the village, We will work on that, We all do handiworks, We can stop desertification, We can build club, We have the workforce and experience…

At the same time, expressions suggesting **lack of agency** and subordination to traditions are equally mentioned. For instance, FA's words reveal how relevant are **traditions** in shaping women's lives and limiting their agency: "Fetching water is a woman chore", "The young girls draw water though pregnant", "They all depend on their sisters". Such sense of resignation is further emphasised by the choice of ending a chapter with "If I have wood I sell it, and if I haven't, I sit in the house".

Further considerations

(De)constructing stereotypes

Although we can consider the opportunity given to narrators to express their commitment, and the choice to emphasise the solution they propose (as we will see in the chapter on solutions), a challenge to the common stereotype of the beneficiaries as passive recipients of help, other representational aspects seem to go into the opposite direction of reinforcing some **stereotypes**.

We have already noticed how every female narrator is attributed a chapter or a headline dealing with **women** and how such categorisation (women talking about women) is somehow guided by the assumption of the interviewers. The titles given to their narratives are mainly negative, stressing on women's sufferance.

The narratives of the male narrators tend to strengthen such typical **gender-dichotomy**, since they men are usually depicted in the act of sacrificing themselves for the sake of the family, while women in the act of waiting the money sent by the

migrant. NA (**the oldest** narrator) is assigned a specific chapter entitled 'Health problems', though the issue has not been extensively talked in the original interview: this may prompt to believe that health has been given such a relevance only because of the age of the narrator. Similarly, **the youngest** woman SA has been associated since the photo caption ('Most of the youth in the village are not married') with the issue of marriage, though not so extensively mentioned by her as has been by other narrators.

View of development assistance and solutions

No matter whether journalist or development worker, every interviewer makes questions by which the narrator is explicitly asked to give his/her opinion about past or current **development interventions**.

Some of these questions are general: Who solves the problems in the village? Who drilled the water wells? Nobody has come to help you?; others specifically mentions the category of **outsider** that the interviewer supposes is expected to intervene: What is the role of the government? Does the government assist you? Can you tell us about the assistance of the organizations and the government? Are you satisfied with its performance?

Though both journalists and development workers ask questions about the assistance received, only the latter solicit the narrator about potential **solutions**: What is your view for the *solution*? Do you have any *proposals*? What is the *alternative*? What are the *efforts* of the villagers? What do you think the *solution* is? The narrators not always articulate their answer. Whatever is the tone of their answer – praise or blame – this is almost always reported: "IFAD did much work and also the government" (OS), "No, they don't help us" (FA). In case of projects' failure, the causes reported are mainly attributed to the indomitable desert creeping , thus suggesting a kind of justification for inaction (EN, NA).

As already underlined, any reference to the inaction of the Zakat Bureau is not reported (EN, SA) or left unquestioned by the interviewer (ME).

The fact that interviewers regularly ask questions about the assistance received, may prompt some narrators to advance their personal quest for help. But, as we have seen, such statements are regularly omitted. They are **reported, and even emphasised**, only in case the narrator:

- advances a well structured proposal;
- extensively articulates the reasons behind the quest for help;
- stresses the agency of the villagers as complementary to the outsiders' intervention.

Indeed the simple fact of proposing some solution may not be enough. For instance, both FA and SA provide some proposals; but - being these not well articulated, neither mentioning the commitment of the villagers – they are not highlighted in the edited version, but simply mentioned under other chapters.

Instead, they are given **particular emphasis** when fulfilling all the conditions mentioned above. This is the case of IS, OS, WI and MA whose onward-looking and pro-active attitude is underlined since the headline ('Broader horizons', 'Make land productive', 'Restoring the village', 'Progress is possible') and confirmed by the titles of the chapters (always located in the end of the interview). The solutions proposed involve both the external assistance (financial support, introduction of agricultural technologies, tractors) and the commitment of the villagers (instruction and awareness), whose potentials and agency is well advertised ("We have the workforce and experience", "We are the pioneers", "We have been successful"). Such well

structured background allows quests for help are integrally published: "What we dream is that a lot of [development] organisations come here…people here are looking forward to such assistance so as to feel these promises and projects are tangible, and to push them forward" (IS).

Change, poverty, marginalization and truth

Any interviewer asks questions about the **change** brought by desertification, that is exclusively supposed to take place in the **social dimension**. According to the interviewer – that in this way somehow leads and suggests the narrator's notion of change - change may be brought by migration (What is the culture acquired and transferred to the village?), affect social relationships and customs (Does desertification affect social relationships? Does desertification affect the age of marriage? What are the traditions that have been stopped?) or impact on behaviours (Has immigration affected the youth when they come back to the village? Did you observe any change in the girls' behaviour?). The fact that the interviewer brings in his assumptions about change is evident in an interaction between ME and his interviewer. The latter seems to assume that migrants, once returned in the village, bring changes that are mainly negative – as they acquired bad habits living in towns – and insists to receive an answer on behavioural changes: How is their dealing with you? Did they bring tobacco to the village? Did they smoke cigarettes in the town? How they treat you? However, ME insists on the material benefits brought by migrants (chairs, cars…) as well as on the contribution they give in building village cooperatives.

Poverty is a category not explicitly mentioned, but always evoked through other narratives. Indeed the word poverty is never pronounced directly by the narrators (with the exception of ME, MA, IS), but its presence can be grasped by the continuous reference to the inability of paying school fees or medical services, and by the sharp contrast with the past abundance always emphasised at the beginning of each narrative.

Marginalisation as well is a category never explicitly mentioned. However, the condition of marginal people may be told through other narratives (the local authorities that ignore the requests of the villagers, the radio providing information to but not getting inputs from the villagers…) or evoked by the use of the pronoun *they* to refer to outsiders, thus creating a sort of *otherisation*.

The word **truth** is mentioned only once (EN: "I'm speaking the truth") and the word **reality** gains an emphatic position as title (IS: 'The reality of migration'). But the most interesting reference to the category of truth/reality is given by the way the interviewer mentions it to the narrator: 'We are here to reflect the *true* information you give us', 'We hope we find *true* information', '…to convince the financing organ that there is a *true* problem' and so on.