

Order and Disjuncture: Theoretical Shifts in the Anthropology of Aid and Development

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Anthropologists and other social scientists met at the School of Oriental and African Studies in London September 26–28, 2003, to explore some of the themes which have emerged since the mid-1990s in the study of aid and development. The occasion was marked by a heuristic approach and did not reflect attempts to consolidate any existing paradigm, but there were some shared points of departure. There was a general effort to overcome a number of dated controversies which pose obstacles to the advance of theory and research. The distinction between pure and applied anthropology was replaced by an enquiry into the relations between policy and knowledge production, accompanied by a critical assessment of the role of the researcher. Both ideological populism and radical deconstructive critique were seen as biases that hindered the analysis of the interactions between different categories of actors in development (see Olivier de Sardan 1995, Robertson 1984). Participants thought that while the anthropology of development could make specific contributions to anthropological theory, it shared its methodology and research object with mainstream anthropology.

"Development"¹ is studied as an institution which influences, directly or indirectly, the majority of the world's population. It is interpreted differently by different groups and generates a multitude of culturally rooted practices. As do kinship, ritual, and religion, it plays a major role in the everyday life of people, especially in non-Western societies, which have been and continue to be the primary focus of anthropological research. Development contexts are examined through empirical research methods, fieldwork, and participant observation. Because "aid" is, more evidently than kinship and religion, the target of governmental regulation and intervention, the work of anthropologists of development may influence policy and find applied uses. Research should pay attention to the various institutions, networks, and identities which constitute the development apparatus. Therefore it is potentially multi-sited,

multi-vocal, and multi-level. This leads to what at first sight may seem a paradoxical observation but was variously shared by conference participants: the apparent increasing order which characterizes the expansion of developmental rationales conceals increasing disjuncture between normative expectations and the multiplicity of practices in development arenas. The dynamics between order and disjuncture worked as a red thread throughout the conference, intertwining with a series of background themes some of which I address briefly below.

In the past decade a number of trends have become recognizable in the sociology and anthropology of development. We have witnessed a renewed emphasis on institutions and organizations as loci of anthropological interest. The work of Mary Douglas in the 1980s had shown us that institutions are governed by idiosyncratic logics and deserve special theoretical treatment. If they are influenced by the cultural norms and values of the society which hosts and supports them, it is also true that, by virtue of their structure and mode of functioning, they have an "institutional grip" on the minds of the agents involved in them (Douglas 1986). The work of Pierre Bourdieu assists us in analyzing the relation between the structured practices of social actors (*modus operandi*) and the products of such practices objectified as institutions (*opus operatum*) (see Bourdieu 1990:57). Many contributions to the workshop suggested innovative frameworks for analyzing the relation between institutions, organizations, and agency. They tried to avoid populist and ideological approaches, which provide a distorted view of recipient agency and oversimplify inter-subjective relations in development. While the so-called target population's relative lack of control over political processes must be explored and accounted for, we dispose of a series of actor-oriented ethnographies which demonstrate the manipulative nature of recipient engagement with dominant development discourses. Aid recipients often take advantage of their marginal position in global hierarchies to advance their own trajectories in local arenas. Like Scott's peasants and de Certeau's consumers, they try to turn to their own ends a dominant system which they do not control. This attitude is evident not just in practices of everyday resistance, failures to comply, or acceptance of dominant orders but also, perhaps primarily, at an epistemological level. Power struggles are founded less on direct confrontation than on a kind of semiotic proselytism that appears in continuous negotiations over meanings (see Carney and Watts 1990) and attempts to enroll others in one's interpretations of specific circumstances. In policy, interpretations are never neutral but based upon a moral view of which activities should or should not be implemented. Here some aspects of the work of Callon and Latour are relevant. Actor-oriented writers had started using notions derived from actor network theory, often without making explicit reference to their theoretical sources, and therefore the notions of network, enrolling, and trajectories have been in the repertoire of analyses of development for some time (see Arce, Villarreal, and de

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1. I have chosen not to place "development" and "aid" in quotation marks throughout, as this might prove redundant and tiresome. Suffice it to note that, both at the workshop and in this report, these terms are understood as concepts which require problematizing.

Vries 1994; Long 1989, 1992, 2001). Rose and Miller (1992) have combined aspects of the work of Foucault and Latour in applying notions taken from actor network theory to problematics of government. David Mosse (2004) has explicitly integrated this framework into the anthropology of development, and in a paper which constituted the theoretical backbone of the workshop he suggested that policy functions by enrolling actors in particular policy models, while project activities reflect the organizational logics of development institutions. This apparent disjuncture between policy and implementation is sealed by the continuous work that projects (or rather the actors working within them) must do in order to represent their practices as congruent with policy models. The success or failure of a project depends more on the coherence between project representations and policy models than on the actual relevance of project activities. Negotiation is primarily epistemological: development interventions are maintained by (epistemic) networks of support, and, in turn, unfolding one's trajectory entails "translating" it into terms that are congruent with existing paradigms.

It appeared from the workshop debate that some issues will require further consideration. First, we have few detailed actor-oriented ethnographies of "the developers." A snapshot of anthropological studies of development today offers a slanted view, with a plethora of ad hoc trajectories, resistance strategies, and manipulations at the "recipients' end" and a few in-depth analyses of the dynamics that characterize the "planners' end." Who are the "developers"? How do they relate to the institutional beliefs and practices which they help to support? How are they positioned vis-à-vis other categories of actors? What sense do they make of their own role? The lack of a substantial base of empirical studies risks producing a misleading impression of consensus which is forcefully contradicted by the studies available (see Arce and Long 1993, Bierschenk, Chauveau, and Olivier de Sardan 2000).

Another set of unresolved questions is related to the role and status of the researcher. A series of critical contributions that appeared throughout the 1990s has convincingly reiterated the shortcomings of some aspects of "traditional" ethnography (see Appadurai 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1997a, b; Marcus 1999). Ethnography is not neutral but unavoidably tied into historically shaped webs of meanings and power. While this message is well taken, anthropologists of development are still exploring ways to negotiate their multiple roles in fieldwork and ethnography. Whether our affiliations are with various types of development agencies, academia, or both, our positioning must be accounted for. This raises a set of methodological questions: How do we conduct fieldwork and research in a way that addresses complex issues of self-reflexivity, positionality, and power? Can we write theory which is relevant without being ideological? Is ethnography "too thick for policy"?

It was to address some of these questions that David Lewis (London School of Economics) and David Mosse (School of Oriental and African Studies) co-organized the workshop, which took place under the auspices of the

European Inter-University Development Opportunities Studies Group (EIDOS), a European network of anthropologists (originally primarily from Germany, Britain, and the Netherlands) interested in the study of development. Since its creation in the 1980s, EIDOS has been characterized by an attempt to transcend the distinction between pure and applied anthropology and to establish a productive dialogue between academics and practitioners in the domain of policy making. The workshop maintained this tradition and brought together commentators affiliated with different institutions. Most of the participants were or had been engaged with both academic and policy work.

What started off as an informal, entirely self-funded exchange of ideas to explore "where we stand" in the study of development turned into an important self-reflexive dialogue. It included almost 80 participants, and 32 papers were selected for discussion in ten sections.²

2. The contributors, their affiliations, and their paper titles in the order in which papers were presented are as follows: *Session 1*, "Ethnography of Donors," Chair, David Mosse (SOAS), Discussant, Michael Woolcock (World Bank); Rosalind Eyben (IDS) and Rosario Leon, "Who Owns the Gift? Donors-Recipient Relations at the National Elections in Bolivia"; Anthony Bebbington (Institute for Development Policy and Management, Manchester), David Lewis (LSE), Simon Batterbury (Arlzona), and Elizabeth Olsen (Colorado), "Of Texts and Practices: Organizational Cultures and the Practice of Empowerment in World Bank Funded Programmes"; Monique Nuijten (Wageningen) and Jilles van Gastel (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs), "The Reinvention of Ownership at the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation: An Anthropological/Organizational Approach to the Construction of a Policy Model"; Gerhard Anders (Erasmus), "An Ethnography of 'Loan Arrangements' Between the Bretton Woods Institutions and the Government of Malawi: Good Governance as Technology." *Session 2*, "Policy, Institutions, and Practices," Chair, David Lewis (LSE), Discussant, James Fairhead (Sussex); Philip Quarles van Ufford (Amsterdam), "The Disjuncture of Things: Some Remarks about a New Agenda for Studying Development"; Raymond Apthorpe (Australian National University/SOAS), "The Virtual Reality of Aid Land"; David Marsden (World Bank), "Rights, Culture, and Contested Modernities"; Ian Harper (SOAS), "On the Trail of the Tubercle Bacillus: A Tale of Fear, Surveillance, and Control in Nepal." *Session 3*, "Development Cultures," Chair, Philip Quarles van Ufford (Amsterdam), Discussant, Sarah Southwold (Wageningen); Stephen Biggs (East Anglia), Barun Gurung, and Don Messerschmidt, "Contending Cultures amongst Development Actors"; Aet Annist (University College London), "The Worshippers of Rules: Defining the Right and Wrong in Local Project Applications in Estonia"; Jeremy Gould (Helsinki), "Timing, Scale, and Style: Capacity as Governmentality in Tanzania"; Paulette Goudge (Sheffield), "The Whiteness of Power: Racism in 'Third World' Development Aid." *Session 4*, "Disjunctures and Translations: Rethinking Global-Local Linkages," Chair, Sarah Ladbury (Loughborough), Discussant, Vijayendra Rao (World Bank); Benedetta Rossi (LSE), "Global Governance and Hidden Transcripts: Unveiling Development Rhetorics in Keita (Niger)"; Peter Luetchford (Sussex), "Organising Development: Relations between Coffee Cooperatives and Fair Trade Organizations—A View from Costa Rica"; Ruth Sharifa Djedje and Rudiger Korff (Hohenheim), "Opium at the Interface: Multiple Realities at the Golden Triangle"; Pierre-Yves Le Meur (Groupe de Recherche et d'Echanges Technologiques, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales), "Knowledge, Governance, and Participation: The Rural Land Plan in Benin." *Session 5*, "Identities, Intermediaries, and Negotiations," Chair, Benedetta Rossi (LSE), Discussant, Dennis Rodgers (LSE); Rebecca Marsland (SOAS), "Community Participation the Tanzanian Way: Conceptual Continuity or Power Struggle?" Celayne Heaton (SOAS), "Order and Disjuncture in the Prac-

A group of graduate students from SOAS and LSE volunteered to help with the organization, and all participants received a CD including the drafts of conference papers, which could be consulted in advance on the conference web site.³ The event brought together Anglophone and Francophone, European and American scholars. Perhaps its main drawback was the scarcity of scholars from aid-receiving countries. However, the response to this fully self-financed workshop signalled that the time had come to debate some of the issues raised concisely in the call for papers.

The first session addressed the scarcely explored domain of donor identities and institutions. Eyben and Leon's paper shed light on the unofficial arrangements and informal dynamics which underpin aid policy and practice. The emotional components of development work and personal relations between international and national staff substantially influence the course of events. Yet these elements are removed from policy documents and replaced by the appearance of order and formality. Bebbington, Lewis, Batterbury, and Olsen argued that textual commitments to empowerment hide patterns of organizational hierarchy and control and challenged the relation between what the bank writes and what is done within projects and funds. Nuijten and van Gastel added that the lack of clear definitions of policy concepts makes them flexible tools for strategic leverage and minimizes potential criticism. This theme was ex-

plored further by Gerhard Anders, who showed that the ambiguous legal status of loan arrangements between the Bretton Woods institutions and governments facilitates the actual control of the former over the latter despite the rhetoric of ownership.

The second session, on policy, institutions, and practices, consisted of contributions which asked creative questions on the nature of aid. Philip Quarles van Ufford opened the session, stating provocatively that "of course outcomes don't reflect plans, of course theory is different from practice: we must accept as a point of departure that policy is a mess." He argued that the marginality of decision makers to the entire process of aid should be seen as a structural inevitability which lies at the heart of policy contradictions. He suggested that academics would improve their analyses and practitioners their work if they accounted for disjuncture from the start. However, what this awareness should induce is not hopelessness or cynicism but an ethical approach to development as a global concern. Raymond Apthorpe went on to suggest that not only is aid a "mess" but this mess exists "nowhere" on the face of this planet; it exists as a virtual reality and creates virtual identities that populate policy reports and development operations. This allegory potentially creates two levels for reflection: one following what happens in virtual aid-land, the other observing practices located in specific parts of the world. David Marsden advocated more reflexivity on the part of development workers based on the recognition that all development models, including dominant ones, are cultural. In a detailed ethnographic analysis, Ian Harper traced the emergence of the tubercle bacillus as a new political object within an emerging global order. He used the example of Nepal to illustrate the concrete, sometimes disastrous effects of policy discourses on the reality they attempt to regulate.

The third session, on development cultures, explored the rules and values governing the development apparatus. Stephen Biggs, Barun Gurung, and Don Messerschmidt advocated the need to open up the black box of development institutions and found that the workshop marked a promising step in this direction. Aet Annist noted that the institutionalized observance of rules irrespective of results is a risk-avoiding strategy in bureaucratic contexts. She illustrated how strict adherence to regulations in Estonian bureaucracy did not necessarily yield positive results for aid recipients. Taking a disenchanting view, Jeremy Gould suggested that the primary aim of development was the institutionalization and perpetuation of the aid apparatus and presented aid as a self-enclosed project which used the rhetoric of "poverty reduction" instrumentally to conceal its ends. Paulette Goudge provided examples to show that aid representations and practices are imbued with a racist ethos. Perhaps with the exception of Biggs et al.'s contribution, this session distinguished itself for its cynicism with regard to the real aims and potential effects of aid. It looked at the internal rules governing aid and at its peculiarities as a culturally and historically specific construct.

3. The site is currently hosted at <http://www.soas.ac.uk/departments/departmentinfo.cfm?navid=455>, where drafts of the contributions can be consulted.

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Papers in the fourth session, on global-local linkages, countered the culturalist approach which characterized the previous session and explored interactions and degrees of intelligibility across development contexts and identities. Benedetta Rossi criticized approaches presenting donors and recipients as holding incommensurable "worldviews." She asked when actors would support "donor narratives" and when "recipient narratives" and suggested that it was more useful to think in terms of strategic positions available to both donor and recipients according to circumstances than in terms of bounded donor or recipient "cultures." Peter Luetchford showed that when recipients stop conforming to the image of dependency and/or marginality Northern organizations change their terms and conditions, turning swiftly from benign "developers" into competitors. Ruth Djedje and Rudiger Korff emphasized that networks create reality: the meaning of concepts and practices is tied to specific networks. When concepts are "exported," communication occurs through mutual misunderstanding. They suggested that the analysis of development contexts should proceed through a reconstruction of changing meanings across networks. Pierre-Yves Le Meur concluded the session by looking at the case of the rural land plan in Benin as an example of governmentality. He illustrated how systems of knowledge induce regimes of practices and control which actors attempt to manipulate to their advantage.

The second day of workshop included three sessions and a plenary discussion. Session 5, on identities, intermediaries, and negotiations, consisted of a series of vivid ethnographies. Rebecca Marsland argued that development institutions are polysemic and that their meanings and functions vary across different "user groups" and showed how the notoriously ambiguous notion of "participation" was used in support of different agendas in competition for control in Tanzania. Celayne Heaton suggested that disjuncture might be seen as "a strategy rather than a by-product." Her observations in a Nepali nongovernmental organization suggested that fieldworkers resorted to "bracketing" of identities as a way of expressing their relations with villagers in terms that were congruent with development rationales. Bina Desai suggested that we focus on knowledge as a process rather than as a crystallized system and unravelled the interactions between processes of knowledge formation, negotiation of identities, and rationalization of practices. Jo Beall's paper explored the multi-layered organization of managing "matter out of place" and contrasted scientific notions of "waste" with informal ways of dealing with it. On a practical note, she advocated a "porous-boundaries" approach, namely, one that flexibly compromises between different interpretations and operationalizations rather than trying to incorporate informal systems into formal ones. In the discussion that followed, Dennis Rodgers observed that anthropology and economics share a holistic and totalizing approach. This initiated a debate on whether anthropological interpretative frameworks impose a particular type of order upon

the objects of research, a theme which was carried on into the following sessions.

The sixth session, on methods, power, and ethnographies, was opened by David Mosse's above-mentioned paradigmatic paper, which consolidated some elements for a renewed analytical framework for the anthropology of development. The following two papers engaged critically with Foucauldian approaches and particularly with Ferguson's use of Foucault's work in *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1990). Tim Bending distinguished between two contradictory effects of recipients' manipulations of development discourses. In order to expand their room for maneuver, recipients reproduce rather than challenge development narratives; thus the disjuncture between the discourse and the reality it tries to regulate is actively maintained. Amity Doolittle emphasized the intentional use of discourse to produce particular effects against early Foucauldian approaches stressing the unintended nature of "instrument effects." Benedikt Korf argued that when "empowerment" rhetorics are employed they turn out to strengthen hierarchies and substitute new hegemonies for old ones. In the debate, a participant observed that we risked "cleaning up the literature instead of the litter" and expressed the concern that many of the contributions did not seem to worry about providing concrete advice for better and more effective policy.

Session 7, on ethnography and development contradictions, interrogated the role of anthropological theory and methodology in development contexts. Alan Rew and Shahzad Khan emphasized the potential contributions of anthropological micro-studies for improving local and national governance. Wiebe Nauta advocated what he called an "embedded-tale" approach to the study of development institutions, based on actor-oriented and multi-sited research grounded in particular historical, political, and socioeconomic contexts. Elizabeth Harrison argued that studies of corruption are dominated by Eurocentric understandings of the research object and called for more ethnographic analyses of local narratives of corruption. Anne Browning-Aiken, Margaret Wilder, and Rebecca Carter explored global-local interactions and power relations through the lens of water management in Sonora (Mexico). Rather than taking sides in the debate by espousing a particular view on water usage, they used contestations over the management of water as a point of entry for understanding local and international strategies.

The last session, on public and scientific orders, was held on the third day of workshop. Dik Roth questioned the likelihood that ethnographic "thick descriptions" of development contexts could be translated into simple policy messages. The following papers confirmed the relevance of his argument. Karen Coelho traced the changes which followed the introduction of a water management program in a context where water had hitherto been considered a public good. She explored the effects of a particular notion of "reform" in crafting new identities ("the public," "crowds," citizens as stakeholders, citizens as customers, willingness to pay, etc.) and establishing new types of relations. Simon Reid-Henry

showed that different conceptions of property rights were used to manipulate an apparently fixed regulatory framework in the context of Cuban biotechnology and argued that the formal rigidity of scientific orders does not impede and may facilitate their manipulation to advance particular interests. Yuri Jack Gomez exposed the power effects that characterize systems of scientific production and classification of knowledge. Historically rooted systems for organizing and classifying knowledge involve processes of appropriation and discrimination, reproducing knowledge hegemonies by incorporating concepts expressed in languages and forms which support established cultural and scientific hierarchies.

The workshop consolidated some features of a renewed theoretical framework for anthropological and sociological studies of development. The work of Michel Foucault continues to represent an important source of inspiration, but the focus has shifted from his earlier understanding of power and discourse to his later work on ethics and governmentality. This reflects a disciplinary shift from attempts to deconstruct the historical systems of thought which underpin development to more detailed attention to specific practices and negotiations between different actors and between actors and knowledge formations. Actor network theory has acquired a central place in the study of development arenas. Its emphasis on intersubjectivity, on processes of knowledge production and reproduction, and on the epistemic nature of strategic action are particularly helpful conceptual tools. No real synthesis could be reached with regard to the central theme of the conference. While participants agreed on the relevance of the opposition between order and disjuncture, there were contrasting interpretations of how it worked in practice and how it should be analyzed in theory. Two principal views could be identified. Some contributors suggested that behind a fiction of order we find a reality of disjuncture, this dualism being an unavoidable aspect of policy. Others argued that actors are capable of deploying both order and disjuncture strategically and that one or the other is actively produced and reproduced according to ad hoc conditions for action and incentives. The former view is supported by what tend to be structural-discursive approaches; the latter places greater emphasis on agency. Whether theoretical integration of these perspectives is possible or even desirable remains open to debate, but this is clearly not a return to the 1980s structure/agency "impasse" (see Booth 1994). What characterized most of the contributions was exactly an attempt to integrate structuralist and actor-oriented approaches into one framework, and here some aspects of the work of Pierre Bourdieu may find productive adaptations in the future. A few specific questions deserve careful attention. Is the notion of "discourse" useful for comparing relatively short-lived policy orientations, or should its use be restricted to grand historical reconstructions? Is a framework based on the study of "interfaces" between separate "worldviews" or even "worlds of meaning" an appropriate tool for making

sense of the multiple dispositions of various groups in development arenas? Finally, is "development" a special case? Probably not. The general view which emerged at the workshop was a reconfirmed trust in empirical research methods and self-reflexive "thick description."

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