It Takes Two to Tango: Anthropologists and Development Agencies[1]

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> *"For many anthropologists I think it is something that you don't want to dirty your hands with because it is dirty. And here is all this core of people with masses of money who say we are helping Africa. And then you find it's all a hoax because they are impoverishing Africa. And really, in strict sense, they are liars"* (Aidan Southall, quoted in Burton, 1992: 1999)

> *"A fundamental problem is that development policy is carried out under a paradigm which assumes that Third World populations should adopt the conditions of production and reproduction imposed by capitalism. Anthropologists who merely accept this paradigm compromise scientific standards and their professional ethics"* (Arnold, 1989: 135)

> *"...The imaginary 'sins' of the colonial anthropological ancestors pale by comparison with the thoroughly Euro-centric, quasi-missionary prostitution of the discipline in the guise of 'development,' a polite term now in common parlance that fails to mask the history of its imperialist origins...Yet, in the contemporary world, anthropologist throw their cultural relativism out of the window while collecting the immodest stipends doled out by development agencies"* (Burton, 1992:182-198).

Introduction

The relationship between anthropologists and development agencies is characterised by mutual misunderstanding that at times tends to translate into severe tensions if not outright hostility. The above quotations provide extreme examples of the kind of enmity anthropologists have generally shown regarding development. However, the past 20 years or so had witnessed a very active and productive debate on the form of involvement of anthropologists in development work (cf. Gardener and Lewis, 1996; Escobar, 1991, 1997; Assal, 2002). While the anthropology-development equation is understood and dealt with in many ways (cf. Ebyen, 1999; Horowitz, 1994, 1999; Mair, 1984; Mathur, 1989; Phillip, 1994), the relationship between anthropologists and development agencies continues to be a matter of heated discussion. In this context, Escobar (1997, p. 498) identifies two positions: those who favour an active engagement with development institutions based on the belief that "...anthropology can improve our understanding of contemporary development problems...as well as help to design and implement solutions to them" (Little and Brokensha, 1988: 11); and those who prescribe a radical critique of, and distancing from, the development establishment, as opening quotations of this essay bluntly demonstrates. Escobar designates the two positions "development anthropology" and the "anthropology of development," respectively.

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However, in recent years various strategies for moving beyond the impasse created by the above-mentioned two positions could be traced in the endeavour of some anthropologists who creatively tried to articulate anthropological theory and practice into the development field (cf. Johanssen, 1992; Gardener and Lewis, 1996). To put it in the words of Gardener and Lewis (1996: 49)[2], whose contribution is perhaps the most significant and thought-provoking to-date, "...is anthropology hopelessly compromised by its involvement in mainstream development or can anthropologists offer an effective challenge to the dominant paradigms of development?" This question is being formulated by a small but perhaps growing number of anthropologists who believed in the possibility of steering a course between "development anthropology" and the "anthropology of development". However, in the process of crafting an alternative practice, these anthropologists are redefining the very notions of "theoretical/academic" as opposed to "applied/practical" anthropology, rendering the distinction between "development anthropology" and the "anthropology of development" newly problematic and perhaps obsolete.

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[2] Gardener and Lewis (1996) provide the most comprehensive and systematic treatment of the relationship between anthropology and development and some sections of this paper draw heavily on their ideas.

The following sections of this paper present an attempt to uncover and scrutinise some aspects of the uneasiness bedevilling the relationship between anthropologists and development agencies. The next two sections of the paper respectively deal with 'arguments for' and the 'arguments against" the involvement of anthropologists in development work. The section that follows discusses and attempts to show how moving beyond the false dichotomisation of the anthropological enterprise into 'academic' and 'applied' could pave the way for a more mutually productive relationship for both anthropologists and development agencies. The paper then moves to discuss the inescapable ethical issues that will arise no matter the form of anthropologists' involvement in development takes. Since it is well-known that "it takes two to tango", the paper departs from the firm belief that overcoming the present apprehensions surrounding the "development dance" is by no means the responsibility of development agencies alone; anthropologists, and of course others, are equally responsible.

What do anthropologists offer development?

Anthropologists are increasingly being employed by development agencies such as international donors, private consultancy firms and NGOs, to help with project design, appraisal and evaluation. Assignments can vary from a short-term consultancy job lasting a few weeks, to a placement on a project for several years as one of the full-time staff. They have been invited to carry out 'impact studies' to assess whether or not the project's objectives have been met. In most such cases, anthropologists worked as members of interdisciplinary teams, which may include specialists from other disciplines such as engineering, ecology, hydrology, economics, management, etc., assembled for short periods in order to undertake time-bound consultancies that investigate these sets of issues. Sometimes anthropologists are invited to conduct such studies in familiar cultural contexts, while others are 'one-offs' in less familiar, if not totally new settings to the anthropologists.

In the context of their involvement with development agencies, anthropologists can play a variety of roles. Perhaps the most common role is that of mediation by the anthropologist between a community and outsiders and, following from this, the attempt to interpret a culture to outsiders: " The anthropologists...often emerge as brokers, or interpreters, acting between local people and the various agencies and institutions that affect their lives" (Little and Brokensha, 1988: 11). While some anthropologists had the opportunity to turn this mediator role into immediate application for development programmes, others have demonstrated that anthropological knowledge can help understand how particular development policies and programmes will affect local populations. In this latter sense, anthropologists "...can give to people responsible for the implementation of development projects, and possibly to outsiders called in to evaluate such projects, some indication of the essential information on the nature of the societies they are dealing with which may help them in the conclusions that they drew" (Mair, 1984: 11). Thus, most development anthropologists firmly believe that without their intermediation the impact of development interventions on local communities would be more disruptive and painful.

Anthropologists have also other types of contributions to make beyond being mediators between development agencies and those to be developed. In a project setting, for example, development anthropologists believe that they can be useful in a number of ways. They are well equipped to monitor the process of project implementation, which is in effect is the task of monitoring social change. In this process, anthropologists can assess whether three-way communication is taking place between planners, implementers and community. This is essential to making projects need-based and to reduce ethnocentric assumptions.

On a more practical level, anthropologists can helped to provide, through their traditional participatory fieldwork methodology, a model of information gathering which is more sensitive to people (Racelis, 1999). There is no doubt that anthropological methodologies, based upon face-to-face contact with people, are receiving more and more attention in development and policy circles. One well-known example of this is the growing popularity of rapid participatory research, which draws on some of anthropology's methodological insights; another is farming systems research, which seeks to combine local knowledge and practices with specialised outsider knowledge in order to improve support for the poor and marginalized who usually find their needs ignored by conventional development approaches (Chambers, 1983). This not only has the potential to improving the quality of the information needed by development practitioners, but can also increase the opportunities for local people to contribute more directly to the evolution of policies and programmes.

However, it should be emphasised that despite its important methodological contributions to development work, anthropology remains primarily a 'way of seeing' rather than a specific 'set of skills' or a 'tool kit': "What has practical relevance in anthropology depends not just, or even primarily, in finding 'technological' solutions to discrete problems, but rather in forging new perspectives, *new ways of looking* at things" (Giddens, 1995: 277, *emphasis added*). This partly because it expresses 'what ought to be' as opposed to 'what actually happen' in practice. Therefore, one of the main ways of *applying* anthropology is to teach this distinctive outlook and ideas more widely to people working in other fields. Nowhere is this need more pressing than in the world of development, where prevailing discourses are perhaps now more open to renegotiation and change than ever before (Gardener and Lewis, 1996).

Anthropologists ask crucial questions regarding people's access to resources and the differential effects of change. These are in many ways anthropological concerns, for the traditional subject matter of anthropology – small-scale, low-income rural communities – have generated a wealth of information about how the different elements of a society fit together, and how, by extension, things might change. Since many development agencies have limited insight into the effects of their work, development anthropologists believe that they need to be constantly reminded that change is inherently political (Gardener and Lewis, 1996). Thus, in their involvement with the aid industry, anthropologists can play an important part in ensuring that the issues of equity and participation within the development process are central in the development agenda.

In their involvement in development work, anthropologists more often than not find themselves under enormous pressures to work tirelessly to put social issues on the centre stage of development agenda. To an extent they have been successful in such an endeavour. Greater awareness of the importance of cultural and social factors in the sphere of economic development was translated into more involvement of the anthropologist at the level of national governments and international organizations. Accordingly, social issues are increasingly reflected in policy and form part of project appraisals and evaluations within many agencies[3] (cf. Hoben, 1982: 358). The discourses they produce through their reports, their policy statements and the actual content of meetings are also shifting, albeit only slowly, to more anthropologically informed ways of seeing and doing. This indicates that development is contested and fought over within aid agencies and that development discourse is continually in a state of flux and change. However, this does not necessarily mean that the style of development is becoming more empowering and participatory on the ground. The bureaucratic and political constraints are huge; and the anthropologists remain only one small part of much larger machinery. But how do academic anthropologists work when they find themselves under the practical constraints of the development workplace?

The Risks of Involvement

> *"I feel strongly that the very nature of the work we do and the egalitarian values we bring to it are apt to incur a lot of displeasure and hostility, often from the very people who hired us"*
> (Goldschmidt, 2001: 428)

The involvement of anthropologists in development work is plagued with constrains, pressures and problems. It is well known that anthropologists have not always communicated smoothly with development agencies. There are numbers of common difficulties that have made the anthropologist's work less relevant and less accessible to development agencies than it should have been. For many years anthropologists used a research methodology that portrayed communities in static terms. The concern with the 'ethnographic present' drew anthropological attention away from examining issues that arise from social change. Added to that is the old-aged complaint of the time lag between the completion of fieldwork and writing up of the findings, which can arrive in a form that is inaccessible to development agencies with limited time. Thus, while development agencies criticise anthropologists for being "...notoriously wishy-washy and slow in making decisions", anthropologists retaliate by invoking development practitioners "...strong record for making 'bad' decisions quickly" (Keesing, 1976: 534f).

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[3] The so-called "social soundness analysis" was introduced by USAID in 1975 and stipulates that no project be planned without consideration of the social and cultural context of the project and the consequences of the proposed interventions (USAID, 1975)

However, within the framework of consultancy there is a tremendous pressure on the anthropologist to contribute constructively to interdisciplinary teams and to try to provide realistic solutions to problems. Some anthropologists find consultancy teamwork difficult because they are used to a solitary, self-regulating work regimes. Aside from that, there are certain methodological compromises that may have to be made by the anthropologist. The main one is TIME: whereas most anthropologists who have completed a doctoral degree will have spent between one and two years doing their field research, work in the development context may be allowed a few months or even only weeks by the employing agency. While it may be possible to do meaningful work by returning to communities already well known from previous experience, this is less than ideal for an anthropologist asked to work in a completely new context. Such assignment can offer an exciting challenge, but it may prove professionally frustrating and may generate research findings that lack theoretical strength or methodological rigour. Thus, for many anthropologists, "Agency requirements for rapid response under limited funding further complicate our lives" (Hackenberg, 2000: 468)

The above scenario is in stark contrast with the traditional methodology of social anthropology based on the conviction that: 'participant observation', that is, the principle of living within a community for a substantial period of time – 'fieldwork', which might be expected to take one or two years – and immersing oneself in the local culture, work, food and language, while remaining as unobtrusive and detached as possible. Many of the earliest anthropologists recorded their observations in a fieldwork diary, taking profuse notes on all aspects of life, to be written up later as a monograph or ethnographic text, and without necessarily having a sense of the particular research questions they wished to address until they were well into the period of study or even until after they have completed fieldwork.

Thus, in the context of development work, the main change is that participant observation must normally be undertaken within a tightly circumscribed timeframe, with a set of 'key questions' (provided by the agency commissioning the study) replacing the more open-ended 'blank notebook' approach. Moreover, the findings of such research are more appreciated if they are presented concisely and made to include at least an element of quantification. In the process, many anthropologists are increasingly forgetting the simple truism that "...fine-grained ethnographic analysis...is our only scientific resource" (Hackenberg, 2000: 467).

Anthropologists are trained sceptics: they tend to look beyond the immediate formal relationship that exists; and are rarely ready to offer conclusions or advice in term of a straightforward course of action since they are accustomed to "offer warnings than advice" (Mair, 1984: 11). For anthropologists, all these qualities are of immense value in informing planned change, but they sit uneasily within the timeframes and priorities of the world of development practice. This often generates misconception if not suspicion about the role of the anthropologists. To some development practitioners, anthropologists are therefore an administrative nightmare, because the knowledge and ideas in which they deal seem to have very little direct practical applicability and, worse still, can raise endless problems. Anthropologists are therefore required to think more creatively about the practical ways in which they can make their findings more useful to the agencies employing them. There is clearly a long way to go before anthropologists and development agencies, primarily those concerned with technical and administrative priorities, can learn to communicate with each other more easily.

Moreover, development agencies on the basis of the arrogant assumption that they know better than anyone else what the most important issues in project context are, they tend to be adamant that research should have direct practical utility. This is clearly reflected in the strict terms of reference development agencies prepare with a set of key questions to be answered and policy recommendations to be provided. In this way both development agencies and the anthropologist who uncritically accept such a restrictive research format tend to forget the plain fact that the most interesting anthropology of development does not simply ask questions about policy; rather, it examines change within its wider contexts. As Anthony Giddens has recently remarked, "The practical connotations of anthropology are likely to depend more upon a rekindling of the anthropological imagination than upon a narrowing-down of the subject to limited social policy issues" (Giddens, 1995: 277). Thus, by insisting that the research agenda concentrates on certain social policy issues and that findings are presented in a certain way, development agencies may therefore absorb anthropology – potentially it's most radical concepts – into the dominant development discourse (Gardener and Lewis, 1996).

This has already been the fate of various important concepts, which have appropriated for development and watered down to the point of ugly distortion. The institutionalisation of such concepts as equity and participation and the ways in which they are applied, is a good example of this danger, since they can easily be 'co-opted' by those with power and influence. Power is hierarchical in development work: between expatriate and local staff, international and local consultants, project staff and beneficiaries. In the context of the institutionalisation of these forms of inequality in terms of privileges and rewards it is not surprising that the concepts of equity and participation can too easily slips into empty rhetoric that serves the interest of the status quo. In this way, the insights of anthropologists concerned with issues of equity and participation have, in some cases, been reformulated to fit into the dominant discourse, thus becoming depoliticised and institutionally 'safe' (Gardener and Lewis 1996).

This also happens within project planning and implementation. Since most development work is carefully planned, fitted around bureaucratic tools such as the 'project framework', social development becomes an "output" to be measured usually through quantitative criteria such as numbers of people trained, loans taken out or meetings attended.

Similarly, research which points to potential problems in project implementation must be presented in report form, with practical recommendations listed. To question these explicitly or to refuse to comply to the established practices (particularly bureaucratic procedures and assumptions, e.g. the production of specific style of reports and use of specific language) would, given the balance of power within the agency, not have much advanced the cause of the anthropologist. Reports that are too critical are condemned as being irrelevant or useless and are not acted upon, for they do not fit into the discourse. So, it would seem that anthropologists are welcomed by development agencies, but only on the latter terms.

Involved anthropologists must continually guard against these tendencies. They need to reassess endlessly how particular concepts such as equity, participation, empowerment, etc., are used. This involves research not only in their meanings at the managerial or institutional level, but also into how they are transformed at different stages in the project cycle. How do development workers carry those concepts into their work? What does equity mean to development practitioners? What do they understand by participation?

The 'Academic/Applied' Dichotomy

It is common that anthropological research output to come under the accusation of being "too academic" or "too theoretical". The phrase "too academic" is coined in some quarters controlling huge resources, but, in most cases, manned by individuals intellectually not prepared to engage in a theoretical discourse. It is a detracting term and therefore has no utility beyond shielding the ignorance of those who invented it when confronted with intellectually serious and politically committed anthropological research output. Thus, under the fear of that accusation, anthropologists tend to compromise their main task, if not the task, of theory building and the generation of academic knowledge in favour of commissioned studies in the pretext of being 'practical'. Credible academic knowledge can only be generated under serious basic research not commissioned studies, the output of which ends up on the shelves as "grey literature" mostly visited by dust and blazing sun rays. One really wonders if it is possible at all to undertake commissioned studies in isolation from a solid foundation of basic research: "Applied anthropology must, of course, be based on pure anthropology" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1980[1930]: 131, emphasis added). Thus, one of the tasks in applied research (requiring as it does rigorous multidisciplinary skills, team-based rather than individually-based investigations), especially in its rapid versions, such RRA, PRA, REAP, or whatever, is to carry out extensive literature review, which means acquainting oneself with the findings and conclusions of hitherto existing relevant basic research. Anthropologists should therefore insist that theoretical anthropology is the source of wisdom with which to "face the daunting task of telling people in the world of practical matters how they can better their conditions" (Goldschmidt, 2001: 424)

Although no one would dispute the plea of some anthropologists for reforming methodological training of students to handle short-term research by incorporating rapid assessment procedures (cf. Finan, 1996; Taplin, Scheld and Low, 2002); this should by no means be seen as an alternative to long-term research characterised by the conventional "one year in the field" as a minimum requirement. Anthropologists should not forget the fact that their greatest strength is in basic research to provide insights and realities, which no shortcuts can possibly replace; that their main research strategy is ethnography and the intrusion of rapid assessment methodologies in social anthropology can only be tolerated as adjuncts, but not when pretending to be the foundation of an anthropological study. In fact some anthropologists argue strongly not only for caution in using these methodologies but also for the need to undertake basic research on participatory methods themselves (cf. Campbell, 2001). In this way, anthropologists can question and thus help to redesign such techniques, ensuring that they do not ossify into rigid exercises that have lost their meaning. This of course should not be considered as an attempt to decry rapid assessment procedures. To the contrary, "...the emergence and development of new instruments of observation, recording, analysis and management are promoting applied anthropology from its former status of an almost 'inspired', but always suspect, art of improvisation and ideological subjectivity, and endowing it with a new image of rigour and scientific reliability" (Mar, 1988: 206). Moreover, rapid assessment methodologies could be considered among the best ways to learn the craft of research only when anthropologists work not lonely but as members of large research teams, including other social and natural scientists, professionals, local participants, and NGOs seeking to improve knowledge for the purpose of development interventions. However, the point is that this can only be achieved where good background knowledge, generated in the context of basic research, is readily available. In fact, it would not be possible to achieve an adequate understanding of any socio-cultural context without the conventional one-year or more fieldwork timeframe. Problem-oriented and short-term research should be grounded on detailed long-term anthropological knowledge. Therefore the luxury of field time restricted to short occasional visits can be tolerated only in the case of seasoned researchers' post-dissertation fieldwork but not in the case of novice researchers.

As a matter of fact what is truly academic is the distinction between basic and applied research.[4] Many anthropologists maintain that, "Academic anthropology and professionalized anthropology are...part and parcel of the same intellectual tradition and corpus of knowledge. The observations of academic anthropology led to the practical concerns with ethnocide and racism, to take extreme examples. More to the point, academic anthropology needs professionalized anthropology – because application provides one of the most important testing grounds for theory, and creates intellectual as well as practical problems" (Belshaw, 1988: 202). Thus, "It is wrong to think of applied and theoretical anthropology as distinct enterprises; they should be mutually supporting" (Goldschmidt, 2001: 424). This means that overcoming the ambiguous duality of the 'pure' and 'applied' could only be possible by stressing its *dialectical* nature in the manner that Elizabeth Eddy and William Partridge, more than a quarter of a century ago, had tried to show, in the section headed "The Dialogue between Theory and Application" of their excellent digest, how theory influences the thinking of anthropologists and how applied anthropology contributes to that theory (Eddy and Partridge, 1978). In this way, bridging the gulf between 'pure' and 'applied' anthropology would make our lives easier and perhaps richer.

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[4] Radcliffe-Brown long ago wrote, "A science is an ordered system of knowledge in the form of general laws related to some defined class of natural phenomena. The discovery of these laws is the task of what is called *pure* science. The use of the discovered laws in the control of phenomena for practical ends is what is called *applied* science. Thus in any science we have these two divisions or aspects". He added, "For the individual scientist the pursuit of knowledge may be, and indeed should be, an end in itself, just as art and morality, the pursuit of beauty and virtue, are ends in themselves for the artist or the good man. But viewed in relation to social life of which they are a part, these things—science, art and morals—are not ends but means. Science, for any given society...is the means by which it attains to a successful adaptation...to its environment". Thus, "...the value of science must lie largely, though not entirely, in its practical application...(Radcliffe-Brown, 1980 [1930]: 121)

It might be legitimate to argue that all anthropology is applied since it involves – usually – field level research with communities of real people and tries to reflect the views of those people. Thus, anthropologists who do not themselves have any direct involvement with development agencies have nevertheless contributed theoretical ideas that inform the ways in which we think about development. Anthropological investigation does not therefore need to be undertaken with a direct problem-solving purpose in mind for it to be objectively useful. In other words, even if the original intention behind a piece of non-commissioned anthropological research was not an applied one, it can be of practical value to a range of people beyond the academia: It can subsequently be drawn upon (and used or misused) by a range of practitioners in donor agencies, NGOs and government.

Moreover, because of the fear of the "too academic" or "not practical" accusations of basic research, some anthropologists have imported into the academia the intellectually questionable tradition of making policy recommendations on the basis of the findings of narrow disciplinary academic research. However, in most cases such recommendations are no more than shopping lists or 'hopes' inspired by a naïve sort of wishful thinking without any guidelines for their operationalisation and implementation. More often than not, such recommendations come in a form whereby development agencies "should do this and should not do that". In that sense they look more like orders than recommendations; and with the kinds of development agencies the anthropologists normally address, they are often received with deaf ears.

This is an unnecessarily overestimation in the part of anthropologists, as individual researchers, of their capabilities and capacities. Anthropologists need to admit that they are human beings not supra-beings; and, as 'people', they do not enjoy any privileged position from which to view social reality in its entire totality and come out with magic solutions to all social problems. Life would have been much easier if anthropologists make themselves aware of both their individual limitations and those of their discipline. It would be more appropriate, and indeed desirable, to make on the basis of research findings and conclusions recommendations for future research. So instead of the "should do this and should not do that" format, these can be rephrased in terms of questions such as "why an agency is doing this and why it is not doing that?" Indeed, the value of any piece of academic research rests not in the answers it provides but in the questions it raises.

The criticism that anthropological accounts of the realities that anthropologists repeatedly requested to investigate are "too academic" is nothing to be ashamed of. What others describe as too academic is essentially our trade, which involves conducting research and transforming research findings and conclusions into teaching material to be shared with our students (the majority of whom will end up in professional [read practical] occupations, not in the academia). Isn't all that practical? It is utterly naïve to think that only manual labour qualifies to be described as 'practical'. Intellectual labour too is not only practical but also an important ingredient in the social division of labour of any society.

The Ethics of Involvement

There can be little doubt that anthropologists can do much to change and improve the work of development agencies. Their involvement, however, remains deeply problematic. There is a range of problems and potentials in store for anthropologists who taken the bumpy route and engaged in applied development work. While settling out to reformulate and change from within, the danger is that anthropologists become profoundly compromised. No discussion of anthropology and development can therefore ignore to bring into sharp focus the difficult issue of ethics (Gardener and Lewis, 1996; Jansen, 1973).

The first of these is the joint issue of accountability and responsibility: For whom is the work being undertaken? To whom are the findings provided? Information is a source of power in the interactions between the rich and the poor, and as such quickly becomes highly sensitive. In the context of development work there is the danger that anthropological skills might placed at the service of the powerful in the equation, that is, development practitioners. Unless the involvement of the anthropologist provides openings for the weaker sections of a local community to increase their influence over the possible outcomes of a development project, he or she may have only contributed to the control over people as the objects rather than subjects of the development process.

A second question is the issue of quality. The constraints placed on the work of the consultant anthropologist, such as a short timeframe or the need for a clear set of 'user-friendly' conclusions, have tended to lead to theoretical or methodological short-cuts being taken. This state of affairs explains the tendency among some anthropologists to look down upon consultancy work as being of second-rate quality since it.[5] While such criticisms are sometime valid (and there is no doubt that poor-quality work can emerge under time-bound, and strict TOR), the quality of work will vary according to the commitment and ability of the anthropologist. This in turn raises the important questions of whether or not anthropologists are compromising themselves and their discipline by 'buying in' to the dominant development discourse, or whether they are contributing to changing that discourse.

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[5] Back in the late 1970s one of colleagues told me that one of his professors defined the consultant as "A corrupt academic, who sells his principle and work under strict terms of reference to produce a load of rubbish" (Ali Edam, personnel communication).

In consultancy work, there may be a further restriction on work undertaken which stipulates that copyright of the material generated remain with the commissioning agency. This rule can become a serious barrier to information diffusion, and is frequently used to withhold material that relates to failure or difficult themes that may show an agency in an unfavourable light. This explains the fact that a vast amount of data and documentation remain in a largely inaccessible form as restricted reports written out by consultants working for development agencies.

One of the most complex questions for anthropologists relates to the terms on which to get involved in development work. There is a general tendency to bring anthropologists only when things begin to go wrong, rather than having them involved from the start in planning. Little can be done if the project has been poorly designed or based on unfounded assumptions, and the 'legitimising role' of the anthropologist (cf. de Treville, 1987) may indeed make matters worse rather than better. The involvement of the anthropologist will always be a matter of conscience, but asking some preliminary questions can help making informed choices. At what stage is the anthropologist being asked to participate in the project? How much time given to the anthropologist to undertake the research? How much credibility will be assigned to the findings? By participating in development, does the anthropologist simply become part of the prevailing discourse and help to lubricate the 'anti-politics machine'? (Gardener and Lewis, 1996)

In their natural pursuit for perfection when assessing the realities of a poor project, anthropologists tend to look behind the apparently simple situations. This not only generates misconceptions about the role of the anthropologists, but also creates communication barriers with the often defensive and potentially hostile agency staff. However, the uneasiness and frustration sometimes created by the presence of an anthropologist can be harnessed in development work and is arguably anthropologists' greatest strength, if it can be deployed constructively. This of course involves complex questions power that may require careful negotiation as well as difficult ethical choices to be made. To begin with, anthropologists as evaluators tend to forget two simple sets of facts. First, that they are 'researchers' not 'detectives' and that the project staff members are not 'criminals' but 'informants' whose interest is protected by the anthropologists own professional codes of ethical conduct. Thus, discussion with the project staff can be as sensitive as with community members and that access to the information over which they are presiding demands careful negotiation. Second, that there are rules (the project objectives) against which the project should be evaluated rather than judging it against 'pure' (often 'technical') principles. The flipside of this, especially if the anthropologist is in desperate need of future work, is to be as positive as possible, which may, in the short term at least, water down any form of staff resistance. This raises important ethical questions: Does the anthropologist prepared to spoil the chances of another similar assignment by giving an agency a negative write-up? Or is it moral, in the name of caution, to provide a clean bill of health for an agency and hope for more work of this kind in the future? (Gardener and Lewis, 1996)

Finally, anthropologists very often question the wider political environment of the country in which an agency operates. Although the agency may agree yet it might not see it as its job to question that side of things. In what way should the anthropologist respond in such encounters? In this regard, some anthropologists argue that there are different objectives for consultancy reports and academic papers, and hence opt for taking different positions with the same material according to context. This can sometimes appear to be hypocritical.

Concluding Remarks

It is often relatively easy to criticise the manner in which the development industry operates; understanding and supporting the alternatives is more difficult. The detached anthropologists were unable to act beyond producing hostile critiques of development agencies and the works of their colleagues who are involved. But if this all they do, their contribution becomes diminutive: they detract while adding nothing. Thus, it is important to be constructively critical: it makes little sense if the anthropologist fails to take responsibility for the practical implications of critical points. If certain assumptions or ideas have shown to be false, alternatives must be suggested which will create more appropriate courses of action. Many development agencies will be pleased to experiment with new ideas, but will be irritated by obdurate cynicism.

Anthropologists, whether as detached critics or as consultants hired by aid agencies, have a potential in development work based on the discipline's ability to 'see beyond' what is initially assumed and explore the complexity of social situations. While on the one hand anthropologists have for many generations worked with governments, donors and NGOs, demonstrating how much the discipline has to offer in terms of improving the work of developers, other anthropologists are engaged in a radical critique of the notion of development, arguing that as a concept it is morally, politically and philosophically corrupt. These differences and often conflicting positions have a long history and to an extent simply represent the diversity of views one would expect to find among any group of individuals: there is no good reason why anthropologists and their positions should be homogenous.

The increasing use of anthropological research by development agencies is to be commended, but anthropologists must watch out the dangers that their work might be forced into narrow, institutionally defined boundaries, thus becoming part of the discourse, which they should be relentlessly criticising. Since they may be funding it, the risk is that development agencies can dictate what type of research is carried out, and on what terms. This means that development agencies will increasingly determine a significant part of the research agenda, with social research increasingly become 'tied-up' with one set of issues. In the process, many other important issues go un-researched. This is evident in the current academic romance with fashionable issues such as, reproductive health, post-war-reconstruction, poverty reduction, and the like. Important though may be such concerns, yet there is far more to anthropological research than the sum of these issues. This raises important questions regarding the cooption of research by development agencies, and the consequent bias against basic research in terms of funding in favour of commissioned studies, which, in turn, undermines both academic and applied research.

Moreover, for anthropologists interested in development issues there need to be no fixed boundary between the 'academic' and the 'consultant' role. Many anthropologists find that these two areas of work can be mutually reinforcing, since they provide the opportunity for creating links between basic research, applied work, and teaching. For the consultant anthropologist who remains linked to an academic institution, information generated in the context of consultancy work can be utilised in subsequent basic research, during which intellectual batteries can be recharged through less pressured periods of reflection and contemplation on theoretical issues. In this way the relationship between the academic and the consultant becomes dialectical. Perhaps the anthropologists who stand the best chance of doing worthwhile development work are those who combine long-term academic research with shorter, carefully selected ventures into applied consultancy. During the consultancy assignments, theoretical ideas can be reformulated into forms that are more easily accessible to development agencies – short reports, workshop presentations and training sessions. Many development practitioners simply do not have time, if not the interest, to take on lengthy theoretical works and instead respond far more readily to face-to-face discussions or short briefing notes.

Finally, anthropologists should not expect involvement with development agencies to be easy. Whatever the form of involvement, the important questions are not only related to what anthropologists might do, but also includes an analysis of the framework in which they operate. Thus, in the words of Gardener and Lewis (1996), "...the collective responsibility of anthropologists is endlessly to question and problematise their positions, to be uncomfortable, and with their questions to make others uncomfortable too". This is a source of creativity, as well as a form of practical engagement and political commitment.

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