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Anthropology and the Development Encounter: The Making and Marketing of Development Anthropology

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# anthropology and the development encounter: the making and marketing of development anthropology

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In this article I deal with a subject that, despite its importance, is seldom raised in anthropological discussions, namely, the process of “development” in the Third World and the role of the anthropologist in such a process. More specifically, I am concerned with those professionals within the discipline who have made development the focus of their work: the “development anthropologists.” I investigate the rise of development anthropology since the mid-1970s, the process of its construction as a field of knowledge, and the ways in which it functions as a locus for intervention.

The involvement of anthropologists with development projects has been growing steadily since the mid-1970s, to the point that practitioners in the field have established a niche for themselves, albeit one not yet completely consolidated, as an anthropological subdiscipline. Discussions on the nature and scope of this subdiscipline have been quite lively among its practitioners during the 1980s. Given its novelty and growing importance, the process of involvement undoubtedly merits attention; it would seem that anthropologists are making an important departure from a longstanding tradition of restricted applied intervention. A recent article on the relationship between anthropology and development, for instance, starts with the following assertion:

The term “development” is taken so much for granted these days that it is hard to remember that when it first became prominent in the early 1960s it raised the hackles of anthropologists, involving images of the telic evolution so despised by persons trained in the Boasian tradition. It challenged the then anthropological notion that each society has reached an adjustment to the world that is best for it and that requires no change. . . . Today, the term is unblushingly invoked by anthropologists, who, it seems, have acquired a new understanding of exotic societies, one which does not treat social and cultural change as abhorrent. Still, my estimate is that although anthropologists may have accepted the idea, they have done so on different terms than others, terms which may uniquely contribute to the development process. [Schneider 1988:61]

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*Since the end of World War II, relations between industrialized nations and Third World countries have been greatly determined and mediated by the discourses and practices of “development.” Although anthropologists in general have not problematized the existence of such discourses and practices, a growing number of them have joined the applied field as “culture experts” in development activities. This article traces the rise and growth of “development anthropology” since the mid-1970s. Because of their adherence to mainstream models in both anthropology and development, the article argues, development anthropologists reinforce ethnocentric and dominating models of development. Moreover, these practitioners disturbingly recycle, in the name of cultural sensitivity and local knowledge, conventional views of modernization, social change, and the Third World. Some thoughts for redefining the role of anthropology in development are offered. [development anthropology, applied anthropology, history of anthropology, development studies, critical theory]*

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One has to ponder, of course, the reason for this change in the anthropologist's position with regard to development and change. We have to take seriously the fact that today, more than ever, anthropologists are evincing great interest in "the development process," and significant numbers of "development anthropologists" roam, more or less at ease, the world of development, teaching at universities or working as consultants or employees for institutions such as the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (U.S. AID), and nongovernmental organizations. The apparent failure of economically oriented approaches to development prompted a reevaluation of development's "social" aspects and goals beginning in the early 1970s and, more recently, of its cultural aspects, among them the impact of development projects on local communities and the importance of local knowledge systems for programs. The new emphasis on culture has in turn opened up unprecedented opportunities for anthropologists. "Culture"—which until the 1970s was purely a residual category, since "traditional" societies were thought to be in the process of becoming "modern" through development—has become inherently problematic in development, calling for a new type of professional participation, that of the anthropologist. As with any problematization, new discourses and practices are appearing, discourses and practices that help to shape the reality to which they refer. The consequences of this process have to be ascertained.<sup>1</sup>

It is thus crucial that we examine the role of anthropologists in development. To what extent do their critiques undermine the dominant discourse of development? Conversely, to what extent do anthropologists still depend on the perceptual configurations and cultural fields inaugurated by post-World War II development? Finally, do other current critiques in anthropology and development allow us to problematize the involvement of anthropologists in development projects? Inevitably, the description of local realities by anthropologists for development purposes involves a positioning in the present and a use of categories and cultural totalities that are not as free of past conditioning as researchers might wish. In their studies, and in spite of themselves, development anthropologists impose upon local realities social and political analyses that have traveled well-known terrains. These types of analyses originate in theoretical traditions in both anthropology and development that are the product of accumulated scholarly and political action, not merely neutral frameworks through which "local knowledge" innocently shows itself. It is through these analyses that anthropologists constitute themselves as subjects capable of knowing and modifying the real. Their actions create a domain of experience—certainly related to real conditions—that opens up ways to intervene in, and to control, the Third World, thus placing anthropology at the service of power.

Development anthropologists argue that a significant transformation took place in the mid-1970s, bringing to the fore the consideration of social and cultural factors in development activities. This transformation ushered in the "era of rapid expansion" (1975–80) of development anthropology, as a practicing development anthropologist put it in a recent issue of the *Anthropology Newsletter* (Jansen 1989). Suddenly, it would seem, anthropologists "trained in Boasian tradition" laid aside their qualms about intervention in the name of social change and "unblushingly" embraced the world of development, either as part-time consultants or as full-time employees with well-known development agencies. What impelled this transformation and thus resulted in the rise of development anthropology? How did "development anthropology" emerge as a form of knowledge, one shaped by development institutions as much as by Third World realities? How did these realities, or their expression at the local level, become objects of knowledge in the discourse of development anthropology? What is the domain of this knowledge, and what are the main categories through which this domain is gaining visibility, thus simultaneously making visible a host of Third World situations? Who can "know," and according to what rules, and what objects are considered pertinent? Finally, is it true that development anthropologists have a "unique" contribution to make in development situations because of their knowledge?

These are some of the questions that I will address in this article. I will argue that development anthropology, as it is currently practiced, is largely determined and constrained by views of development and anthropology that conform closely to mainstream models in both fields. In relation to the former field, I make the case that development anthropology rests in a Western-centered system of knowledge and power and that it actually recycles this system in the name of post-1960s notions of sensitivity to the grassroots, local culture, and the like. In relation to the latter my argument is simpler: development anthropologists have failed to take into account, perhaps even to notice, the significant changes that are happening in the discipline, thus continuing to adhere to professional practices that many anthropologists today would find questionable. In the conclusion, I explore ways in which the interface between development and anthropology could be modified by building upon recent critiques in both fields.<sup>2</sup>

## **the making of development anthropology**

My approach to the emergence of development anthropology focuses on three aspects that define the construction of this subdiscipline: discursive operations, processes of institutionalization, and practices of intervention. The discursive operations include the ways in which development anthropologists articulate the principles, methods, and scope of their field. This part of my analysis, in turn, gravitates around a number of inquiries concerning the origins of the field, the actual or possible roles of development anthropologists, the “anthropological difference” they see themselves as making, and their discussion of the dilemma they face because of the inevitable intervention in people’s lives that development projects entail. The processes of institutionalization and the practices of intervention evoke the question of the anthropologists’ real practice in development institutions and in specific projects. What must be examined in this regard are the working conditions and experiences of development anthropologists within bureaucratic bodies that have an idiosyncratic culture of their own, on the one hand, and the anthropologists’ assessment of the effectiveness of their intervention, on the other. In what follows, I will outline the main contours of this process of construction.

## **development anthropology and the history of applied anthropology**

Nowhere, perhaps, is the historical character of anthropology more evident than in its applied branch. Despite its exclusion from recent historical studies, given its “applied,” “non-academic,” or “nonscientific” character vis-à-vis the more reputable and well-established branches, the history of development anthropology can legitimately be considered part of the history of the “systematic study of human unity-in-diversity” (Stocking 1983:5); moreover, to use Stocking’s notion, development anthropology, like other anthropological subdisciplines, “allows us to consider as historically problematic the processes by which certain approaches to or aspects of human diversity are (or are not) incorporated into such systematic study” (1983:5). As this author contends:

in every period the “systematic study of human unity-in-diversity” is itself constrained—some might say systematically structured—by the ongoing and cumulative historical experience of encounters and comprehensions between Europeans and “others.” These comprehensions articulate closely with ideologies of European self-knowledge—as the evolutionary equation of savage/madman/peasant/child/woman suggests—and the often bloodily expropriative nature of these encounters gives them a special weighting of moral concern. The history of anthropology is thus the history of a “discipline” whose enmeshment in world-historical structures and processes especially compels attention. [1983:5–6]

If this view of the history of anthropology is correct, it is surprising how little attention has been paid to the latest addition to the “evolutionary equation,” namely, the “underdeveloped” or “less developed” species created by the post-World War II development discourse. Not only

colonialism but also development, and the latter perhaps more so despite its more benign face, has partaken of a “bloodily expropriative nature” and has extended modern European self-knowledge (as “First World”); at the same time, the development discourse has sought to re-contain, in the terrain of representation, the former colonies, now conceived of as “Third World.” In the transition from the colonial to the development encounter, anthropology’s historical awareness has left much to be desired. Anthropologists, for the most part, have taken post-World War II “development” for granted; they have accepted it as the normal state of affairs and have thus contributed to its naturalization. How unanthropological, one might say, to accept an entire historically produced cultural field without probing its depths. Surely this is related to divisions of labor within the academy, particularly the anthropologists’ lack of training in “development studies.” But one wonders whether this gap does not hide an important, and perhaps unique, problem in the discipline as a whole. All the more reason to inquire into the history of those whose practice is predicated on a close engagement with the otherwise absent, because ubiquitous, paradigm.<sup>3</sup>

The roots of development anthropology are related to the history of the broader field of applied anthropology. Applied anthropology, of course, is not new, and it might be useful to refer briefly to its history, since some of its aspects are quite relevant to current debates in development anthropology. Indeed, the roots of development anthropology can be traced back to debates on the nature and scope of “applied anthropology” dating to Malinowski and even before. In accepting the Malinowski award, offered him by the British Society for Applied Anthropology, Raymond Firth placed the beginning of applied anthropology even before the beginning of “overt colonialism” (Firth 1981). Malinowski is, of course, seen by many as the patron saint of applied anthropology, and his 1929 “Practical Anthropology” article is often quoted in this regard. “A new branch of anthropology,” Malinowski wrote in that article, “must sooner or later be started: the anthropology of the changing Native. . . . This anthropology would obviously be of the highest importance to the practical man in the colonies” (cited in Grillo 1985:9). In a subsequent article, Malinowski argued that

our present-day academic anthropology is not yet mobilized for the task of assisting colonial control. . . . [A] new theory, the functional school, is rapidly crystallizing, and . . . this, if it receives the cooperation of the men in the colonial field, will undoubtedly play the same part in constructive policy as physics and geology have played in engineering. . . . It is [thus] quite as necessary to advocate the reorganization of anthropology on functional lines as to stimulate the administrator’s interest in what the anthropologist has to say. . . . [W]hat I have really been advocating is not a leadership by the specialist, but, on the contrary, a temporary, impartial, but effective submission of specialized knowledge to practical lines. . . . [T]hat the whole vast branch of study which ambitiously calls itself the Science of Man ought to remain completely aloof from the real troubles and difficulties which beset the management of one race by another, and their contacts and co-operations, this is surely an anomalous and an unhealthy state of affairs. [1930:408, 427–428]

To be sure, Malinowski’s overall position regarding the colonial enterprise was by no means as clear-cut as this statement would seem to indicate. For him, the “anthropologist’s laboratory” was “the surface of the globe,” and the anthropologist’s work entailed study of “the white savage side by side with the coloured,” as he contended in the same article (1930:419). Like most anthropologists of the period, Malinowski, the “reluctant imperialist” (James 1973), was generally hesitant to become involved with the colonial administration, even if at times he wrote enthusiastically of a possible relationship.<sup>4</sup> In this sort of ethnographic liberalism there was a tension between detachment and engagement, a tension that Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown, and Evans-Pritchard, for instance, resolved in different ways, according to their respective views of colonialism, the role of knowledge, and the nature of academic practice. For Evans-Pritchard, there was nothing wrong per se with the application of anthropological knowledge to practical affairs; but if it were so applied, the anthropologist had to realize that he was “no longer acting within the anthropological field but in the non-scientific field of administration” (Evans-Pritchard 1946:93). While anthropology is characterized by objectivity and the exclusion of moral values as methodologically irrelevant, administration requires that moral

values be made explicit, since ethical standards are demanded. Intellectual objections such as these, political doubts about intervention on behalf of a system whose values the anthropologist did not share, and reluctance on the part of administrators to listen to the anthropologist all militated against the application of anthropology in the colonial context (Grillo 1985).

The beginnings of applied anthropology in the context of British colonialism, then, were quite contradictory. In reflecting on the history of social anthropology, Firth recalled the absence of certain “important parameters,” such as an appropriate public view of anthropology and, perhaps more important, institutional backing for anthropological research. Although this situation started to change between the two European wars, it was not until the creation of the great development organizations in the late 1940s and 1950s that more nearly adequate “parameters” came into play:

Between the two world wars the Rockefeller Foundation supported both the Australian National Research Council and the International African Institute in their anthropological work. But even with bodies such as League of Nations FAO and WHO, there was nothing like the pervasive modern system of highly financed, articulate bureaucratic organizations directly concerned with development and welfare of so-called Third World and more wealthy countries, and providing channels for anthropological opinion and enquiry, of applied as well as of theoretical kind. . . . [T]he change in these parameters has given us useful modern assets. [Firth 1981:195–196]

Firth’s characterization of development institutions as a “pervasive modern system” is right on the mark. As I will discuss, it is this vast apparatus of development that provides the basis for the mapping, and in many ways the creation, of the “Third World” and, at the same time, for the anthropologist’s intervention. In the United States, this apparatus was in gestation at the time of the Depression and the New Deal and, actually, applied anthropology arose—even acquiring its own journal by the mid-1930s—as part of the New Deal’s move to make social science “useful” for solving social problems. In the international arena, most authors today concur that, after a brief period of activity in the 1950s, especially through “community development projects,” development anthropology entered a period of hibernation that lasted throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, when involvement came to a halt and practically disappeared. During the 1950s, the rise of foreign assistance provided ample opportunities for the employment of anthropologists and other social scientists, whose role was to facilitate the diffusion of new technologies by overcoming resistance to change arising out of traditional values and institutions. The dominant paradigm was modernization theory, underscored in anthropology by technological change theory, perhaps best exemplified by Mead’s *Cultural Patterns and Technical Change*, published in 1953 under UNESCO sponsorship. Although this approach was seen as an advance over the earlier acculturation theory—according to which change still happened to discrete societies in unique ways, not as part of a worldwide process—technological change theory, with its image of the anthropologist as researcher and, to some extent, constructive participant, was not without problems, as Hoben has pointed out in his valuable review of development anthropology:<sup>5</sup>

the theoretical and methodological bias of midcentury American anthropology appears, rather paradoxically, to have limited anthropologists’ role and to have reinforced the development paradigm’s stereotype of traditional society. In keeping with their commitment to cultural diversity and relativity, anthropologists accepted the role of helping technicians and planners understand the uniqueness of each ethnic group’s customs, perceptions, and goals. This sustained the idea that the anthropologist’s place is in the village and that his only contribution to development is to serve as interpreter in direct action programs. [1982:354]

Hoben, to be sure, writes from the perspective that the anthropologist’s “place” is not only in the village but also in the development institutions of Washington or elsewhere, a point to which I shall return. But his observation about the anthropologists’ conservative orientation during this period, a point that was of course highlighted by critical anthropologists during the 1960s, is well taken. A turn toward macroeconomic-based strategies, along with radical critiques of past and current anthropology during the 1960s and early 1970s, contributed to the disappearance of anthropologists from international development.<sup>6</sup> Their absence lasted for

more than a decade. But when it was over, development anthropology was to emerge in full regalia.

### **“poverty-oriented” development and the new surge of development anthropology**

What was it that made possible the reversal of longstanding opposition to anthropologists' massive intervention in international practical affairs? Although development anthropology theorists mention several factors (among them the availability of new quantitative tools, the emergence of other anthropological subfields such as medical and nutritional anthropology, and new insights into the nature of social and economic change), they tend to agree on the main factor responsible for this change (Bennett and Bowen 1988; Green 1986; Hoben 1982; Horowitz and Painter 1986; Skar 1985; Wulff and Fiske 1987). Development experts and agencies, having become discontent with the poor results of technology and capital-intensive top-down interventions, developed a new sensitivity toward the social and cultural factors in their programs. Moreover, they began to realize that the poor themselves had to participate actively in the programs if these were to have a reasonable margin of success. Projects had to be socially relevant, to be culturally appropriate, and to involve their direct beneficiaries in a significant fashion. Such new concerns created an unprecedented demand for the anthropologist's skills. Faced with dwindling employment opportunities within the academy, anthropologists were more than eager to participate in the new venture.<sup>7</sup>

Theorists tend to agree, too, on the nature of the phases already traveled. This periodization is best summarized by W. H. Jansen II, staff anthropologist with U.S. AID in Amman. Jansen agrees with most authors in identifying the mid-1970s—and, more concretely, the formulation of the “New Directions” mandate for U.S. AID—as the take-off point for development anthropology. This marked the beginning of the era of rapid expansion, and “thus began a ‘boom’ time for development anthropology and the ‘gold rush’ of some anthropologists to the ranks of applied social science” (Jansen 1989:36). As the initial rapport between anthropologists and developers started to wane, and in the wake of a return to orthodoxy in development thinking during the Reagan years, a period of “rising discontent” (1980–85) was ushered in, to be succeeded by a “quest for alternatives” (1985–90) during the late 1980s, characterized by a more realistic and pragmatic mood among both anthropologists and developers.

Observers of development usually also point to a significant reformulation of strategies in the early 1970s, a reformulation manifested most clearly in World Bank and U.S. AID pronouncements on basic policy issues. In his landmark Nairobi speech, delivered before the Board of Governors of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund at their annual joint meeting in September 1973, Robert McNamara directed attention to what he described as a serious problem: the existence of over 100 million families with holdings of land too small and conditions of cultivation too poor to contribute significantly to agricultural production. The financial and intellectual apparatus of the Bank was then to be partially turned to serving the needs of the rural poor. “Poverty-oriented” programs, especially in the areas of rural development, health, nutrition, and family planning, thus became the order of the day. Most of the Bank's lending, to be sure, continued to be oriented toward large-scale projects to promote economic growth; but for the first time significant resources were devoted to the design and implementation of programs directly targeting the rural and urban poor (McNamara 1975).

This shift in policy led to development projects centered on the poor, to programs “concerned with the modernization and monetization of rural society, and with its transition from traditional isolation to integration with the national economy,” as the World Bank's 1975 Rural Development Policy Paper mandated (World Bank 1975:3). The basic premise of the development enterprise did not change. The new policies still sought the “modernization” of “tra-

ditional societies," understood as their incorporation into national and world economies, even if this time through more carefully tailored interventions. Rural development programs geared to the increase of food production were certainly linked to an existing agrarian political economy, as many have argued; in this view, rural development programs were geared toward the provision of cheap food, which would, in turn, maintain the conditions of cheap labor required for capital accumulation in the periphery of the world economy (de Janvry 1981). But beyond this, the new poverty-oriented programs reproduced the world of postwar development: a world organized around production and markets, divided between developed and underdeveloped, "traditional" and "modern," ruled by the politics of aid and multinational corporations, riddled by fears of overpopulation and communism, anchored in a faith in material progress through technology and the exploitation of nature. These programs gave the rural poor of the Third World a new visibility, making them the target of interventions that served to reshape social relations.<sup>8</sup>

These aspects seem to have escaped the attention of development anthropologists in their interpretation of the events of the early 1970s. Of course, the new focus on "the rural poor" was more the result of increasing radicalism in the countryside and of the demise of modernization theories than of a real change in the thinking of the World Bank. More important, it was in light of the increased visibility of the poor that the anthropologist's own visibility became possible. Anthropological reconstructions of this change of institutional attitude, however, focus on the more benign representation of "increased concern with the poor," without inquiring further into the social and cultural configuration that this improved "concern" entailed for the poor. This ideological operation—the effacing of the power that is inevitably linked to visibility—was, and still is, made possible by relying on U.S. AID's tight discourse. What for the World Bank became poverty-oriented and basic needs approaches, for U.S. AID found expression in the New Directions mandate. Enunciated between 1973 and 1975, this mandate called for a more beneficiary-oriented, community-centered approach designed to get at the "basic human needs of the poor," especially "the poorest of the poor"—another label coined during those years. The failure to consider social factors and "the human component," U.S. AID argued, led to repeated project failure. Farmers, on the other hand, were conventionally seen as individuals, not as members of a complex social system, and this faulty perception, too, had to be corrected. U.S. AID then insisted on the design of grassroots participatory approaches that would elicit the active participation of the poor themselves. And who else but the anthropologist, who was perceived by many as working closely with the poor and having intimate knowledge of their reality, was best qualified for the job?

Reflecting the New Directions mandate, U.S. AID began to require a "social soundness analysis" (SSA), an assessment of the feasibility, compatibility, and potential impact of a project in terms of the sociocultural environment in which it was to be carried out. For anthropologists, "the social soundness analysis cites the relevance of local values, beliefs, and social structures to the technological package under consideration; promotes cultural integration by fitting innovations into existing social patterns; solicits the impressions villagers and others have of their own circumstances; and evaluates the impact of programs upon people and the way they live" (Robins 1986:19). The social soundness analysis and "knowledge, attitude, and practices" (KAP) studies opened the doors of U.S. AID to anthropologists. "In addition to greatly expanding employment opportunities for anthropologists by introducing the requirement of a 'social soundness analysis' for all AID-sponsored projects," Green says in his review of development anthropology experiences, "New Directions proved ideologically and methodologically compatible with the training, orientation and practice of anthropology" (1986:5).

This view clearly presupposes a certain vision of the nature and role of anthropology. It also presupposes that anthropologists are to operate under the constraints of entrenched bureaucratic practices, politics, and worldviews, such as those of U.S. AID. I will return to the consequences of this shortly, and to the reasons why they appear to have escaped the practitioners'



attention. A main result of all the changes outlined above was a steady increase in the number of anthropologists working full- or part-time for development organizations of various kinds. While the main employer was, and remains, U.S. AID, other organizations also joined the trend. The presence of anthropologists in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations technical agencies, and other bilateral governmental development bodies (especially in the Scandinavian countries, Britain, and Canada) also increased substantially. Even the World Bank added a handful of anthropologists and sociologists to its permanent staff. While in 1974 the number of anthropologists working on a full-time basis for U.S. AID was one, the number had increased to 22 by mid-1977 and to at least 50 by 1980 (including those in Washington and at U.S. AID's overseas missions)—and this figure does not take into account those anthropologists who worked for U.S. AID on short-term contracts, the number of which “can be conservatively placed at well over 100” (Hoben 1982:359).<sup>9</sup> It was, in short, the “gold rush” period of development anthropology, to use Jansen's apt characterization.

In sum, the “history of development anthropology” constructed by development anthropologists closely reflects the attempts of those anthropologists to build a space and an identity for themselves. What they see in the recent past is a series of positive changes in the development dogma, changes that have allowed them to act on behalf of the poor. The rapid growth of the discipline, however, has opened up questions of the institutionalization of the field and of the field's relation to dominant institutions. It has also brought to the fore the ethical dilemma of involvement. The ways in which development anthropologists have addressed these questions have been greatly influenced by their conceptions of the role of anthropology and of the nature of development.

### **the professionalization and institutionalization of development anthropology**

The question of whether development anthropology can be thought to actually constitute a discipline should be addressed, since it also contributes to the discursive definition and stabilization of the practice. Writing in 1982, Hoben could say that “anthropologists working in development have not created an academic subdiscipline, ‘development anthropology,’ for their work is not characterized by a coherent or distinctive body of theory, concepts, and methods” (1982:349). This position has been reassessed more recently. Green has perhaps presented the matter most pointedly:

I think there is now considerable evidence that a subdiscipline has in fact emerged. . . . Development anthropology is probably not an academic subdiscipline, not only for the reason given [by Hoben] but because the scope of applied anthropology in the context of development is such that it cuts across many anthropological and other subdisciplines: public health, nutrition, population, forestry, agronomy, ecology, economics, communications, and marketing, to name but a few. It would be surprising if a coherent body of theory, concepts, or methods could emerge from such diverse fields of study and activity. We may be in a boom period for university-based teaching of development anthropology at present due to diminished career opportunities in academic anthropology and recent expansion of such opportunities in the broad field of development. But development anthropology, like development economics, will probably remain an amorphous, non-academically oriented field and as such will never be regarded as a legitimate academic subdiscipline—at least by traditional academicians. [1986:2, 3]

One senses here the old distinction between “academic” and “applied” branches, the former being credited with greater coherence, abstractness, comprehensiveness—and, in the long run, scientificity—than the latter, a point of which Green and many others are aware. At the same time one cannot but point out that its scientific status is crucial to development anthropology—is in fact its *raison d'être* within U.S. AID and the World Bank, since these institutions see development anthropologists as the bearers of true knowledge about people in the Third World. “Amorphous” or “dubious” disciplines such as development anthropology can be most fruitfully seen not in terms of “theory, concepts, and methods” but as discourses, that is,

as forms of knowledge which, while including or making use of a series of objects, concepts, and methodological choices, are primarily characterized by “regularity in dispersion.”<sup>10</sup> In other words, what characterizes most development anthropology—and, as I will show, development as a whole—is its ability to apply itself in a wide range of fields (concerning health, agriculture, ecology, education, population, and the like), starting from a relatively small number of variables (culture, technology, capital, resources) and the relations among them. Development anthropology thus functions by applying an anthropological principle, “culture”—which can be described on the basis of a few “regular” concepts, elements, or principles—to a broad range of real situations labeled “development” situations.

The consolidation of development anthropology will depend, of course, not only on its effect upon real situations but also on the ways in which it is professionalized as a body of knowledge and institutionalized as a practice. Professionalization and institutionalization are both quite problematic; they are interrelated and converge in the practice itself. Let us look at this aspect briefly. Professional organizations provide part of the framework for the field. In 1977, for instance, the British Royal Anthropological Institute set up a Development Anthropology Committee “to promote the involvement of anthropology in development in the Third World” (Grillo 1985:2). In the United States, a Society for Applied Anthropology was established in 1941 as the formal organization of applied practitioners, including, in recent years, those working in development. These institutions have contributed greatly to the placing of development anthropology in the professional agendas of both countries. In 1976, three well-known anthropologists set up the nonprofit Institute for Development Anthropology in Binghamton, New York. Since its inception, the Institute has been involved in projects in more than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, funded primarily by U.S. AID but also by the World Bank, FAO, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and others.

There are also private organizations which, although not development anthropology organizations, draw from similar ideas and funding sources. Their relation to cultural or anthropology-oriented conceptions warrants further research.<sup>11</sup> Among them are the Pragma Corporation, founded in 1977 in Washington, DC, staffed by 70 professionals, and supported by a roster of more than 1000 part-time consultants and associates; and Technoserve, funded by private contributions, which purports to provide a “working solution to world hunger” by “showing” poor villagers in the Third World “how to use their land more efficiently” (Technoserve n.d.). Pragma’s brochure emphasizes, much as development anthropologists do, “cultural diversity and cultural respect,” noting: “we seek our clients’ involvement and approval of all our recommendations and actions. . . . Our expertise is available to our counterparts so they can define and resolve problems to their own advantage.” They also pride themselves on their ability to respond quickly, and their advertising draws on modern technological, almost military, language: “Pragma can locate and send groups of experts anywhere in the world within a few days. We respond as swiftly to requests from our overseas personnel” (Pragma Corporation n.d.). Furthermore, they are decentralized, with field offices in Belize, Benin, Burkina Faso, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Zaire; finally, their brochure announces, they have excellent ties with the Washington “banking community” and with organizations such as U.S. AID, the World Bank, and the Organization of American States (OAS). The language of science merges here perfectly with those of economics and technology to establish a tight discourse and deployment apparatus.

A more important institutional aspect, however, is the extent to which the mindset and actions of development anthropologists are shaped or constrained by the fact that they have to operate within the scope of mainstream development institutions. The effect is noticeable in, for example, the manner in which development anthropologists often present and “market” themselves, consciously or unconsciously designing their accounts of past experiences “to convince current and prospective practitioners of the utility and marketability of their anthropological knowledge to government and industry. To sell, one must be sold” (Wulff and Fiske

1987:1). This is not merely cynicism, as the need to show success in order “to sell” creates a parallel need to emphasize only the “positive” aspects of projects. But there are much more important effects. The American Anthropological Association’s *Training Manual in Development Anthropology*, for instance, presents the following definition:

Development anthropology is scientific research with significant applications within the development project cycle. Its objective is to enhance benefits and mitigate negative consequences for the human communities involved in and affected by development efforts. Development anthropologists are involved in development projects in a variety of ways, the specific roles being determined in part by the particular stage in the life cycle of the project. [Partridge 1984:1]

What might appear at first glance to be a matter-of-fact definition reveals, under closer scrutiny, a number of disturbing assumptions and practices. Generally speaking, what has to be examined is how institutional practices such as the project cycle contribute to organizing the world, including the world of the “beneficiaries” (peasants, for example). To begin with, the term “project cycle” refers to a view that sees policy and planning as a systematic process composed of fixed stages (problem identification, identification and assessment of alternatives, policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation). This view raises complex questions, which we can barely begin to tackle here and to which few anthropologists or development experts have paid attention. In relation to the planning cycle itself, the model gives the impression that policy is the result of discrete, voluntaristic acts, not the process of coming to terms with conflicting interests and worldviews, in the course of which choices are made and exclusions effected. In this way, agendas and decisions appear to be rational, deriving from objective analysis, whereas in fact they are often foregone conclusions. But there are other important hidden mechanisms, such as the demarcation of new fields and their assignment to experts (for example, “rural development”), sometimes even the creation of a new subdiscipline (“development anthropology”). This operation not only assumes the pre-existence of compartments such as “health,” “agriculture,” “culture,” and the like—which are in truth no more than fictions created by the scientists—but also imposes them on cultures to which they are alien. Along the way, states, dominant institutions, and mainstream ways are strengthened and the domain of their action is inexorably expanded (Escobar In press).

There is also an apparent neutrality in identifying people as a “problem” without realizing, first, that this definition of the “problem” has already been put together in Washington or some capital city of the Third World; second, that problems are defined in such a way that some development program has to be accepted as a legitimate solution; and finally, that along with this “solution” come administrative measures that make people conform to the institution’s discursive and practical universe (Mueller 1987). This effect is reinforced by the use of labels such as “small farmers,” “illiterate peasants,” or “pregnant women”—some of the favorite labels of development institutions—which not only reduce a person to a trait, turning him or her into a “case” or abnormality to be treated, but also make it possible to dissociate explanations of the “problem” from the nonpoor and to assign them to factors internal to the poor. In short, labels and institutional practices are issues of power; they are invented by institutions as part of an apparently rational process that is fundamentally political in nature (Wood 1985).

Policy is thus bureaucratized and depoliticized through “commonsense” practices such as planning. Strategies such as “rural development” are seen as exogenous to social and political situations, charitable medicines provided by the “international community” to be applied on sore spots perceived as external. Moreover, professional ideologies (including those of development anthropology) provide the categories with which “facts” can be named and analyzed. This means, simply said, that the encounter between, say, peasants and development experts is socially constructed, that is, structured by professional and bureaucratic mechanisms which are anterior to the encounter. The local situation is inevitably transcended and objectified as it is translated into documentary and conceptual forms that can be recognized by the institutions. In this way, the locally historical is greatly determined by nonlocal practices of institutions. Not

only that, but since the internal processes of organizations are tied to social relations involving governments and specific groups, they become an aspect of ruling: organizations rely upon and replicate conceptions and means of description that are features of the world as understood and practiced for those who rule it. The “development encounter” produces forms of consciousness that are more the property of organizations and ruling groups than a reflection of the concrete coming together of individuals. One thus has to strive to understand the nonlocal determinants of locally lived situations introduced by development.<sup>12</sup>

In sum, the narrative of planning and development—deeply grounded in the post-World War II political economy and cultural order—inevitably relies on the erasure of historical mediation in the consciousness of planners and other actors through a series of practices defined as “rational.” In this narrative, too, peasants and Third World people appear as the half-human, half-cultured benchmark against which the Euro-American world measures its own achievements. As targets of “development,” peasants are made irrelevant even to their own communities. Development anthropologists, it is true, try to stay closer to local perceptions; but as they interact with institutions, they inevitably inscribe local reality in terms of professional categories. Recently, development anthropologists have begun to emphasize the need to study the “culture” of the institutions themselves (Bennett and Bowen 1988; Hoben 1982); this trend, although promising, is still intended for the most part to augment their bargaining power within the institutions, not to enhance our understanding of how the institutions shape the fields of thinking and action of both the anthropologist and his or her Third World clients. In the process of discursively constructing their subdiscipline, anthropologists have overlooked the ways in which power works at this level. In this, they are no exception among development practitioners.

### **views of development and the role and dilemma of the anthropologist**

Finally, how do development anthropologists conceive of development and their role within it? Development anthropologists’ views of development and anthropology can be best gleaned from their articulation and resolution of what they see as their fundamental dilemma: to be or not to be involved. Needless to say, the dilemma is for the most part resolved in favor of involvement; what is important to examine, however, is the reasoning behind such a decision, as well as the views of development and anthropology that are implicated and projected in that reasoning. Some development anthropologists legitimate intervention in a defensive, almost dismissive, tone. For instance, Scudder, one of the founders of the Institute for Development Anthropology, presents the dilemma thus:

Because our main sources of funds are USAID, the World Bank, FAO, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), we are occasionally asked whether there is an inconsistency between our stated goals and our reliance on agencies that “are part of an imperialistic establishment seeking to promote Western dominance around the world.” . . . Although problems are associated with such sponsorship, I consider them to be more institutional and developmental than ideological. Generally speaking, we are not uncomfortable with our sponsors. . . . [I]t is a gross mistake to look on AID . . . as homogeneous; there are many AID officers who are genuinely committed to human rights, to income redistribution. . . . [I]t is important to state that to date we have had little difficulty in finding worthwhile projects that are largely compatible with our goals. [1988:371]

One does not need to see U.S. AID and the World Bank as “tools of imperialism,” and one does not need to disagree with the fact that there are well-intentioned individuals within those agencies, in order to be critical of what it means to be involved with these organizations. For Scudder, any kind of criticism will amount to some sort of “leftist simple-mindedness,” which allows him to dismiss critical views without having to consider them seriously. A more commonly held argument in favor of involvement is the insistence that noninvolvement would entail greater detriment to the people, and that those who decide not to participate do nothing but “stand on the sidelines.” To quote Scudder once more:

The point is this: regardless of its ideological stance and the nature of a nation's political economy, large-scale river basin development projects are going to continue. The options, therefore, are to stand on the sidelines complaining about the negative impacts of such projects but having relatively little effect on their number, location, design and purpose, or try to influence—both from within and, where necessary, from without—their planning, implementation, and management in ways that incorporate local populations in project benefits in an environmentally sound way. [1988:373]

This position takes for granted that the anthropologist's intervention will be meaningful in terms of meeting both the needs and the desires of the poor and that, of course, she or he can judge what is beneficial or "environmentally sound" and what is not. I shall return to this point shortly. It also assumes that to do otherwise amounts to "stand[ing] on the sidelines complaining," a point made by other authors as well (Green 1986; Partridge 1984; Spain 1978). Green, one of the most prominent figures in the field, stresses that "it is worth sacrificing strict scientific neutrality and cultural relativism if the lives of the world's poor majority can be improved; . . . development projects and programs informed by anthropology are better to [sic] those not so informed" (1986:2). That profound doubts regarding "scientific neutrality" and "cultural relativism" (as conventionally understood) have been raised not only in anthropology but in other branches of social analysis does not seem to concern development anthropologists; rather, they elevate "academic" anthropology to the status of objective inquiry and relegate its practice to the "ivory tower" of the university, where "noninvolvement" is possible and desirable. Theirs is a different practice—so development anthropologists naively believe—one preoccupied not with career advancement but with serving the poor. An important ideological operation is undoubtedly at work here, the full understanding of which would require consideration of debates about pure and applied science and, more generally, about the role of the intellectual in the postcolonial world, a task that is clearly beyond the scope of this article.

The dilemma of involvement is not new. I have already mentioned the ambivalence of early applied anthropology in relation to colonialism. Firth, for instance, while acknowledging that "there is a bridge to be built between the savage and the civilization that is forced upon him; and the anthropologist can play his part in this social engineering" (1938:194), also warned that "culture change is not a mechanical process; it depends on the ideas of the people who are affected by it, and successful adjustment is not a simple matter of introducing 'development,' 'enlightenment' and 'progress' to backward races" (1938:193). Moreover,

if the anthropologist is asked to help in making a policy of Indirect Rule more efficient, is this with the ultimate objective of fitting the natives for self-government, with freedom of choice as to the form of political institutions that they may finally desire, or is it with the aim of simply getting a more cohesive community, with law and order better kept, taxes paid more promptly, and social services more efficiently carried out, all to remain within the framework of an Imperial system? When it is argued that anthropology must be ready to give solutions to practical problems, it is too often assumed that the values which the anthropologist should uphold and actively promote are those of our own civilization. [1938:195–196]

The question still applies to the present-day world, with the corresponding qualifications (substitute, for instance, "capitalist world economy" for "Imperial system"). Bennett in North America, Grillo in Britain, and Swantz in Scandinavia all reformulate this question in thoughtful fashion. Bennett's "moral dilemma" takes the following form:

Because development has become a historical and national necessity, anthropologists are drawn into participation even as they protest its means and ends. . . . Still, to do so is to facilitate development, and such facilitation may seem to violate the anthropologist's credo of self-determination of local populations. Hence the moral dilemma: by staying out, anthropologists may help to perpetuate the costs and disbenefits; by coming in, anthropologists may ease the burden of rapid change but nevertheless further the loss of cultural integrity. [1988:2]

This assertion, however, is based on several questionable premises: that development is a "historical necessity"; that to stay out is necessarily to do nothing (and not to care about people's problems); that to intervene will automatically mean that something good will happen to the local people; and that the anthropologist is needed to preserve "cultural integrity," which assumes in turn that something like "cultural integrity" or untouched culture exists in the first

place and that people cannot defend it without the help of the anthropologist. Grillo's statement is less abstract, better grounded in history, than is Bennett's. "Th[e] subversive potential of anthropology, which stems from our methodology, could be seen as one of our greatest strengths," he writes,

but it has to be recognized that in reality the customer-contractor relationship is one in which the power to define what is and is not possible resides usually with the customer [the development agency]. This means that the anthropologist is inevitably caught in a web of compromise. . . . The question that all this raises is how far are we prepared to go, and on what terms, and yet retain our professional and personal self-respect? [Grillo 1985:24]

This position is echoed by Swantz in her assessment of the contribution that anthropologists can make in the context of Scandinavian development assistance. Swantz believes that one must start by considering those practices that constrain the practitioner, such as the dependence on outside funding and the need for professional recognition, the inherited set of theories and categories, and the cultural views with which the anthropologist approaches a community from the outside. Once these are considered, questions such as for whom the knowledge is produced and whose knowledge matters, as well as the question of the anthropologist's political commitment, cannot be avoided. Moreover, the question then becomes "whether anthropologists can condone the kind of application that is expected of them and become facilitators of programs planned by outsiders. . . . [C]an an anthropologist pursue the goals and principles of his/her discipline and at the same time cooperate with development agencies?" (Swantz 1985:26–27). Swantz, like Grillo, argues that there can be no general answer to this question. Rather, involvement should be decided upon on a case by case basis, for which the anthropologist will need an exceptionally high degree of ethical, political, and practical consciousness. Useful criteria in this regard are the degree of independence of the anthropologist vis-à-vis the institution, the possibility of an honest critique, the definition of "development" in each specific project and, of course, the potential benefits for those affected.

Underlying the mainstream arguments by development anthropologists, as I mentioned, are conventional views of development and anthropology that should be explored further. As the quotations from Scudder and Bennett reveal, most development anthropologists assume that development either has to take place or inevitably will. Scudder is quick to add that the "major justification for this stance is that the large majority of the world's population want development for themselves and their families" (Scudder 1988:366). But how can Scudder demonstrate this point? Moreover, it is not difficult to show, as I do below, that there is widespread resistance to development projects in many parts of the Third World. Another author states that "development in the absolute sense of moving forward is the standard by which this process [modernization] is being judged. . . . Developing the capacity of Third World nations to satisfy the needs of their people, as they the people perceive them, is the challenge which faces applied scientists" (Robins 1986:10–11). The idea that a planned process can bring about social change lies at the bottom of these views. This process is geared toward increasing production, changing consumption attitudes to resemble those of the industrial world, reducing poverty, and so on. Some authors go as far as to say that development is inevitable because Third World people, like anybody else, are primarily motivated to obtain power.<sup>13</sup> Or, from Bennett:

The cultural issues are momentous and the most important facing humankind since the invention of writing: how can human needs and wants on a worldwide scale be disciplined? How can we adjust the exceedingly defective methods of social and economic planning to runaway aspirations of personal gratification and national autonomy and power? How can the proliferating and self-reinforcing system of rising expectations be brought under some kind of stable governance? . . . Development is an urgent agenda; some version of it *must* be accomplished if global inequalities, and the consequent environmental effects, are to be modified. So anthropologists must participate in development, and continue to seek both social and environmental goals. They must participate in the search for a sustainable route to the well-being of a world population. And let us hope that population can, in some fashion, be brought under some sort of control over the next generation. [1988:23–24]

In other words, discipline the natives, control their aspirations, redefine their priorities and realities. This is what this sort of development would amount to (good intentions notwithstanding), a task which is amply justified, in this view, by the specter of ecological degradation and overpopulation (brought about mostly by development itself!). Development anthropologists, for all their self-proclaimed sensitivity to local conditions, have not escaped the ethnocentricity of the whole development paradigm.

The dependence of anthropologists on the cultural field of development (and, more generally, on the episteme of modernity) goes hand in hand with a certain perception of their role. Development anthropologists see themselves, in general, as “cultural brokers” or translators working on behalf of the poor. Whether anthropologists act as “research facilitators,” “micro-level interventionists” (participant employees of a development-oriented organization), or “research evaluators,”<sup>14</sup> their holistic method of analysis supposedly guarantees appropriate consideration of all the relevant variables, while their knowledge and cultural sensitivity guarantee the social and cultural adequacy of projects:

The anthropological difference is apparent at every stage of the problem-solving process: Anthropologists design programs that work because they are culturally appropriate; they correct interventions that are underway but that will be economically unfeasible because of community opposition; they conduct evaluations that contain valid indicators of program results. They provide the unique skills necessary for intercultural brokering; they collect primary and “emic” data necessary for planning and formulating policy; and they project and assess cultural and social effects of intervention. [Wulff and Fiske 1987:10]

Or, more emphatically:

Anthropologists regularly report the perspective of the people among whom they work (the “emic” perspective); . . . [they] customarily give expression to local points of view; they are sensitive to the ethnocentric pitfalls of cross-cultural comparison; they are experienced in field research in pre-industrial society; they view culture holistically, and they recognize that farming and technology are but part of larger systems. . . . Helping the poor to better understand their position in society can be yet another contribution that the anthropologist makes. [Robins 1986:16, 17, 18]

In other words, because of their discipline and methods, anthropologists working in development cannot err in their actions regarding the poor even if sometimes, as some of them argue, they may be victims of the *Realpolitik* of development institutions (Horowitz and Painter 1986). Moreover, an assessment of their contributions to development amply substantiates this claim; as they see it, these contributions—such as improved planning from below, provision of relevant data at the local level, appropriate survey design, identification of cultural constraints on projects, and rapid provision of feedback—have been important in a variety of fields, including involuntary relocation, informal sector economies, indigenous knowledge systems, farming systems and projects, river basin development, reforestation programs, and the management of fragile lands. Development anthropologists rarely discuss the many problems associated with these projects, and in fact they tend to foster the impression that they have a monopoly on such contributions. Without belittling the anthropologists’ contributions, one has to recognize that many other kinds of professionals have played similar roles at the local level, and that even the ethnographic method, to which anthropologists claim to have sole access, is now used by many other professionals.<sup>15</sup>

To be sure, development anthropologists produce many types of useful knowledge in the course of their research. What must be objected to is the attachment of this knowledge to a development rationality. Actually, a number of case studies found in development anthropology anthologies report on research not carried out specifically within development situations, and some of them are quite insightful.<sup>16</sup> Generally speaking, however, it is difficult to accept at face value the overly optimistic and unproblematic rendition of the role and experience of the development anthropologist. Some problems are admitted to exist, but these relate almost invariably to the constraints within which anthropologists must work because of the bureaucratic nature of institutions such as U.S. AID, UNDP, and the World Bank. A common complaint is that anthropologists are usually not involved in the entire “project cycle” but only in the be-

gining or final stages. Some writers therefore conclude that anthropology must increase its participation in those institutions. Anthropologists, Horowitz (1989) says, have been too modest, too reticent to propagandize their centrality in development. And, according to Hoben, "in the last analysis, the institutionalization and impact of anthropologists in development work depends on their ability to demonstrate their utility by participating as trusted insiders [in institutions such as U.S. AID] playing many roles in a broad range of decision making processes" (1982:359).

Many objections can be raised to this characterization. From within the discipline itself, Thompson's well-known word of caution for applied anthropology has some relevance. Thompson emphasizes that cultures have to be seen as self-producing entities, with their own unique capacities for self-creation and problem solving; if this view is accepted, applied anthropologists can do no more than help to clarify the historical options available to a community, making no further interventions, not even "on behalf of the poor" (Thompson 1976:1). This stand represents what Grillo has called the "rejectionist" position, one that sees the anthropologist's intervention as elitist or paternalistic, as something that necessarily reinforces the status quo. Grillo outlines three other possible positions: that of the "monitorist," who simply diagnoses and creates public awareness of the problems associated with development; that of the "activist," who, like the anthropologists discussed in this article, is actively engaged in development work; and that of the "conditional reformer" (Grillo and his co-workers seem to put themselves in this category), who recognizes that anthropologists can contribute to the solution of Third World problems, but who also recognizes that their work in development programs and institutions is inherently problematic. Grillo's final remarks in this regard are worth quoting, since they reflect a more constructive position:

The argument sketched here leads, then, to a perspective which might be termed conditional reformism. Anthropology has much to offer the world of development—though that world has yet to be completely convinced of its value. But we must be fully aware of what involvement in that world means, ethically, politically and practically. Applied anthropologists need an especially high degree of consciousness of what is and is not possible, of what has historically been possible and what has not; optimism—yes—but also realism, and a stronger sense of scepticism, too. They will also need an exceptionally thick skin. [Grillo 1985:31]

If it is certainly true that anthropologists have much to offer the world, this does not mean that their contribution has to be in the world of "development"; this contribution will always depend on what kind of anthropology is practiced. For now, Grillo's dictum may serve to remind development anthropologists that when working within the scope of the development establishment, they will be dealing with much more than meets the eye. As I have argued, the institution necessarily shapes the encounter between anthropologist and "beneficiary" to such an extent that more often than not the real client of the anthropologist is not the latter but rather the hiring institution. It can also be argued that the anthropologist's "holistic" method is rendered inoperative and even useless in the context of development organizations that still operate according to a strict positivist epistemology, for the anthropologist must adopt the same kind of positivist and economic outlook in his or her dealings with those organizations. As a result, the interpretive or holistic insights are so watered down by the time they become part of the project cycle that they have lost most of their "subversive" value. This is even more so when the anthropologist's involvement is reduced to a typical two-week field visit. Finally, one can question, of course, the whole adequacy and efficiency of institutions such as U.S. AID—their blatant links to self-serving U.S. foreign policy interests and their conventional view of development—a point which I have not addressed explicitly here, but which has been the subject of very critical evaluations even from within the establishment itself.<sup>17</sup>

More important, the same syndrome tends to vitiate the anthropologist's ability to perceive the "local reality." The ability to perceive "from the native's point of view"—a problematic position, as current critiques of anthropology have amply demonstrated (Friedman 1987; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Rosaldo 1989; Trinh 1989)—not only assumes that the natives need



someone to “speak for” them, but also becomes entangled with the need to perceive “from the institution’s point of view.” Moreover, the anthropologist thus constructs local situations not in terms that conform to the subject’s reality but in terms that make sense to the organization, that is, as a reflection of development categories. A critical reading of development anthropology case studies easily reveals this feature. In these accounts, the subjects rarely talk back, and when they do, their voices are filtered, disciplined, standardized, translated into institutional terms. To conclude, I would like to illustrate this point with a brief mention of one such case study, on reforestation programs in Haiti, hailed by many as an exemplary case of the anthropologist’s involvement in development.

This case study reports the results of a several-year-long project directed for U.S. AID by an anthropologist who had just completed his doctoral dissertation on the relationship between peasant land tenure systems and population growth in Haiti. The project had the unusual feature of being directed and conceptualized by anthropologists, and it did achieve some remarkable results: about 75 million trees planted in four years, some positive income effects for Haitian peasants, and significant modifications in U.S. AID’s project procedures. The project also served as the basis for several anthropological studies. Despite these achievements, the case study exhibits most of the shortcomings to which I have alluded. After a neo-Malthusian introduction to “the problem” (a geometric increase in population that is leading the peasantry to “rac[e] each other with axes and machetes to cut down the few natural tree stands remaining” and is impelling peasants to “creatively convert daytime reforestation projects into nocturnal goat forage projects”), the author goes on to describe Haitian peasants as “inveterate and aggressive cash croppers” (Murray 1987:223, 225, 228). This vision leads him to conclude—and to design his project accordingly—that

The global tree problem is often erroneously conceptualized in a conservationist or ecological framework. . . . From hunting and gathering we turned to cropping and harvesting. I found the analogy conceptually overpowering. *Trees will emerge when and only when human beings start planting them aggressively as a harvestable crop, not when human consciousness is raised regarding their ecological importance.* This anthropological insight (or bias), nourished by the aggressive creativity of the Haitian peasants among whom I had lived, swayed me towards the adoption of a dynamic “domestication” paradigm in proposing a solution to the tree problem in Haiti. This evolutionary perspective also permitted me to see that the cash-cropping of wood was in reality a small evolutionary step, not a quantum leap. [Murray 1987:237; emphasis added]

Moreover, the author triumphantly concludes after the project that

I felt as though I were observing (and had been a participant in) a replay of an ancient anthropological drama, the shift from an extractive to a domesticated mode of resource procurement. Though their sources of food energy had been domesticated millennia ago, my former village neighbors had now begun replicating this transition in the domain of wood and wood-based energy. I felt a satisfaction at having chosen a discipline that could give me the privilege of participating, even marginally, in this very ancient cultural-evolutionary transition. [1987:239]

Denial of coevalness—that is, seeing the Haitians as existing in a different time or “evolutionary stage” from our own (Fabian 1983)—biological determinism, neo-Malthusian empiricist propositions, and the disqualification of ecology (including peasants’ ecological knowledge) are only the most prominent ideological operations at work in this conception. Although the author mentions in passing the role of external forces in deforestation, he fails to see how his small “evolutionary step”—that is, the adoption of tree-planting for cash, naturalized as a normal course of events—builds upon and deepens the process of commodification of land and labor and the increased penetration of capital into natural systems, which thus become “production conditions” (in this case, trees produced in plantations for cash).<sup>18</sup> The same outlook requires that peasants be seen as “aggressive cash croppers” or, alternatively, as dark hordes roaming the Third World countryside with axes and machetes, destroying the forests; it does not sufficiently consider why peasants are cutting trees, and it inevitably summons up the ghost of overpopulation. The fact that the study provides a more complex view of deforestation than previous U.S. AID reports does not do away with the fact that projects such as these serve

to redefine Latin American peasants along the lines of individualistic, capitalistic, and consumption-oriented variables, with crucial consequences for interventions. Given their adherence to the development paradigm, such projects have a hard time seeing local reality in terms other than those of the development discourse.

The concrete achievements of the project, of course, have to be recognized. But one is given little information as to what else changed in the process, materially and culturally. In other words, the reader is supposed to accept the study at face value given the amount of trees planted or income generated, but she or he is not presented with a broader context in which to assess the real impact of the project. The author cites the modification of U.S. AID's modus operandi, away from inefficient paternalistic approaches and toward a "privatized delivery model" run by private voluntary organizations (PVOs), as an important achievement of the project. But while one may agree with the need to change development models, one also has to wonder whether the kind of privatization scheme promoted by this study is what is needed. After all, the project was designed by outsiders and, for the most part, run by external PVOs. Haitians had to fit into a preexisting structure in order to participate in it. While one cannot reject privatization a priori, it must be said that in the present case it goes well with the philosophy of privatization of assistance pushed by the Reagan and Bush administrations. What kind of private groups, with what relations to the grassroots, are involved in the project? Is the project sustainable? What kind of autonomy or dependency on institutions does it foster? What forms of popular power does it encourage or undermine? Is the community's link to an extractive economic system not strengthened by a project conceived narrowly in terms of cash cropping? What could be the long-term consequences of the changes introduced by the project? These are some of the questions that the study leaves largely unanswered.

Such objections, of course, are not restricted to this study but can be raised in relation to a great number of development projects. They are presented as an indication of the difficulties external researchers face in coming up with project designs that conform more closely to the popular experience, avoiding developmentalist thinking to the extent possible. Similar mechanisms are at play even in the work of many nongovernmental organizations and "grassroots" development projects. Even in the case of seemingly progressive grassroots projects, such as those sponsored by the Inter American Foundation (Annis and Hakim 1988) and Cultural Survival, some of these mechanisms surface despite the good intentions of the researchers. For instance, donor perceptions still determine what counts as a "good project," even when the donors seek to give control of a project to the community and to "valorize" local knowledge. The fact that it is the donor who determines what is to be "valorized" and how is problematic. Communities, on the other hand, have to adopt organizational forms and project designs that the donor can recognize if they are to have access to project funds, even if those forms may not reflect community traditions. Since often the donor still functions within the project view of development, commitment to local culture and autonomy is replaced by commitment to a project. Cultural self-definitions thus frequently remain invisible and, in some cases, are unwittingly suppressed.

As I have argued, development institutions are part and parcel of how the world is put together so as to insure certain processes of ruling. Under these conditions, development anthropology almost inevitably upholds the main tenets of development. Professionals discover an "order" or "system" that is no more than the order they have been trained to perceive or discover. Procedures for producing knowledge about the Third World are thus embedded in the processes of ruling, including, of course, a whole political economy and regime of cultural production. A proper institutional ethnography (Mueller 1987; Smith 1987) must examine all of these determinants if our concern for people in the Third World is to be advanced in a cultural and social space different from that determined by the apparatus of development. This would be a type of ethnography in which fieldwork in a local setting, research in a development institution, and archival research were combined in order to explain, within the context of re-

gional or global forces, the effect on a local community of a specific development intervention, originated in a particular professional discourse and implemented by one or several institutions. In this kind of study, resistance to and possible means of redirecting development interventions would also be examined. Studies of this nature might provide opportunities for practical work by anthropologists outside of routine development projects.

This type of research would also enable anthropologists and activists to carry out a type of work that is more aware of the conditions of its own production. It would help to suspend the process whereby local situations are inevitably translated into development interventions. Otherwise, the hidden nature of development is effaced, and the position of the West as an economic and cultural center reinforced. As practiced today, the development encounter—with or without the participation of anthropologists—thus amounts to an act of cognitive and social domination.

## conclusion

The analysis conducted thus far highlights the problematic character of the relation between development and anthropology. It opens up the question of whether a different relation is possible, the answer to which will depend, once again, on the views of development and anthropology to which one subscribes. I would like to refer briefly to this possibility as a way of concluding. As my analysis of the Haitian case study indicates, the building of a new practice will depend in part on taking a more critical look at dominant development models. This is, of course, easier said than done, given the hegemonic character of the development discourse. But some clues already exist in this regard.

Actually, a number of authors have begun to speak not even of “development alternatives” but of “alternatives to development,” that is, the abandonment of the whole epistemological and political field of postwar development (Apffel-Marglin and Marglin 1990; Escobar 1984-85, 1988; Esteva 1987; Fals Borda 1988; Mueller 1987; Nandy 1987, 1989; Rahnema 1988a, 1988b; Sachs *In press*; Shet 1987; Shiva 1989). These authors come from many parts of the world and share a number of preoccupations and interests: a critical stance with respect to established scientific discourse and, more generally, a rejection of the ethnocentric, patriarchal, and ecocidal character of development models; a defense of pluralistic grassroots movements, in the belief that these movements, and “new social movements” in general, may be providing a new basis for transforming the structures and discourses of the modern developmentalist states in the Third World; and a conviction that we must work toward a relation between truth and reality different from that which has characterized Western modernity in general and development in particular. Although still limited, the initiatives examined by these authors, most of them at the grassroots level, are seen as providing the means to an “alternative development as political practice” (Shet 1987).

Central to this vision is a critical examination of development as much more than a set of economic and technological interventions in the Third World. This kind of critique, which cannot be even summarized here,<sup>19</sup> goes well beyond the 1960s critiques of development as a dependency-creating mechanism and a tool of imperialism, emphasizing the role of development as a discourse that has constituted an entire way of defining and shaping the reality of a great part of the globe. “It took twenty years for two billion people to define themselves as underdeveloped,” Ivan Illich is quoted as saying (Trinh 1982). Problematic as this statement may be (who, among those in the Third World, started to see themselves as such?), it captures the essence of development as discourse. After World War II, countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America started to be seen, and to see themselves, as “underdeveloped,” and to be treated accordingly. “To develop” became a fundamental problem for them; they thus embarked upon the task of un-underdeveloping themselves by subjecting their societies to systematic and min-

ute observations and interventions that would allow them to discover and eventually eradicate their problems once and for all. Like the orientalist discourses discussed by Said (1979), development has functioned as a mechanism of power for the production and management of the Third World. It has done so through the systematic elaboration of forms of knowledge concerning all aspects of importance in the life of Third World societies, and through the creation of corresponding fields of intervention, from international organizations and universities to national- and local-level development agencies.

Development, thus, must be seen as a historically specific, even peculiar, experience; it must be defamiliarized so that its naturalness can be suspended in the eyes of theorists and practitioners. Resistance to development and the repeated failure of many development projects provide important elements for this task. Is it then possible to say that development is a “historical necessity”? Only if one continues to adhere to a vision of history propagated by politicians, multinational corporations, and mainstream scientific discourses, for which knowledge is what Western science knows, progress what the West’s dominant groups have achieved, and the only kind of life worth living what that knowledge and achievements define. As Esteva points out, “financing, marketing, transporting, voting, obtaining public services, using the media, travelling, applying ‘modern’ technology, . . . almost every contact of the peasants with others is an occasion for being damaged” (Esteva 1987:135); or, in Trinh’s words, “the more I accept his [the anthropologist’s/development expert’s] prescriptions, the more my *competences* shrink. . . . What he means and means well, between the lines, is . . . be like *us*, a collective identification that includes or excludes me with equal passion” (1989:48, 52). The debt crisis, the African famine, and widespread poverty and malnutrition are only the tip of the iceberg of the development record. The impact of many development programs has been pervasive; it has been felt acutely at the local level, perhaps most profoundly by indigenous peoples and women. Do not development anthropologists overlook this record when they decide to join in the “development effort”? Do not they, in doing so, fail to value local reality, introducing instead new mechanisms of dependency and control?

If development anthropologists ground their practice in a conventional view of development—albeit in the name of the local people and by bringing culture into consideration within predominantly economic models—their view of anthropology is equally conventional. It is somewhat paradoxical that at a time when anthropology is deeply questioning its “scientific” status—its ability to “represent” another culture transparently, the position from which it speaks, its objectivist stand, its embeddedness in power-knowledge systems (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Rosaldo 1989; Trinh 1989)—development anthropologists establish a practice predicated on their scientific credentials, on their ability to speak the truth about “the natives”; that when a number of anthropologists unveil not only the deleterious effects on Third World peoples of the political technologies of development (such as the Green Revolution or rural development programs) but also the manifold forms of resistance to them by the “beneficiaries”/victims of those programs (Ong 1987; Scott 1985; Taussig 1980), development anthropologists engage with similar programs in the hope that at least the negative effects can be assuaged, or in the belief that to refrain from engagement is “to stand on the sidelines”; that, finally, when anthropology and other disciplines emphasize the necessity of self-consciously critical and situated social science (Haraway 1988), development anthropologists choose to remain blind to the historically constituted character of development as a cultural system.

But how about anthropology “as a whole”? What kind of awareness do most anthropological works show about the ways in which “development” shapes the groups or situations they study? In his introduction to *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, Talal Asad raised the question of whether there was not still “a strange reluctance on the part of most professional anthropologists to consider seriously the power structure within which their discipline has taken shape” (1973:5)—that is, to consider the whole problematic of colonialism and neoco-

colonialism, their political economy and their institutions. Does not development today, as colonialism once did, make “possible the kind of human intimacy on which anthropological fieldwork is based, but insure that that intimacy [will] be one-sided and provisional” (1973:17), even if the contemporary subjects move and talk back? Finally, if during the colonial period “the general drift of anthropological understanding did not constitute a basic challenge to the unequal world represented by the colonial system” (1973:18), is this also the case with the “development system”? In sum, can we not speak with equal pertinence of “anthropology and the development encounter”?

There is some truth to the statement that anthropology as a whole has been unaware of its taking place within the post-World War II “development encounter,” despite the cautious stand that the discipline has usually taken with respect to its applications. If it is true that many aspects of colonialism have been superseded, the representation of the Third World through development is no less a social fact, its power effects are no less real. It is disturbing, as Said has pointed out in discussing the new trends and critiques in anthropology, that “there is an almost total absence of any reference to American imperial intervention as a factor affecting the theoretical discussion” (1989:214; see also Friedman 1987). Also disturbing, as he proceeds to argue, is the lack of attention on the part of Western scholars to the sizable and impassioned critical literature by Third World intellectuals on the subjects of colonialism, history, tradition, and domination—and, one might add, development. The fact that many Third World people (especially its elites and middle classes) have adopted the discourse does not let the anthropologist off the hook. Third World people have to move within the structures and discourses created by 40 years of development activities. As de Certeau (1984) has shown, the “users” of dominant discourses (such as development) effect in relation to them a veritable act of cultural creation, through resistance, adaptation, subversion. These aspects have to be taken into account in anthropological inquiry.

In sum, development anthropology, for all its claim to relevance to local problems, to cultural sensitivity, and to access to interpretive holistic methods, has done no more than recycle, and dress in more localized fabrics, the discourses of modernization and development. Can the good intentions of development anthropologists be preserved and their activities be reoriented significantly in ways that undermine, rather than reinforce, these paradigms? As I have indicated, current critiques in both anthropology and development provide some clues for the task of reorientation. But then “development anthropology” would become something else altogether. Another clue is provided by Strathern’s likening of feminist anthropology to applied anthropology, to the extent that the latter can be said to “shift discourse” (1985:20): to change the character of the interaction between anthropologist and subject, to alter the subject matter of conversation in such a way that the other is allowed to speak. But while feminist anthropology is grounded in feminism as a political practice, what is the politics of development anthropology if not, as we have shown, a politics of a Western-based, patriarchal, scientific, economic, and cultural project? Thus, the promises of applied anthropology remain to be fulfilled. The discipline has much to learn from feminism and from Third World social movements in this regard.

Is there a future for development anthropology? As we have seen, the practitioners’ view of their own future calls for a further integration into the development apparatus. I would rather argue for a type of anthropological practice that distances itself from mainstream development institutions and conceptions, even when working within the “development” field; a type of practice that is sensitive to the remaking of social analysis that critical anthropologists seem to be working toward; a type of practice that is less concerned with standard anthropological problems and more concerned with, for instance, social movements, political struggles, and the reconstitution of identities through development technologies and resistance to them; a type of practice that considers detached objectivity only one intellectual method among many and that, more generally, applies sustained epistemological pressure to conventional scientific

practices and divisions of labor. A type of practice, finally, that is not threatened by otherness and difference, trying to conceal them in the displacements of its discourse (seeing others as “underdeveloped” or “needy”), but that, always aware of the power dynamics at play, searches for a more self-aware communication among different, yet equal, subjects.

Anthropological studies of development will of course continue to be important, but they would take a different form. Anthropologists could examine how communities in the Third World are progressively constituted through the political technologies of development, and could elucidate the larger cultural and economic projects that such technologies deploy with them.<sup>20</sup> First, however, it will be necessary to renew our way of listening to the voices of different groups of people in the Third World, without making them into signs of a need for development, and to renew our awareness of the suffering caused by human institutions and actions, development or otherwise. Finally, anthropologists may contribute through this type of work to a collective practice of re-envisioning ways of organizing societies and economies, ways of relating to nature and to one another that have a better chance for life. In the process, we may discover other ways of caring and of healing the ravages brought about by development in the Third World. Some grassroots social movements seem to be pointing the way.

## notes

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<sup>1</sup>Foucault proposes the study of “problematizations of truth”—that is, the processes by which a situation or behavior becomes a problem, thus originating and shaping a field of experience and intervention (1985).

<sup>2</sup>I should make it clear at the outset that my argument applies specifically to the work of anthropologists involved with development projects, particularly those carried out under the aegis of large, mainstream development organizations. In its broader outlines, the analysis, I believe, has relevance to applied anthropology in general (including projects carried out in the United States for government agencies, for instance) and, as I will show, to anthropology as a whole.

<sup>3</sup>Johannes Fabian (1983) is one of the few scholars who have devoted attention to the ways in which the concept of “underdevelopment” functions in anthropology. Studies of the “anthropology of modernity” also allow us to study development as a chapter in the history of reason (see Escobar 1988). A handful of ethnographies, to which I will refer later, also address the impact of development interventions on various Third World populations.

<sup>4</sup>James (1973) analyzes in depth Malinowski’s “liberal-radical” position during the interwar period and thereafter, pointing out the paradoxical and contradictory character of the anthropologist’s concern for the natives, on the one hand, and his relation to colonial authorities, on the other. If it is true that Malinowski refused to side with the colonialists, showing sympathy for growing nationalist movements in Africa, James argues, there were clear limits to his radicalism. The anthropologist was “caught in the middle [between colonialism and nationalism] and constrained from either side” (1973:69).

<sup>5</sup>On these aspects of the history of the discipline, see also Bennett (1988).

<sup>6</sup>The most important critical statements of the era are the well-known books by Hymes (1969) and Asad (1973).

<sup>7</sup>For this reading of the history of development anthropology, and for a more general overview of the field, see especially Hoben (1982), Green, ed. (1986), Wulff and Fiske (1987), Skar (1985), Horowitz and Painter (1986), Bennett and Bowen (1988), and Trotter (1988).

<sup>8</sup>For an analysis of rural development programs from this perspective, see Escobar (1987, 1988).

<sup>9</sup>The placement of anthropologists outside the academy, of course, goes beyond development anthropology. In 1985-86, for the first time, the majority of anthropology Ph.D.’s took jobs outside academia (American Anthropological Association 1987).

<sup>10</sup>On the study of discourse along these lines, see Foucault (1972, 1978).

<sup>11</sup>This is not to say, of course, that all of the emphasis on the “local,” the grassroots, and the cultural aspects of development comes from anthropology. There are other sources as well, including the demands of grassroots activists and nongovernmental organizations.

<sup>12</sup>On this type of institutional analysis in relation to power and ruling, see the excellent work of Dorothy Smith (1987). See also Mueller (1986), Clay and Schaffer (1984), and Escobar (1987).

<sup>13</sup>“Even today I am not sure that anthropologists, not to say developers, have accepted this fact of desire for power. . . . [I]f opportunity presents itself any one person will strive for all the power he or she can get, to the point of establishing himself as lord of all” (Schneider 1988:67).

<sup>14</sup>This classification scheme is Bennett’s (1988:7).

<sup>15</sup>For a summary of the anthropologists’ contributions, see Hoben (1982) and the recent summary article by Horowitz of the Institute for Development Anthropology (Horowitz 1989). In this article, Horowitz goes so far as to say that “there is little understanding outside our discipline that environmental degradation is not a problem of the relationship between people and their habitats but of relationships among peoples competing for access to productive resources” (1989:3). One may doubt both the proposition and, more important, the assumption that only anthropologists understand the nature-society relation. Ecologists, in fact, seem more attuned to this relation than do anthropologists.

<sup>16</sup>This is especially true of some of the case studies in the volume edited by Bennett and Bowen (1988).

<sup>17</sup>See especially the recent work by Hellinger, Hellinger, and O’Regan (1988). In this book, the authors find the U.S. AID structure incapable of carrying out the New Directions mandate, and they advocate a total reorientation of this and other institutions. Whether their proposals have any chance of being implemented is a different matter. But it is significant that well-known figures within the establishment are coming to such strong conclusions. For them, U.S. AID and the World Bank are clearly part of the problem.

<sup>18</sup>J. O’Connor discusses capital’s treatment of nature as production conditions (1988).

<sup>19</sup>This critique has been advanced in part as a collective process by a group that includes, among others, Wolfgang Sachs, Ivan Illich, Barbara Duden, Majid Rahnema, Ashis Nandy, Vandana Shiva, Gustavo Esteva, and the author of this article. The group is bringing out a volume entitled “Keywords in Development” (Sachs In press). See also Esteva (1987), Shiva (1989), and Escobar (1984-85, 1987, 1988). These authors argue that even if the roots of development are to be found in colonialism, 19th-century ideas of progress, and, more generally, Western European modernity, something drastic happened in the early post-World War II period when an entirely new discourse, “development,” emerged. In their view, there was no “development,” “underdevelopment,” or “Third World” before 1945. Inventions of the postwar period, these notions have resulted in the deployment of a very efficient apparatus through which the “Third World” was and is largely produced. Other closely related works are those by Mueller (1987), Ferguson (1990), and Apffel-Marglin and Marglin (1990).

<sup>20</sup>A recent work (Ferguson 1990) on the introduction and deployment of development in Lesotho seems to be conceived along similar lines. Studies such as this are very important in detailing the workings and effects of the development apparatus.

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