The Rationale of Development Anthropology*

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The controversy between the 'academic' and 'applied' parameters of anthropology, has divided the practitioners of anthropology since the discipline became a university science in the last decades of the ninteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Anthropology has primarily been concerned with the study of the nature, content, and transformation of social phenomena in general. There is hence, an obvious contradiction between the generality of the subject-matter, and concern with scientific objectivity on the one hand; and the biases inherent within the applicability of the parameters of anthropology to concrete given situations, and the obligation to compensate for the debt owed to the sources that make the study possible, on the other.

The commitment of anthropologists, as social scientists, to engage in the resolution of current social problems and the exigencies of the scientific procedure have hence been separated from a responsibility validated on moral grounds and an enabling disciplinary epistemology. I have sought to place the above discussion within a larger historical perspective, with the aim of arriving at a more holistic understanding of the subject with reference to the present status of anthropology on the one hand; and that of the development exercise on the other. The paper also highlights the necessity of an academic analysis of the development experience. The merit of the latter exercise for the development of anthropological theory is self-evident.

THE PARAMETERS OF DEVELOPMENT ANTHROPOLOGY

In the development context, the anthropologist is hired by a sponsoring agency to assist in instituting planned change in non-Western societies. As part of a team of development planners hence, anthropologists are by and large assigned

a job. The terms of this job most often do not entail either their consent, nor their involvement [Cernea (1985)]. For the most part therefore, anthropologists have lacked the opportunity (more spicifically at the initial stages of project formulation) to provide insights that may explain the local logic, and/or the nature of inter-structural relationships [Cernea (1985); Horowitz (1990)] which constitute the subject-matter of their discipline.

The terminology and the policy behind the exercise of development has also been the object of criticism. The use of the term "development" Escobar (1991) has noted, tends to perpetuate a relationship of subordination of the non-Western world *vis-à-vis* the industrialised countries, even by the mere fact of labelling the latter as "underdeveloped" or the "Third World", and of thereby assuming the task of "developing" the latter world, and thus continuing to reproduce that unequal relationship. This unequal relationship gives the industrialised countries effective influence over the internal affairs of the countries of the latter world. The real motivation of the government agencies of the industrialised countries to "develop" the "Third World" in the first place, (over and above the stated humanitarian objective), and more importantly so, Escobar believes (and as in fact is no secret) is dictated by the political and economic interests of the industrialised countries.

The bureaucratic set up of donor agencies, and the budget and time constraints recommended by that procedure furthermore, call for radical compromises, not only on method, but also on the results of the analysis of a given situation [Swantz (1985)]. Rather than the inductive qualitative method of long-term field research, that enables anthropologists to holistically analyse the problem under study, the procedure adopted to conduct a "development" study (which is outlined for them) is often a "rapid appraisal" [Epstein (1990)]. The emphasis on quantitative data may yield "a table on every page" *ibid*. (1990), it cannot however, explain the internal logic of economic and non-economic structures that in anthropological analyses determine social behaviour in societies at the periphery and semi-periphery of the world system. The inclusion of anthropologists in "development" studies thus, often becomes a matter of mere protocol where the anthropologist is required to certify that a socio-economic "study had been conducted" (*ibid*. 1990) rather than assigning rigour to the exercise, or concentrating on the effectiveness of the findings of the study to the implementation of the programme.

The findings of the study moreover, are for the consumption of development planners and policy-makers (who may not necessarily be scientists). These individuals function in accordance with their own criteria. They are therefore often

not interested in getting "more than they bargained for" [Grillo (1985), p. 23]. If future employment with donor agencies is to be secured, anthropologists find themselves constrained to withhold observations that may be critical of the methods and policies of the donor agencies in question.

Besides compromises on the method and techniques of research for which anthropologists have been trained, in the development context they are often expected to play a role for which they have not been trained, namely: that of passionate advocacy of solutions; and the provision of *bona fide* answers to specific questions in a context which itself is not subject to examination [cf. MacLachlan (1968), p. 419]. Instead of scepticism of propositions that reinforce an anthropologist's own assumptions, where the object of an exercise is to convince, and the recruitment of the anthropologist is based upon his/her ability to prove his/her "utility" and "competence" for an assigned job rather than to explore, examine critically, hypothesise, and verify, there can be no holism; nor any objectivity: not even of the kind which is "limited only by the capabilities of human nature" [Rudolph (1968), p. 424] to which the scientific endeavour aspires.

The format of the development paradigm, and the subject matter (that has traditionally defined the parameters of the discipline) rather than the science itself, have therefore been analysed by the more academically inclined anthropologists to be constraining or elusive of the kind of exactitude required in development research, not to mention allowance for the properties born unconsciously of the human will that also play a role in the final formation that results. Academic anthropologists thus consider themselves "justified" in their unwillingness to "give a straight answer to blunt questions" [Firth (1981), p. 198]. Moreover, as Firth has observed, they are trained to study the way people are. They do not tell them how they should be (cf. *ibid*. 1981).

The involvement of anthropologists in the development exercise, as it is at present practiced, has hence been termed by academics, as "neocolonialist" [Leach (1977); Onoge (1979)] in that the former are not only seen as compromising on theory and method, but as also "collaborating" with the countries and agencies whose policies and motivations are judged suspect of the professed humane objectives. The exercise has therefore been described by academics as opposed to the convictions against which they so obviously took exception during the colonial period when the discipline developed (as Gough would say) among "humanist visions of the Enlightenment" (1968).

The malaise, no doubt also originates from the fact that "anthropologists had created, and now wished to defend their agenda" [cf. Schapera (1951), in Grillo

(1985)]. Development anthropologists, on the other hand, accuse academics of ignoring their social responsibility, and of thereby escaping to the Ivory Tower.

THE LARGER PERSPECTIVE

Although the relevance of anthropological knowledge to real life issues cannot be precluded, a justification for involvement in the development exercise nevertheless calls for viewing the exercise within a larger historical perspective. The restriction of one's vision to the rationale and the network of relationships which define the present historical phase, and to consider these as an absolute indicator of the essence of the nature and content of social phenomena in all contexts, and at all points in time, we contend, may not only be myopic; it is also historically incorrect. The present historical phase, as Godelier (1984) points out, is only *one* among many others through which human civilisations have passed during the fifty millennia or so of history of the human species. During the course of this period, diverse material and social forms of human adaptation to specific eco-systems have emerged, evolved, and disappeared. The logic, and the manner in which this has happened is more important to our comprehension of the nature of social phenomena in general, than to assume, as does the development paradigm, that the rationale of the capitalist market system, and by implication, the concept of the "profit motive" (which is inherent to that system) is synonymous with "rational" human behaviour, and as such, universally applicable.

The present historical phase is unique in so far as an integrated world economic order has resulted in incorporating pre-modern societies within the fold of a single monetary market system and thereby in exposing the latter to the domination of the industrialised and the technologically more advanced Western societies. Although one cannot ignore these relationships when working within the present historical phase, one's analysis would inevitably be distorted if one fails to situate the present phase within the larger trans-cultural and trans-historical span since the human species (having evolved into homo sapiens) has existed socially in groups.

Pre-modern societies, as anthropological studies have repeatedly revealed, subscribe to a rationale which has historically and culturally evolved in given contexts as the best answer to the survival of local populations in given ecological conditions. Traditional communal arrangements, are an interconnected network of social relations based on the internal rapport between economic and non-economic structures. The rationale of these relations is sanctioned by the logic of the total social

configuration (i.e. the intra, inter, and extra communal relations) in question. It is hence related, and specific to the larger social rationality of the configuration. The nature and implication of this rationality, cannot, without scientific proof, be accepted as a varient of the monetary market system or applied, without a structural analysis of the local logic, to every society. The meaning of the term "rationality", as the latter term is understood in the monetary market system cannot, on the basis of mere speculation hence be assumed to be absolute and therefore applicable to every society at every point in time.

The concept of development moreover, rests primarily on the condition of technological advancement. Such advancement has erroneously come to represent general advancement in all socio-cultural aspects. The concept therefore, presumes (consciously or unconsciously, and despite the fact that the unilineal theory of evolution has been abandoned for more than a century now) that societies which are to be "developed", are somehow at a "lower" stage of development in all other aspects as compared to Western societies. In order to "progress" hence, the former societies are expected to emulate and follow the pattern of the Western model of development.

Certain features which characterise technological advancement (and which have come to represent general advancement) have as a consequence, been established as the common components of a universally applicable development model. The specific fields into which the thrust of development is compartmentalised, has led to a dichotomy in development research between what is termed as "social" as opposed to "economic" development. All so-called "developing" or "underdeveloped" societies are hence subjected to this uniform format.

The pertinence of local institutions and cultures are thus taken into account with the view of devising strategies that may ensure "success" of the programme intended, rather than the desire to explore existing potentials for resolving perceived inadequacies on the basis of existing forms of social existence.

Thus, development agencies not only work with *a priori* notions of development, but they also invariably have their particular thrust. The intervention of an agency in a society hence, seeks to realise the potentials of that thrust, and these pre-conceived notions of development, rather than (even within the limitations of the development package) considering the sequence of, and emphasis on, changes that would be rational within an interconnected system of relations that have a logic, and specific priorities of their own, so that the effects of planned change can be meaningful and holistic.

WHAT THEN MUST WE DO?

We agree with Grillo that "anthropology has much to offer the world of development"; and that "development without anthropology is worse than development with anthropology" (1985: 30). The two options that anthropologists have so far been practising are:

- Engagement in what has been termed as "the anthropology of development" i.e. undertake socially relevant research by using the inductive method of analysis. In this case, in order for the findings of the research thus undertaken to be communicated to policy-makers, the latter may be invited to attend the forum with the aim of the findings having a bearing on existing policies.
- Engage in development work, as part of a development team, for a donor agency.

In the second instance, it is important to make the following clarifications.

To begin with, anthropologists need to exercise the right to refuse involvement in any project they cannot justify morally. On the basis of their understanding of the nature of intra and inter structural relationships of entities that constitute given units of analyses, and the dynamics of the process of social change in general, anthropologists may make predictions about the possible course of evolution that given societies are likely to follow within the local and global conditions of those societies. They cannot provide precise answers to concrete questions, in given situations, that have (to begin with) been framed with reference to the rationale of a particular context. Their view would furthermore have to remain subject to verification, and to the development of hypotheses on the basis of experience gained cross-culturally, that may encourage further research and a more rigorous analysis.

As a precondition to their involvement in development work therefore, it needs to be accepted that any meaningful anthropological contribution to planned development requires not only cognisance of the theory and method of anthropology, but also of an acknowledgement of the limitations accruing from accommodating the budgetary and time constraints of the present development format.

More importantly, the involvement in development research cannot mean abandoning the main thrust of the discipline for the latter, nor reducing of the scope of the former in favour of the latter. For this, purely anthropological studies (such as analyses of kinship structures for instance) need to be continued simultaneously with development research in which anthropological knowledge is

applied. The application of anthropological knowledge to action-directed research however, requires the development of a theory to guide analysis. For this, development anthropologists need to give a feedback of their findings to the academy.

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