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Thomas Bierschenk

**Anthropology and Development.  
An historicizing and localizing approach**

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The Working Papers are edited by  
Institut für Ethnologie und Afrikastudien, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität,  
Forum 6, D-55099 Mainz, Germany.  
Tel. +49-6131-3923720; Email: [ifeas@uni-mainz.de](mailto:ifeas@uni-mainz.de); <http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de>

Geschäftsführende Herausgeberin/ Managing Editor:  
Eva Spies ([espies@uni-mainz.de](mailto:espies@uni-mainz.de))

## **Anthropology and Development. An historicizing and localizing approach<sup>1</sup>**

Thomas Bierschenk<sup>2</sup>

I wish to use this opportunity offered to me by the organisers of this conference, to reflect on the APAD agenda with which I have been closely associated almost from its beginnings. Such a reflection seems to be particularly appropriate for this year's conference which is meant to be one of stock-taking and reflection on new perspectives.

My objective is to situate the APAD approach in the broader field of the anthropology of development. I will do this by first looking back, then by looking, if I may say so, "left and right". I will ask what, if anything, we can learn from other efforts to think the relationship between anthropology and development, efforts which had gone on long before APAD came into being, and which continued in parallel to it. The anthropology of development had started well before the foundation of APAD in the early 1990s – something we were only dimly aware of at the time – and in hindsight, it becomes clear that the birth of our association was part of a larger movement in the field. And looking at what was and is currently going on in the field beyond and in parallel to APAD helps us to better understand how its particular conditions of birth have left APAD with specific, enduring traits, some of which undoubtedly are worth keeping, others which might well be worth modifying. In other words, the four key terms in APAD's name – Europe, Africa, anthropology, development – all deserve closer scrutiny. So after having looked back and having looked left and right, I will finish this lecture with a look ahead.

There is of course a premise in my proposals which we will have to deal with first. This premise is that there is something like an "APAD approach" to the anthropology of development. This APAD approach has been evolving since its first formulations, first by Jean-Pierre Dozon (1978) and Jean-Pierre Chauveau (1985), and then extensively, and repeatedly, by Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan<sup>3</sup> (for an assessment, see Bierschenk 2007a; among his numerous writings on the subject, see Olivier de Sardan 1983; Olivier de Sardan 1985, 1995, 2005a). It is based on something like five key postulates. The first of these postulates is to separate normative reflexions on development from empirical analysis and concentrate on the latter, on the "facts of development". Development is simply what the actors in the field name as such,

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<sup>1</sup> Slightly revised version of the key-note lecture, APAD conference on "Development, Liberalism and Modernity: Trajectories for an Anthropology of Social Change", 13 – 15 December 2007, Tervuren/Brussels. APAD is the Euro-African Association for the Anthropology for Social Change and Development/*Association Euro-Africaine pour l'Anthropologie du Changement Social et du Développement* based now in Uppsala (Sweden) and Leiden (Netherlands). Cf. [www.association-apid.org](http://www.association-apid.org). For productive comments on an earlier version of this text, I am grateful to Nassirou Bako-Arifari, Pierre-Yves Le Meur and Eva Spies. My thinking on the subject was much influenced by the insightful comments and critical questions raised by Ejima Baker, Jacob Doherty and Summer Wood in the topical class I taught together with Nassirou Bako-Arifari at the New School for Social Research in New York in Fall 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Germany. Contact: [biersche@uni-mainz.de](mailto:biersche@uni-mainz.de)

<sup>3</sup> Among his numerous writings on the subject are Olivier de Sardan (1983; 1985; 1995; 2005a). For an assessment, see Bierschenk (2007a).

and the social world in which they move. Or, as Jean-Pierre Chauveau formulated concisely back in 1985 (p. 164): „Il y a tout simplement ‚développement‘ là ou il y a des ‚développeurs‘, là ou un des groupes se réclamant de la mise en œuvre du développement organise un dispositif d’intervention sur d’autres groupes sociaux ». If development anthropology is empirical (second postulate), it is so not in a naïve positivist sense, but in the sense of all good anthropology, in so far as it aims at being grounded in the live worlds, social practices and everyday experiences of actors. Development as a social field (third postulate) is a legitimate object of anthropology, as noble as other, more classical objects like kinship and religion. In fact, development as a social field is made up of multiple realities for which anthropology with its methodological repertoire is particularly well equipped. This non-normative, empirical anthropology of development (fourth postulate) has theoretical ambitions: it contributes not only new objects, but also, and perhaps more so, new methods and innovative theoretical approaches to general anthropology. At the same time (fifth postulate), this theoretically ambitious anthropology of development is also applied development anthropology. Applied and basic research go hand in hand. Consequently, when anthropology neglects development, or the development world neglects anthropology, they do so at their own detriment and both are being left impoverished.

To these five substantive postulates should be added a particular APAD style of anthropological work: co-production of anthropological knowledge on development by European and African researchers. I think this style is in fact amply demonstrated by the composition of this conference, as it has been in all previous APAD conferences.

Now, if this is a correct albeit necessarily short characterisation of a distinct APAD approach, an approach which came into existence with much self-confidence and a sense of historical rupture in the 1980s, where to position it in the wider field of knowledge production and practical intervention which is sign-posted by the notions of anthropology and of development?

There are different ways to structure this field. One conventional typology differentiates between fundamental anthropological research on development and the application of anthropological knowledge to development, another typology differentiates between actor, institution, policy and discourse-oriented approaches.

The first distinction, the one between applied and basic research, is often expressed in the alternative of development anthropology vs. anthropology of development (the latter in the same sense as we might speak of anthropology of law, of religion, etc.). We have seen that the APAD approach, while not denying that there is a difference, consciously tries to bridge it. Applied research, it is postulated, can not stand on its own. It can only be of good quality if it is based on good basic research, with all its methodological safeguards and theoretical reflexivity. It should also be said, in passing and in anticipation of my later sketch of American applied anthropology, that development anthropology and applied (or practical) anthropology overlap but are not identical: While there is an anthropology of development which is not applied, there is also applied anthropology which is not development oriented, or only so in a very loose sense.

In respect to the second type of typology based on the distinction between actor, institution, policy and discourse oriented approaches, it is probably fair to say that the APAD way of doing anthropology has been mainly actor-centred, an almost inevitable consequence of the priority given to ethnography. However, while the actor-centred approach was theoretically innovative in the 1980s, it has recently come under criticism from the perspective of the other approaches, in particular the so-called discursive approach. Looking at the programme of our conference, we notice that the APAD approach itself is evolving towards policy approaches.

I wish to approach these differences by making a detour via a third, localizing, distinction which I am proposing here, and which seems to me to have been unduly neglected. The adjective localizing can be applied as well as to the writing-up as well as to the field sites of anthropological endeavours. As to the latter, the development of anthropological theory has been described in relation to the field sites from which theory was developed (Fardon 1990). The holistic approach to culture of Bronislaw Malinowski, for example, is said to have gained its plausibility from the bounded nature of the islands of Oceania, and the network approach of the Manchester School from the fluid character of social relations in South-Central Africa. A parallel reflection for the anthropology of development is still awaiting its authors: Is an anthropology of development which takes its empirical inspiration from India, Indonesia or Latin America different from one that is empirically grounded in Africa? Most probably so, but it is precisely APAD's geographical limitation that has prevented us from spelling out the specific features of African development encounters.<sup>4</sup>

Here I want to propose that much of the current debate in the field of the anthropology of development and the respective positioning and labelling that is taking place, are better understood if we realize that there are currently two major and distinct sites for the writing of the anthropology of development: Europe and USA, and that these sites have developed distinguishing features that set them apart. This idea of "writing up sites" should not be understood in a purely localized fashion – even though geographical locality is not completely absent –, and has of course nothing to do with the national background of individual authors. I am thinking more in terms of different epistemic communities, discursive traditions, dominant intellectual references under which, and book markets and scientific journals for which fieldwork in the anthropology of development is written up. Language divides play a major role in the cutting up of these sites.

In other words, I posit that there is something like a typical European and a typical US-American style in the anthropology of development, and some current positions and debates are better understood if we see them in these terms. I recognize that by doing so, I am proposing very much a "North Atlantic perspective", and that I might gloss over other, peripheral

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<sup>4</sup> The degree of extraversion of states and society, in particular vis-à-vis foreign development agencies, itself linked to the relative strength and weakness of states and their differential "cunniness" (Randeria 2007), the relative strength of social movements, and obviously different class formations would be some of the comparative dimensions to look for. This point cannot be developed here.

discourses, like for example a Latin American or Indian branch of development anthropology. For the purposes of the present lecture as well as out of sheer ignorance, this question has to be simply bracketed. I am also glossing over one of APAD's distinguishing traits: Euro-African co-production of anthropological knowledge. Looking at the career trajectories and networks of our African colleagues, it would be difficult to deny that these are heavily Europe-focused.

I suggest that APAD represents a typically European style of development anthropology, together with the Wageningen School (Long 2001, 1989; Long & Long 1992) and the EIDOS network (Hobart 1993; Lewis & Mosse 2005, 2006; Quarles van Ufford 1993; Quarles van Ufford, Kruyt & Downing 1988). In fact, there are personal overlaps between these networks which, together with the occasional presence at each others' meetings and conferences, has produced much cross-cutting influence, acknowledged (Lewis & Mosse 2006; Olivier de Sardan 1988, 2001) or otherwise. While a closer look would certainly reveal important nuances, the common traits of this European style are easier to perceive if looked at from the outside, in this case the United States. I will try to bring out these intercontinental differences by adopting a historical perspective.

Common knowledge in early APAD texts holds it that the anthropology of development took shape sometime in the 1970s, even if some precursors (e.g., Bastide 1973, French orig. 1971) are acknowledged in passing (Olivier de Sardan 1988). This way of writing the history of the field, however, seems to me to reflect a very European, even a continental European perspective. It largely overlooks two traditions: the very rich American tradition of applied anthropology which goes back almost to the beginnings of anthropology as an empirical science in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the sustained interest in the practical uses of anthropology in Great Britain during the same period. In the US case, the practical interest was more directed inwards, towards the own, American, society, and here – uniquely in the anthropological tradition until the 1970s – a substantial literature was generated which aimed at identifying a distinct field (for a useful overview, see Bennett 1996). In the British case, anthropology had already accompanied the active humanitarianism movements of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, in particular the anti-slavery movements (Reining 1996, comment on Bennett) and later became an adjunct of colonialism, with practical interest directed outwards, towards first the colonies and later the independent countries (Gardner & Lewis 1996, ch. 2). By contrast, neither in France nor in Germany did anthropology develop any serious practical interests before the 1970s, albeit for different historical reasons. In France, interest in contemporary colonial societies was predominantly reflected in authors who worked outside academic anthropology (Delafosse 1941; Delavignette 1931; cf. Sibeud 2002), while the latter well up into the 1980s limited its interest to the “traditional”, and disappearing, forms of social life.<sup>5</sup> The situation was worse for German anthropology which after 1918 severed its empirical moorings and got lost in historical speculation – which did not prevent some of its practitioners to (unsuccessfully) propose an applied version of their discipline for administering future colonies to the Nazi rulers (Hauschild 1995; Streck 2000). In both cases, it was the interest in development of

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<sup>5</sup> and this despite the influence of George Balandier (Balandier 1951, 1967) who had made a very important first step for making the study of modern Africa respectable.

a younger generation of anthropologists which lay behind the empirical turn which the discipline experienced in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Germany), with an increasing legitimacy of empirical studies of contemporary societies (Germany, France).

It must be admitted that it is very easy to overlook this sustained practical, applied tradition of US and British anthropology as it is usually not mentioned in standard histories of the discipline, or at best relegated to the margins as something which the founders of the discipline, besides producing canonical texts, “also did”.<sup>6</sup> This applied tradition is consequently not taught to anthropological debutants or, when it is taught, it is boxed into specialist courses. The applied side of anthropology might, however, be “critiqued” by general anthropologists but in that case, it is most of the time simply equated with anthropology in the context of the colonial encounter (Asad 1973)<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, specialist treatments of the history of development anthropology are usually very selective and usually deal with only one national tradition, even if the respective titles of contributions suggest a more general perspective: for example, Bennett’s (1996) important contribution exclusively deals with the US (without saying so in the title)<sup>8</sup>, Gardner & Lewis (1996, ch. 2) mainly deal with the British and, very selectively, the US situation, while their sporadic references to France are not substantiated, and Spittler (1994) – who does not give any bibliographical references – apparently speaks only about the German school of applied development anthropology (which he criticizes for its lack of theoretical awareness).<sup>9</sup> These selective perceptions can partly, but not fully, be explained by limited linguistic competence, and it is probably not unfair to say that there is a gradient in the perception of what is happening outside national or particular linguistic boundaries: While German anthropologists would read at least some of the American, British and French anthropologists, the reverse is far from being certain.<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, when James Ferguson (1997) speaks of development as the “evil twin” of anthropology – evil because not acknowledged – he has the right intuition, but his argument suffers from under-complexity as he does not take these different national traditions into account. He sees the hidden connection as being produced by epistemology: anthropology’s unextinguishable but hidden link to an evolutionary perspective, and not also by the practical concerns for the modern world which were equally constitutive for the discipline. These concerns, however, played out very differently in the United States – where in the absence of an

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<sup>6</sup> For example, none of the authors in Barth et al. (2005) deals in any but the most superficial fashion with applied, practical or development anthropology. Many classical authors have written on the practical application of anthropology, cf. among others Malinowski (1929), Radcliff-Brown (1980 [orig. 1930]), Herskovits (1936), Evans-Pritchard (1946), Mead (1977), Firth (1981).

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that the empirical reference of this important book is British – not French or US – colonialism

<sup>8</sup> as do Gow (1993), Hoben (1982) and Nolan (2002) ...

<sup>9</sup> This school is covered in Schönhuth & Bliss (2004).

<sup>10</sup> No satisfactory account in English – or in German, for that matter – exists of the recent history of German anthropology; Gingrich (2005) treatment of post-1970 developments is extremely cursory and skewed. For a good recent overview of German language African studies, see Probst (2005). – On the other hand, linguistic competence is not a guarantee for appropriate perception: most German anthropologists probably underestimate the sheer size, intellectual and institutional diversity and sectionalism of American anthropology (Silverman 2005: 330ff.), which “make it possible for “renegades to survive” and means “that no paradigm can remain dominant for a very long time”.

acknowledged colonial empire but also for mundane reasons like the difficulty to get travel grants and the limited linguistic skills of most graduate students – the practical concerns of anthropology were relatively more directed inwards – and in Great Britain – the only place where anthropology was part of the colonial dispositive. By contrast, in France and Germany anthropology, as we have mentioned, had not practical use, and hardly any practical aspiration.<sup>11</sup>

In the United States, the 1930s were a key period in the development of an applied anthropology (Bennett 1996) Only part of this work was centred on Native American reservations. American applied anthropology was topically diverse and also focused “white” America, as in the Harvard studies on the socio-cultural basis of industrial organisation which produced a concept of “anthropological engineering” (Chapple 1943, quoted in Bennett 1996), and studies of American rural communities sponsored by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and Rural Welfare in the Roosevelt Administration’s Department of Agriculture. Obviously, the background to this development was the New Deal with its conviction of the possibility of social engineering. Methodological hallmarks of this applied anthropological research were multi-disciplinarity, comparison and the reflective utilisation of a range of research methods, well beyond the – ritually evoked but not much reflected upon – canonical participant observation approach canonized by Malinowski (1984, orig. 1922: introduction), coupled to an implicit critique of the dominant “whole-culturalism” (Bennett 1996: 26) of mainstream anthropology of the day. These unorthodox methodological and theoretical orientations probably explain much of the hostility with which this applied work was greeted by many academic anthropologists. In other words, many recent advances in general anthropology, but also contemporary skirmishes between “basis” and “applied” anthropology were foreshadowed in this unrecognized American tradition of applied anthropology, which for a long time also – together with its more overtly paternalistic British cousin – was “the exclusive home for anthropologists interested in contemporary society” (Bennett 1996: 25 n. 5) – a home claimed by general anthropology today.

However, beyond these applied approaches, the conviction that anthropology should play a public role and could be brought to bear on questions of practical interest, marked American anthropology as such and was shared by such towering figures as Mead, Benedict and Herskovits, who actively engaged in the war effort and in creating a new world order after 1945. American anthropologists shared the humanist-liberal optimism and egalitarian populism that had marked American social science since its origins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and which were linked to a moral impulse to improve the world (Anderson 2003). In this sense, the New Deal and its interest in social engineering were only actualised versions of long-held ideas,

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<sup>11</sup> This is not to deny that French academic anthropologists when they did work empirically, like during the Dakar to Djibouti expedition in the early 1930s (Griaule 1975; Leiris 1999), did profit from the infrastructure of colonial rule. Unlike their British counterparts (Evans-Pritchard and more generally the Rhodes Livingstone Institute come to mind) they did not, however, have the ambition of reforming or otherwise being useful for colonial rule. – Beyond the embedded evolutionary perspective and the practical concerns for the modern world, there is a third sense in which development is non-acknowledged by anthropologist: In fact, there is a surprising number of them who pride themselves of being in the pure academic (e.g., non-applied) mode but who (or whose spouses) are in fact actively engaged in development enterprises, usually in their fieldwork sites. In this not infrequent case, this parallel activity in development is not the object of theoretical reflection.

and the course of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War gave new force to these convictions. Anthropology, for many of its practitioners, constituted a form of “public service” (Lantis 1945, quoted by Bennett 1996: 30), defined as a combination of professionalism with social engineering.

In the 1950s, these humanist convictions and methodological traditions of applied anthropology were reflected – in a radicalized fashion – in the oeuvre of Sol Tax – a maverick figure in American anthropology the work of which deserves much closer, if critical attention than it has received by present-day anthropologists aiming at bridging the knowledge-practice divide in development. In Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan’s (2004b) terminology, Sol Tax could be described as an early searcher for the missing “chain link” between research and action.<sup>12</sup> Sol Tax, who had biographical roots in Midwestern populism, and who as a student had worked with Ruth Benedict in her Mescalero Apache study and Robert Redfield in Mexico, early on developed a distinction between “pure” and “therapeutic” science, the latter being concerned with producing knowledge on real-life problems and the nitty-gritty of everyday life, as a precondition for progressive practice (Bennett 1996: 34ff.). Tax’s core idea was about the identity of fieldwork and community development. The task of the fieldworker is to bring into focus, through research and fostering better communication, what we might call, in today’s language, the people’s own notions of development, social well-being and the good life, and help them to achieve these goals. Tax’s ideas were put in practice not only in the well-known Fox project in an Indian reservation in Iowa, but in a host of other activities for American Indians and also in a community housing and development programme in an urban neighbourhood just north of the University of Chicago where he was teaching. In other words, Tax de-exoticized and de-racialized Native Americans. He saw them and white urban dwellers alike as simple Americans with “with fears, hopes and needs”. So we might say that Sol Tax advocated, fifty years ago, what Arjun Appadurai (2007) has recently called an anthropology of the future, even if Sol Tax was more concerned with the transfer from knowledge to practice and hardly, if at all, with the theoretical potential of action-oriented research.<sup>13</sup>

The introduction of anthropological perspectives into US development work in the late 1960s and early 1970s can be seen as a relatively late, but impressive outflow of this particular American tradition of applied anthropology (Hoben 1982). Around 1970, USAID became a major employer of American anthropologists, and was instrumental for developing “social soundness analysis” which under McNamara found its way into the World Bank and later into a host of other bilateral and multilateral development agencies. In other words, USAID was pioneering a “participative and anthropological turn” in development which was far advanced over anything that happened in this field in Europe at the time. Thus, when the APAD project took shape in the early 1980s, arguing for a greater anthropological involvement in development, this battle had already been won in the USA.

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<sup>12</sup> On the “missing link”, see also the recent contributions of Bako (2007), Lavigne Delville (2007) and Le Meur (2007).

<sup>13</sup> Potential links through Roger Bastide between this program and the APAD agenda to which Jean-Pierre Chauveau has drawn my attention, would have to be explored.

However, in the meantime, American liberal optimism had soured during the 1960s and 1970s. One immediate cause, within the field of anthropology, was the implication of US anthropologists in global counterinsurgency, with the Camelot project being its most visible expression. In terms of “real” history, the general background to this demise of social-engineering optimism was of course the Vietnam War, in terms of intellectual history, and probably not unrelated to the former, it was postmodernism and its misgivings about the high modernist project. But the growing gulf between practical and academic anthropology was also supported by contingent developments in the US job market: While many anthropologists worked in applied fields in the 1950s, their numbers dwindled after 1960, when American anthropologists increasingly found employment at universities, and could thus permit themselves to shun applied work. In American development work proper, the rise of the modernization paradigm made anthropologists redundant by 1960 (Hoben 1982). After 1970, the trend was reversed, and the non-university job market became increasingly dominant.

The general souring of American liberal optimism and the ideological and employment crisis in development anthropology provided, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the backdrop to the emergence of a radical critique of development which is commonly associated with the work of Arturo Escobar (1995) and James Ferguson (1990). Both authors posit that development amounts to a vast knowledge/power regime which has the function to subjugate the Third World in the interest of The West. The “development machine”’s major mechanism is depoliticisation: beginning with structural adjustment, developing agencies increasingly subject poor countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America to an international disciplining regime in which political questions are being rendered technical, thus taking agency away from these countries. This international power/knowledge regime can not be reformed from the inside but only “critiqued” from the outside, for which an academic position at a top American university seems to provide the ideal, if not the only possible, vantage point.

In other words, beginning in the 1980s and increasingly from the 1990s, the situation in the United States was and is marked by two extreme positions: On the one hand, we have a technically very sophisticated applied development anthropology with a rich historical tradition, the main objective of which seems to be to try to be useful. However, this applied wing of anthropology is theoretically unreflective; or maybe we should rather say, does not realize its theoretical potential. It is mainly interested in the contribution that anthropology can make to development, and not in a potential contribution into the other direction: that which the study of development could make to anthropology in general.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, there is a radical “do-not-touch-it-with-a-fire-poke” position, with hardly any empirical engagement with the object being “critiqued”, and in fact a substitution of learned references to big names in philosophy for empirical analysis. We could consider this as a renaissance of the old modernization vs. dependency debate, only that Escobar’s and Ferguson’s neo-dependency theory draws not any longer on Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg but largely on Foucault. These radically op-

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<sup>14</sup> In this perspective – cf. Cernea (1996) and Nolan (2002) –, development challenges anthropology mainly in respect to its teaching practices: These should, it is argued, become less theoretical and more praxis-oriented, transmitting primarily skills needed by development professionals.

posed positions have their separate institutional anchoring and hardly communicate with each other.

By comparison, European positions developing at the same time were more in terms of a critical engagement with practice. Significantly, they were often formulated by people who had, simultaneously or over the course of their careers, a foot in both camps, e. g. development practice and academia, and who tried to ally development praxis with theoretical reflection: In Wageningen, the group around Norman Long had to engage intensively with the more practically minded colleagues in the neighbouring departments of extension, irrigation and others, at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Marseille Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan regularly accepted PhD candidates with a previous career in development, at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) David Mosse and his colleagues continue to combine development work with academic teaching and research, to name but a few. This kind of straddling seems much rarer, if not completely absent, in the US.

Obviously, there are also marked nuances between different European approaches which should not be underestimated. Apart from different national traditions already alluded to, they seem to me largely related to different field sites (Latin America, Africa, India), differing personal trajectories and, last not least to the type of public where legitimacy is being sought.<sup>15</sup>

The weaknesses of neo-dependency theory have often been pointed out (e.g., Olivier de Sardan 2001), so I will limit myself here to summarizing three main points:

1. The first critique concerns the weak empirical grounding. In fact, not unlike classical dependency theory, neo-dependency authors draw their authority less from empirical analysis than from learned references to social theory. As a result, “neo-liberalism” is essentialized (and not analyzed), and the reach of the “power/knowledge regime of development” is overestimated – a perspective which is in tune with a Foucaultian position and arguably more plausible if you look at the world from an American metropolis than, say, the Eastern Congo.<sup>16</sup> While this lack of interest in what is really happening on the ground is particularly obvious in the work of Escobar (1995), it is not absent from more empirically-oriented neo-dependency authors either. Ferguson (1990), for example, generalizes from a single and very particular case: a “high modernist” World Bank project of the 1960 and 1970s which he presents as typical for the whole development enterprise in a book published in the 1990s, that is long after the “participant turn” development had taken. And a careful reading of his analysis reveals that while development agencies might try to de-politicize development and render it technical, the Lesotho political elite is very aware of the political implications of development interventions and very crafty at using it to their advantage.

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<sup>15</sup> For example, Norman Long who was a PhD student with Max Gluckman, seems to be mainly addressing an academic public predominantly within the field of sociology, as indicated by the title of his major books (Long 1977, 2001), while Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, in parallel to his theoretical interests, is also aiming at a local, practical impact – e.g. in West Africa where he has chosen to reside as well as with international development agencies, cf. Bierschenk (2007a).

<sup>16</sup> One criticism of Foucault’s philosophy of power has been that it foreclose on the possibility of alternative loci of power and resistance, cf. Honnet (1986).

2. The work of other neo-dependency writers like Rita Abrahamsen (2000) seem to be less concerned by this critique, being a solid comparative political science study of the depoliticizing effects of grafted democracy in four African countries. However, her approach suffers, like those of many neo-dependency writers, from a functionalist fallacy of deluding effects from motives, from a misunderstanding of the function of policy formulation, and from insufficient familiarity with organisational sociology. Anthropologists of development anthropologists and sociologists of organisation have shown that development agencies, like any other organisation, are at best only “loosely coupled” and not governed from the top (Quarles van Ufford, Kruyt & Downing 1988), and that the function of policy discourse is less to regulate practices than to justify them for particular publics and often ex post (Mosse 2004).<sup>17</sup> I would add to this the observation that development agencies, as input oriented organisations, are marked by a particular high degree of “repressive tolerance”, adapting this term from Herbert Marcuse (1969): they reveal a high capacity to integrate critics and critiques in their policy discourse with limited effect on practices. The additive mode in which development policy papers are written are another example of this repressive tolerance: In the three big Africa policy papers which the World Bank has produced since the early 1980s, central paradigms and key notions do not replace each other, but are added on to each other, so what we have in the 1989 report (World Bank 1989) is not an alternative to structural adjustment which was proposed in the so-called Berg report some years earlier (World Bank 1982), but “structural adjustment” plus “governance”, while in the 2001 report (Gelb 2000) we find “structural adjustment” plus “governance” plus “participation” plus “poverty reduction” (Tepe 2006). In other words, even if we grant that the approaches of the big international development agencies, and most of the smaller ones, are based on a logic of rendering political issues technical, that does not mean that they succeed. In fact, one serious argument in the African development debate has been that whatever the approaches chosen by the development agencies were, African elites have always succeeded in politicising them to their own advantage (van de Walle 2001). Therefore, it seems quite plausible to assume that the current policy and sectorial approaches to development are confronted with the same local strategies of side-tracking, unpacking and selective appropriation that development anthropologists have highlighted for the more classical development project approaches long ago (Bierschenk 1988; Bierschenk & Elwert 1988; Lentz 1988; Olivier de Sardan 1988).
3. Thirdly, neo-dependency theory is not capable of formulating a realistic alternative to the criticized practices. Occasionally we find an idealization of social movements or a loose allusion to “post-development” (Rahnema & Bawtree 1997), but the main advice is to stay away from it – a proposal which is easier to make for an anthropologist who is holding a tenured university position but less obvious for his students, a large number of which will work in the field of development.

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<sup>17</sup> A similar perspective, drawing heavily on Luhmann (1981), is adopted by Stefanie Hanke (1996) in her excellent short study of the World Bank.

This being said, I do not think that we should throw out the baby with the tub water or deal with neo-dependency theory in the same do-not-touch-it mode that it applies to development. Neo-dependency theory has brought some important advances and should be considered as a challenge for an empirically-minded anthropology of development for which APAD stands for. It can be seen as a challenge in at least five different respects.

- First of all, neo-dependency theory does not suffer from the culturalist bias which the anthropology of development has long fought against. On the contrary, it has insisted on the centrality of power in development. An actor-centred empirical development anthropology sometimes has the tendency to neglect power as an important structuring dimension of the development encounter – which, adapting a term from Balandier (1951), more often than not should be described as a “development situation” of highly unequal power differentials.
- Secondly, while classical anthropology was arguably at its best in the deconstruction of development projects (see the contributions in Bierschenk & Elwert 1988) and of planned project intervention (Long 1989), neo-dependency theory has fostered a focus on the more recent mode of development interventions, e. g. development policies and sectorial approaches.
- Thirdly, it proposes to study development policies as much at the production end (e.g., development institutions) as at the receiving end, e. g. the point of intervention – even if, as we will see, ethnographies of development institutions have remained surprisingly rare to our days.
- Fourthly, neo-dependency theory provokes us to think again about the combined effects of development interventions, effects which go beyond those of an individual project or policy, and which therefore do not come into focus in an empirical approach that limits itself to one particular project. Depoliticising and technical framing have been identified as two potential combined effects of the sum of many individual development interventions; “structural amnesia” would be a third one. (Bierschenk & Elwert 1991; Bierschenk, Elwert & Kohnert 1993).
- Finally, neo-dependency points in the right direction in its attempts at linking “development” to other practices of “producing the world”, and in its self-conscious effort to link empirical data on micro-events – for the study of which an actor-oriented development anthropology is particularly well equipped – with larger processes – which are more difficult to grasp with anthropology’s classical methodological repertoire. A lot of the older, project-centred anthropology of development has failed to embed its micro-stories in larger narratives and to link local analysis to global tendencies.

I think we should take these challenges seriously but give the ambitions of neo-dependency theory a more pronounced empirical twist. Of course, APAD is not alone in this field, and there are many people “out there” busy producing what I would call a new anthropology of development. Going back to one of my initial typologies of actor, institution and discourse

centred approaches, it appears that this new-style anthropology of development comes along mainly in two forms:

- There are authors who claim for themselves a so-called discursive approach. On closer inspection, this often amounts to simple document analysis, and suffers from the same weaknesses already enumerated: taking discourse for practice and announced effects for reality. In this type of analysis, the “development machine” remains a black box as we do not learn how and by whom the discourse is produced, and even less how it is being received and possibly deconstructed. The reality of this essentialising type of discourse analysis is, more often than not, a new kind of armchair anthropology.<sup>18</sup>
- By contrast, some of the best recent empirical work is done on new style development policies (even if they exhibit a tendency to silence local voices). For example, in a recent fascinating study Tania Murray Li (2006; 2007) traces the emergence of World Bank neo-liberal strategies in Indonesia, and shows how these policies have been implemented not through coercion, but by attempts at “reforming the subject” with the help of hundreds of local anthropologists. In his study of a water project of the German development bank (KfW), Rottenburg (Rottenburg 2002) dissects the discursive “double-bind” of development: couching structural power differentials in a rhetoric of partnership, and denying the political character of aid, a double bind in which all the participating actors are collusively engaged.

These, and other, studies constitute major recent achievement of development anthropology, partly based on non-African field sites. On the other hand, it is surprising how rare institutional and professional ethnographies in the field of development have remained, despite claims to the contrary (Watts 2001). For example, while there are some interesting insider analyses of the World Bank, most of them coming from staff who left over policy disagreements (for example, the fascinating accounts by Wade; cf. Wade 1996, 1997, 2001; Wade 2002), only very partial ethnographies of the World Bank by professional ethnographers exists which amount more to an ethnography of policy than of the institution as such (Fox 2000; Goldman 2001; Griffiths 2003). For other larger multi- and bilateral agencies, even these partial ethnographies seem to be lacking. However, we do have some ethnographies of development professionals (Spies 2003, 2005)

In conclusion, what lessons can we draw from this rapid overview of the literature? I see two fields into which APAD's empirically focused anthropology of development is, or should be, moving: an empirical study of states and bureaucracies in the Global South and ethnographies of development institutions.

1. *States and bureaucracies in the Global South*: Recent writings and APAD conferences, including the present one, show that the classical APAD anthropology of development centred on projects is in a rapid process of being transformed into an

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<sup>18</sup> For example, the study by Anders (2005), despite its promising title, contains not a single element of information based on fieldwork, and could have been produced entirely from an office somewhere far away from Malawi.

anthropology of the delivery of public services, of public policies (which in the “development situation” is usually co-produced by state and foreign actors), of public bureaucracies and of the state, on both national and local levels (Blundo 2001, 2006; Blundo, Olivier de Sardan & with N. Bako-Arifari and M. Tidjani Alou 2006; Le Meur 2006; Olivier de Sardan 2004a, 2005b).<sup>19</sup> At the same time, this new type of development anthropology is increasingly differentiating into sub-fields like the anthropology of health (Jaffré & Olivier de Sardan 2003), of education (Bierschenk 2007b; Hartmann 2007), of (modern) law and the judiciary (Bierschenk 2004; Tidjani Alou 2001, 2006).<sup>20</sup>

2. *Ethnographies of development institutions and professionals*: What is badly, and maybe most urgently, needed are ethnographies of development institutions. A major unsolved issue here is that of access, a problem less acute if the object is not so much an institution as their professionals. Such institutional and professional ethnographies would help to define the anthropology of development as a constituent part of an anthropology of globalisation: Seeing Development (with a capital D) as one among several globalizing projects, as a set of “practices of world production”<sup>21</sup>, is one possible way to embed the localized narratives of development anthropologists in larger dynamics.<sup>22</sup>

In this work, a more explicit comparative posture is urgently needed. APAD's anthropology of development has to look more closely “left and right”: it has to more explicitly aim at absorbing what can be learned from studies on India, Latin America, South East Asia, etc. My recent teaching experience has taught me that it does not make much sense to try to teach a course on the anthropology of development exclusively focussed on Africa. As we have seen, some of the best recent work in the anthropology of development has been done with a non-African focus, and it is obviously important that we are aware of this work, in particular if our ambition is to put Africa into perspective.<sup>23</sup>

I want to conclude with four general reflections: The first concerns the combined effects of development, effects which are not immediately deductible from the observation of localized practices. Even successful individual development projects and particular policies might still have unintended consequences on a more general level that are less positive: the institutional-

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<sup>19</sup> For a earlier Mexican example see Arce (1993), for an Indonesian case Li (1999).

<sup>20</sup> Public bureaucracies in Africa are the object of an ongoing research project (funded by the Volkswagen Foundation) under the title “The state at work: public services and public servants in Benin, Ghana, Mali, and Niger” in which several APAD researchers are currently involved.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Rottenburg, personal communication.

<sup>22</sup> Two additional under-researched topics in the field of development could be mentioned: The leads given by Chauveau (1985; 1992) and Cooper (Cooper 1997; Cooper & Packard 1997) on the history of development have not been followed up by many authors (but see van Beusekom 2002), and there is also very little work on local actors’ (by which I mean not only the “recipients” of aid but also the “developers”!) notions and images of development, the desirable future and the good life. Such projects could take leads from Peel’s (1978) empirical research in Nigeria, Streiffeler & Mudimba’s (1997) in Kongo-Zaire, Lentz (1995) in Ghana and Diouf (1997) in Senegal, from more abstract recent reflections by Sen (2001) and Appadurai (2007) and receive methodological inspiration from Willis’ (1977) work on British working-class youth, Gaventa’s (1980) on Appalachian communities in the face of large-scale strip-mining as well as from Boltanski & Thévenot’s (2006) sociological analysis of local notions of justice and fairness in France.

<sup>23</sup> We could also add as a desideratum for APAD scholars to publish more in English.

ized aid dependency of many African countries, the generalization and institutionalization of double talk by African elites and of a “cunning state” (Randeria 2004) which are encouraged by the development enterprise, the fragmentation of coherent national policies via the creation of enclaves in the neo-liberal image as a result of sustained development interventions, the creation of a system of generalized irresponsibility through Development, etc. The anthropology of development, however justified its local approach may be, must be aware of the huge development challenges that Africa is facing and the failure of Development (with a capital D) to deliver development. Not only have more than 50 years of development not been able to adequately address these challenges; it might well be that Development and its unintended consequences are part of the problem (Collier & Gunning 1999; Ricupero 2001)

Secondly, we have to reflect on what it means that following the “participatory turn” in development, even the World Bank nowadays employs hundreds of anthropologists in a “neo-liberal” project (Li 2006). I think one conclusion to draw from this is that the anthropology of development needs to become more reflexive. This proposal should not be understood exclusively in the epistemological sense that post-modern concerns with the power of representation have, rightly, given it. It can be taken as a very practical proposal: What we need are ethnographies of the role, practices and functions of development anthropologists.

Thirdly, the anthropology of development brings up an old question which social sciences have grappled with since its inception: how to combine social analysis with political praxis and moral responsibility. The anthropology of development cannot, in the name of methodological rigour, shy away from, and in fact has to address, the question of moral and political values – something our students reminds us of constantly, in case we should forget. Bringing up the question of values does not automatically lead to a neo-dependency position of “do-not-touch it” (e.g., Development) on moral grounds. Such a position overlooks the fundamental fact that there is no difference in principle between the ethical problems of practical engagement and of ethnographic representation. Questioning, on grounds of principle, the ethics of intervention by the development anthropologist, as neo-dependency theorists do, is to question the ethnographic enterprise as such – which of course is a legitimate position to hold but which presents the anthropologist with an obvious dilemma. In my view, there are no theoretical, a-priori solutions to these dilemmas; there can only be practical and ad hoc ways of dealing with them. As development anthropologists are not only researchers but also teachers, a further consideration comes into play: of the responsibility towards our students. Most of them will not stay in academia in their later life, nor will be becoming full-time activists of Attac be a realistic option for them. Consequently, a do-not-touch-it position towards development which is typical for certain strands of self-declared “critical” anthropology is as irresponsible as an unreflected teaching of intervention techniques as proposed by some programmes in “development studies”. As with other fields of praxis, it is critical engagement with development and the finding of the optimal degree of distance to its practices which seems to me the path to follow – a difficult path but one that best fits the objectives of academic research and teaching.

And finally, what about the original claim of APAD's early years that anthropology and development are mutually beneficial for each other?<sup>24</sup> What is the balance sheet of this double ambition today? Its first part is pretty clear: the battle for recognition by development practitioners of anthropology's usefulness for development has been largely won. There is widespread consensus today that development projects and policies need to be based on detailed knowledge of the social dynamics on which development interventions are based, and for the countries of the Global South, there is often only anthropology which can deliver this type of knowledge. And since the participative turn in development, it is generally acknowledged that projects and interventions should be based on a "participative" approach which again favours the implication of anthropologists.

However, it is not equally clear whether the second objective has been reached. What does anthropology of development contribute to general anthropology? An interest in the modern world set the different version of practical anthropology apart from the mainstream fifty years ago; but this is not longer the case nowadays when few anthropologists continue to claim that the discipline should be confined to "traditional" social phenomena, and nearly everyone argues for an "anthropology of (post-)modernity". I see the contribution of the anthropology of development – at least of its empirically minded version – to general anthropology mainly in two fields. The first is methodological: Development and applied anthropologists who work for non-academic institutions have always been held, and felt, much more accountable about their methods, than purely academic anthropology, and have therefore developed a much more explicit arsenal of methods, combining quantitative with qualitative methods, adding sociological and historical approaches to classical participant observation, and being much more open towards interdisciplinary work than is probably true for most academic anthropologists (Bennett 1996). It is significant that historical perspectives – as different from the historical speculations of most evolutionists and diffusionists – were first introduced into anthropology in the applied context of the Rhodes-Livingstone-Institute and the Manchester School (Evens & Handelman 2006), where also network analysis was invented (Mitchell 1969), the only quantitative method ever developed in anthropology (Schweitzer 1988). Development anthropology was in fact never prisoner to the sole and only participant observation approach of Malinowskian anthropology – which subsequent generations of anthropology more often simply invoked than reflected upon. Paradoxically, neither this methodological openness nor development anthropology's engagement with neighbouring disciplines have been beneficial to development anthropology's legitimacy within the general discipline (where ironically it is sometimes exactly those colleagues more known for their theoretical than their empirical or methodological contributions to the discipline who present themselves as the staunchest supporters of the centrality of "participant observation").

The second contribution of development anthropology to general anthropology lies in its implicit recall of realities. Development is not simply a hegemonic project imposed by "the West" on "the South" (as it might appear when "the South" is looked at from afar); it is a master narrative to which many voices contribute. Since the late colonial times and in particu-

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<sup>24</sup> This last section of the text was not contained in the original lecture and picks up on some of the discussion during the conference.

lar in Africa, it has been a mobilising idea for a multitude of actors, from African peasants, to national elites to international agencies (Cooper & Packard 1997). This idea has not lost its mobilising force today and is inscribed in national constitutions as well as in the popular imaginary (for a similar argument, see Edelman & Haugerud 2004). Few anthropologists, whatever the research topic were they originally arrived with in their African field sites, will fail to quickly grasp the centrality of “development” (or its absence) in local discourses and for local practices. In other words, anthropologists who disdain or “critique” development, without attempting to grasp its local meanings, simply miss out on a large slice of (African) realities.

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