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Local Development Brokers in Africa

The rise of a new social category

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Functions and activities of mediation or «brokerage» are to be found in all societies. They are more or less prevalent, more or less specialized, more or less institutionalised. The phenomenon is particularly common in Africa where it can be observed in a wide variety of areas such as kinship, religion, political organisation or the economy. In the case of Africa, one notes for example the pre-eminence of certain positions of kinship, ties through marriage or based on gender in the relationship between various classes of the kinship system, or when it comes to designating authorised intermediaries between the community, the land and the ancestors or between a marabout and localized groups of his disciples. The «function» of go-between is obviously more explicit when social or symbolic distance coincides with distance in terms of space, as in the case of pre-colonial states in which two levels of «conceptions» could coexist: local political communities and ruling aristocracies, the former and the local communities. In the field of economy, there is a wealth of documentary sources which provide explicit descriptions of various forms of brokerage in exchange activities.

Under colonial rule, in particular, the regulation of relationships between colonial authorities and the local populations was largely dependent on groups of mediators who, from the interpreter to the village or district chief, were supposed to ensure the link between colonial authorities and the local societies. However, in a situation of extreme power differentials, with marked barriers between heterogeneous cultural, socio-economic and political groups and a gulf between local societies and territorial and metropolitan centres of decision, mediators were not confined to the role of transmission belts. They had no qualms about deviating and amplifying the function prescribed by the colonial infrastructure, and influenced the orientation of colonial policy and practice in keeping with their own interests or based on their own systems of political conceptions. (Amadou Hampaté Ba's novel, entitled *L'étrange destin de Wangrin*, based on documentary truth, provides an excellent description of the reality and ambiguity of brokerage.) This explains why the colonial political system and its vestiges in contemporary African states may be defined as «decentralised despotism» (Mamdani, 1996).

After the Second World War, the transition from colonial «mise en valeur» to «social and economic development» policies and their consequent implementation by former colonial

centres and international institutions, after independence, have led, progressively, to the unprecedented economic importance of brokerage activities. Development aid, in its various forms (public, and increasingly, decentralised, non-government or private; aid, bonus loan or a loan obtained on the private international market, bilateral or multilateral aid etc.) is now a prevailing reality in many African countries. The image of the «rent seeking» African state and the rent seeking endeavours of the bureaucratic elite and of the commercial private sector in independent African countries are commonplace clichés. They refer to the situation in which the access to power and economic resources is closely connected to the access to the international aid circuits and to control over of its distribution. Strategies aimed at the mobilization and «capture» of some of this development aid «income» have become stakes of vital importance. Moral or normative perspectives aside, this is in fact a «rent», albeit one based on external resources and occurring in a context of poverty, and sometimes of extreme deprivation. The modalities and importance of development aid obviously vary from one country to another, depending on available resources and on the existence or non-existence of alternative national incomes (mineral, petrol, or even agricultural resources – export crops). However, due to indebtedness, even the richer African states (Côte d'Ivoire or Nigeria, for instance) still depend on international financing. The mobilisation of development aid remains an important task for their politicians, who, in this respect, play the role of «development brokers» at the national and international levels. The «structural adjustment loans», seen as constraints imposed on African countries by international institutions, also constitute massive injections of resources into national economies and societies. They generate conflicts over distribution between countries under-going structural adjustment and international financial institutions, and among local interest groups.

These economic and political facts are common knowledge, described and analysed by economists and political scientists in particular. But they have implications of particular interest to sociologists and anthropologists which are less immediately conspicuous and which go beyond the usual generalizations about the rent seeking African state. These implications are related to contemporary modes of circulation and redistribution of this «development revenue» and more precisely, to its mobilisation to the benefit of patron-client relationships which constitute the framework underlying as well the internal social relationships of the bureaucratic class as the relationship between the latter and the local populations. There exists (in Africa and elsewhere) a group of social actors who play a specific role in the acquisition of this development revenue and which, until recently, have rarely been singled out for study.

The group we are referring to is that of intermediaries between «donors» and potential «beneficiaries» of development aid. We will call them «development brokers». The present article deals with one, hitherto largely unstudied, sub-category of them, e.g. local development brokers.

Local development brokers are the social actors implanted in a local arena (in whose politics they are directly or indirectly involved) and who serve as intermediaries who drain off (in the direction of the social space corresponding to this arena) external resources in the form of development aid. In the case of the development project, which could be seen as the ideal-type of the development operation⁴, regardless of the operator (public or private, multilateral or bilateral) in question, brokers represent the project's local social carriers, at the interface between the people (the «target group») aimed at by the project and the development institutions. They are supposed to represent *the* local populations, express its «needs» to the structures in charge of aid and to external financiers. In fact, far from being passive operators of logic of dependence, development brokers are *the* key actors in the irresistible hunt for projects carried out in and around African villages.

The research programme of which certain results are being reported in the present paper was addressed to a socio-anthropological, comparative analysis of this phenomenon of development brokerage, mainly in French-Speaking West Africa (for an East African case study, see Neubert 2000). We have made a conscious effort to avoid preconceived norms, be they positive (brokers as emanations of a «civil society» confronting adversity) or negative (brokers as «parasites» preying on mismanaged aid). The type of research we advocate is characterized, among other things, by wariness in the face of ideological digressions of all types, the high priority placed on empirical studies in the form of intensive fieldwork, and by a constant combination of ethnographic and historical approaches.

The first part of this introduction will attempt to illustrate the fact that brokerage is a particularly important social and historical reality in the structuring of contemporary African societies. The second part of the paper will recall the political anthropological tradition to which the present work is indebted. We will then go on to develop, in the third part, a comparative overview of the achievements and conclusions of this work, seen through the various case studies of which it is comprised and through the perspectives which emerge. The conclu-

⁴ Despite the declared principle of reorienting aid towards macro-economic adjustment policies, to the detriment of sectoral or regional project financing, the «project» as a form of aid persists in most areas (health, fight against poverty, insertion of young diploma holders, credit, promotion of women, participatory management of natural resources, etc.) Besides, regardless of lip service petitions, NGO projects are not different, or rarely so, from the classic project (cf. *infra*).

sion will emphasize the contributions and solid theoretic potentials of «local development brokers» as regards the more general debates on the relationship between the construction of the state, «civil society» and local forms of power in Africa.

The rise of local development brokers in contemporary Africa⁵

In order to be properly understood, the contemporary phenomenon of development brokerage must be placed in historical context, and in particular set against the background of on-going processes of state formation in Africa.

State construction in Africa in historical perspective

It has been pointed out that contemporary African states, until today still reveal many traits of their colonial legacy. Most noticeable is their recurrent recourse to the exercise of a despotic and violent form of power, the relative lack of authority of the state and a systemic reliance on local intermediaries in order to offset their weak local implantation.⁶ Some authors have even drawn a parallel, in this respect, to proto-modern European states (Tilly, 1986). As these proto-modern European states, contemporary African states appear extremely fragile, with the constant possibility of the processes of state formation being reversed. It should be noted, however, that fragility of contemporary African states also stems from the fact that their sovereignty and their very existence, in a sense, depends more on the international system of states than on their own internal regulatory powers and capacities at revenue generation (Jackson & Rosberg 1982). In reference to Evers' distinction (1987) between «externally dependent» and «internally dependent» states, the least advanced African states belong to the first category. They are, to borrow the terms of the political scientist J.-F. Bayart (1989), «extroverted». It is especially in this respect that the situation of post-colonial states differs from that of proto-modern European states.

Financially dependent on external sources, the political classes of the least advanced African countries have fed on the taxation of international commercial transit, on the transfer of development aid funds and on other rents, as opposed to internally generated revenues. Regardless of the area considered, «development», and rural development in particular, assumes the shape of a chain of agencies and actors involved in the transfer of resources, from bi- or multilateral donors over national governments to local services of project administra-

⁵ The general orientation of this section owes a lot to the analyses of Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardan (1998a) on the processes of democratisation and decentralisation in Africa.

⁶ See on this, among others, Bayart, 1989; Mamdani, 1996; Spittler, 1981; von Trotha, 1994.

tion to «target populations». In fact, since independence, development aid has been a central element in the mediation of state sovereignty in Africa. Instead of seeing the preponderance of patron-client relations in African politics as a deplorable effect of traditionalism, the aid relationship itself has largely contributed to reinforcing the clientelist character of African political systems. Since independence, it is development aid that has allowed for the extension of the state apparatus on national territories. Rural African societies found themselves wrapped up in a network of institutions and organisations related to territorial administration (these sometimes included village chiefdoms), the security forces and technical services (agriculture, livestock, health, education, land management, etc.). These tentacles of the state have been involved for decades as actors and major stakes in local political arenas.

However, the increasing local presence of the state should not be misread as a sign of hegemony of the state over local political arenas. While the representatives of the state are everywhere important actors in local arenas, they are not the only ones. Indeed, local political arenas⁷ are characterized by a number of traits which could be summed up as follows (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 1998a, 29 and *sq.*):

- village power is divided up between political institutions originating in various epochs, based on different principles of legitimacy, on different rules and on different actors – a trait which is captured in the notion of polycephaly;

- the ensuing game of competition and coalition authorises a relative autonomy of local political arenas regarding national history, whose major events obviously leave their mark on the former arenas, which, nonetheless, re-appropriate a great deal of national history through recontextualizing it into village political sense systems;

- the «piling up» (sedimentation) of a variety of local political institutions generates a degree of flexibility and malleability in these institutions and in their mutual interrelations, leaving ample room for negotiation, usually informal, for the different actors who must define required competences and rules of the game;

- this results in the weak and fragmented character of local politics. On one hand, there is the state and its limited capacity to impose norms. On the other, there is, along with official avenues of political authority (such as chiefdoms and district councils), the fact that political power can also be found in the hands of associations and organisations who do not appear, at first sight, to be involved in politics. Besides, it is not uncommon to find local representatives

⁷ For a discussion of the notion of the local arena in anthropology, see Bierschenk, 1988, Olivier de Sardan, 1995, Dartigues, 1997, Bako-Arifari, 1999.

of the state, high civil servants and intellectuals involved as members of these «supra-local» associations (mutual savings associations and village member associations, for example).

These local arenas are the fields in which the bureaucratic logics of the central state, represented by the agents from its various services, come face to face with other logics of political action and with various local representatives of politics, authority, sovereignty and power (cf. Bako-Arifari, 1999). The state's capacity to control relationships between villages and the outside world is therefore limited. It can be further weakened by a loss of legitimacy to the benefit of «local modes of governance» and supra-local networks.

The reorientation of the flows and circuits of development aid which has taken place over the last twenty years reinforce this tendency. The new modalities of decentralised aid which are closely linked to the re-adjustment of international aid and to the political and economic withdrawal of the state, lead in fact to a proliferation of intermediate organisations and actors that do not depend only on public authorities.

Aid decentralisation and the proliferation of actors and intermediary organisations

The crisis of the 1970s marked the decline of the prototype of the strong state of early independence, with its over-inflated civil service. This internal factor was aggravated by the loss of the geo-political rent which African states had derived from the cold war, linked to the accessory role they were liable to play to the benefit of one block or the other and to their capacity to shift their alliances. Profound changes have thus intervened in the conditions of allotment, capture and distribution of development rent and international aid: the volume of public aid is on the decline, conditions are increasingly stringent, states are no longer the only beneficiaries. Consequently, one aspect of the «crisis of the African state» is the fact that they are no longer in a position to drain off or control a significant portion of North-South aid flows because donors no longer trust them. A significant proportion of the «development rent» therefore transits via intermediary national networks, separate and apart from the classic administrative and political apparatus, and via circuits of decentralised aid (decentralised development co-operation, town partnerships/twinning, one-off charity operations ...), in which NGOs, from the North and the South, assume increasing importance (Bratton, 1990; Fowler, 1992; Salomon, 1994; Petiteville, 1996; Sogge, 1996; Neubert, 1997).

The current processes of economic liberalisation and political democratisation are another aspect of the stormy waters being crossed by African states. Accompanying the policy of state withdrawal, international and bilateral donors have put de-statisation and decentralisa-

tion on the agenda, packaged in the new catchword of «institutional development». Reduction in the number of civil servants, privatisation of economic sectors formerly under state control, abolition of one party-rule and the introduction (at least nominal) of democratic rules in political life have resulted in a «denationalisation» of aid, on the part of donors (local communities, associations, NGOs from the North) and receptors (local communities, associations, NGOs from the South) alike, and its decentralisation in the name of the «participation» invoked by one and all. The reforms imposed on African states and the new modalities of decentralised aid have thus reopened or created fields of action for a great number of intermediary organisations: village associations, co-operatives, producers' groups, user associations, local and regional development associations, more or less politically active agricultural trade unions, village committees related to one project or another, local sections of the various political parties, migrants' or home-town associations, religious associations, ethnic, regional, cultural movements and organisations, youth and women's clubs, savings circles, etc. The logic of the central state is thus confronted with new logics of mobilisation of external resources, quite unlike those formerly in vogue in the national bureaucratic and political class. Intermediary organisations specialised in the capturing of development aid become new actors and represent new stakes which are being added to, without replacing them, pre-existing intermediary organisations and local centres of power.

This proliferation of organisations and associations has led to a massive recruitment of leaders from various social backgrounds. In addition to public service agents posted in the area, and to intellectuals belonging to regional and rural communities, who spearhead the process, the myriad bureaux and committees of various kinds include a significant number of persons left on the wayside by the policy of liberalisation (rubbed off the lists of the public service or of the urban private sector, unemployed diploma holders who have gone back to the land, or ordinary educated youths in search of employment). Last not least, village chiefs and the customary village notables, at least those who are open to «modernity», often involve themselves in this movement.

In this context, development brokers assume growing importance, at the local, the national and even the international level. In Africa, they can be found wherever decentralised aid is present. The geographical distribution of development projects is currently determined to a great extent by the practices of these «barefoot» brokers (cf. *infra*).

Research questions

The entity often referred to, in currently fashionable development discourse, as «civil society» is often mysterious in nature. It generally connotes the intention to mark a certain distance from the state or a valorisation of «non-statal» forms of collective action. In actual fact, these incessant references to «civil society» usually designate a multitude of associations, local NGOs and groups of all kinds. What is the importance of development brokers in this galaxy of associations? Are they simply contingent elements linked to the fluctuations in international aid trends? Or are they, to the contrary, reflections of a structural recomposition of the relationship between states and their «civil societies» at work through their agency? An empirical study of development brokers thus leads to broader reflections on the relationship between African states, local modes of governance and intermediary organisations.

Hence the following research questions which have served as guidelines for the programme to which this paper is indebted. How are the competences, trajectories and «careers» of development brokers integrated in the local political field? What about the relationship between the leaders of associations, a role often assumed by development brokers, and the classic authorities in village arenas? Has the emergence of development brokers contributed to the transformation of the relationship between African states and local modes of governance which pre-existed the crisis of the state and the new modalities of international aid – for instance by encouraging the further erosion of state legitimacy, by enhancing the autonomy of local political arenas, by contributing to the fragmentation of village power to the advantage of these intermediaries, by conferring on supra-local associations and organisations unprecedented resources and competence in negotiation in the local and national political fields? Finally, does development brokerage really go in the direction, as is usually claimed, of a reinforcement of the «civil society», to the detriment of the state or does it contribute merely to a further clouding of the issue and to aggravating the fundamental ambivalence of the relationships between civil society and the state – especially by encouraging the participation of civil servants, high civil service officers and intellectuals, as well as chiefs and notables, school drop-outs and urban citizens in dire straits in the great hunt for projects to the benefit of «their» villages?

Brokerage and mediation as issues in political anthropology

The interest anthropologists take in brokers is not new. Many authors, mostly from English-speaking areas, have studied intermediaries who take advantage of the position at the interface between two social and cultural configurations. This «classic» socio-anthropological

literature is characterized by three traits. Firstly, literature on brokerage is based on empirical research conducted essentially in two regions: the Mediterranean area and Latin America – which raises the issue of a possible elective affinity between a research problematic and the specific character of a research field (cf. Fardon, 1990). However, as we will see, the phenomena of mediation constituted an important research theme also in the works of certain British africanist researchers since the end of the 1930s, long in advance of the introduction of the terms broker or brokerage. Secondly, this literature falls essentially under the heading of political anthropology, which was the major field of British socio-anthropology up to the 1960s. As a result, it was interested primarily in political brokers. Later, in the 1970s, the first studies on what we call «development brokers» came to light (the term was not yet in existence). Finally, these works question the structural-functionalist paradigm which held sway in anthropology at the time. They underline the fact that social actors do not simply play roles or execute norms, but are also in a position to carve out room for manoeuvre for themselves in the interstices and margins of systems and structures, in a context marked by non-homogenous and even contradictory norms. This critical tendency took concrete shape in the form of certain «schools of thought» such as the Manchester school (Gluckman, Epstein, Mitchell, Turner and others) or in interactionist sociology (Goffman, Becker, Strauss ...).

We can distinguish two main perspectives, in function of the importance attached to pressures exerted on brokers by the various power systems in which they play the role of mediator.

Encapsulating and encapsulated societies

Some authors (such as Gluckman *et al.*, 1949; Fallers, 1955; Mendras, 1976) reason in terms of the relationship between an «encapsulating» and an «encapsulated» society (or to revert to another metaphor, between the «top» and the «bottom»), with a clear power differential in favour of the former (see the numerous analyses of «peasant societies» and their relationship with state and urban authorities, etc.). From this perspective, mediation is restricted to the relationship between a single encapsulating and a single encapsulated society. Though competition can exist between several mediators and brokers, these cannot in turn influence any of the power configurations whose relationship they facilitate, which obviously limits their room for manoeuvre.

However, to the minds of other authors (like Mair, 1968; Kuper, 1970; Boissevain, 1974; Cohen & Comaroff, 1976; Gonzalez, 1972), power configurations exist in greater num-

bers, are more varied and are more unstable. Divers avenues, paths and trajectories of brokerage exist. Competition occurs, not only among brokers, but also, in a manner of speaking, between structures of authority. In this type of situation, brokers are liable to find abundant room for manoeuvre. They can be thrown into competition, and can, in turn, throw the power configurations into competition.

In fact, authors have progressively abandoned the first perspective in favour of the second. This does not appear to be a mere a change in theory; it also corresponds to a change in the historical situations under analysis. While the first analyses describe more or less locked-in «colonial situations» marked by strict hierarchy and dichotomy, more recent works describe situations marked by greater fragmentation, in which power configurations are, so to speak, «decentred» (some authors speak in terms of «post-modern conditions»). This change in perspective goes hand in hand with a transposition of the category of brokerage from the field of politics proper to that of development, in which the mobilization of political resources interferes with strategies aimed at the capturing of external aid – in keeping with the new tendencies of the developed world which we have outlined above.

From the analysis of the position of the chief as «go-between» to the analysis of political brokerage in a situation of complex interrelations

The paper by Gluckman, Mitchell and Barnes (1949) on the «village chief in central British Africa» may be considered as one of the founding texts of the political anthropology of brokerage, though these terms are not used. These authors outline a research programme on the position of the village chief as a go-between during the colonial epoch. In the introduction, Gluckman underscores the ambivalence of the position of the chief, torn between contradictory principles. Within the village, he occupies the interface between the kinship and political systems. This situation is in itself an ambivalent one, especially when there is a conflict to be settled. This ambivalence is further aggravated by the fact that he must, despite himself, see to the application of the rules of the colonial administration, which he does not approve. He thus finds himself caught between two value systems. The «stress» implied in the position of chief has led another author, Fallers (1955), to insist on the «predicament» of the modern African chief.

Gluckman provides an interesting lead but gives no follow-up on it. The intermediary position of the chief, torn between the demands of the local «traditional» system and those of the «modern» colonial administration, is mentioned without further development. The analy-

ses of Mitchell and Barnes which follow treat only the first type of ambivalence entailed in the position of the chief, that is, linked to his position within the village. Moreover, Mitchell views the position of the chief as a «predicament», that is to say in a passive light: the chief, caught between two systems of rules, norms and values derives no benefit whatsoever from his role. Hence, he is not a broker in the sense employed later on in anthropological literature (and in this paper) and as formalized by Boissevain (1974), who defines the broker as an active mediator between two social units who benefits from this mediation.

Kuper (1970) makes a blatant criticism of Gluckman's neo-functionalist perspective – which can be encountered elsewhere throughout his work –, and proposes that analysis be centred instead on the room for manoeuvre available to the chief who can use his position as go-between to his own advantage if he knows how to play the cards he has in hand. In fact, this could be read as an unacknowledged repetition of an approach proposed earlier by Lucy Mair in several of her papers (Mair, 1968) concerning political change in Africa. Her anticipation of future developments (and of certain themes of this paper) in the field of mediation and brokerage is reason enough to dwell for a moment on its main contribution.

As of 1936, in a paper on «chiefdom in modern Africa», republished three decades later in a collective work on «Anthropology and social change» (1968), Mair points out that the chiefdom is not an isolated institution, but that it should be considered in relation to all other institutions whose combined effects delimit the sphere of influence of the chief. Submission – of the chief to colonial power or of his subjects to him – is not the only key for interpreting the chief's relationship to colonial power; there is also the fact that colonial powers have to rely on the chiefs'. Mair considers this to be a situation in which the chief must evaluate and take into consideration the «room for manoeuvre» available to him (a key concept in her work, along with that of «small-scale societies», see Mair 1968). For example, insofar as the colonial administration, albeit indirectly, undermines the former local infrastructure through which the population controlled chiefs, the latter are in a position to derive certain advantages from their position as mediators with the colonial authority. However, the chief must also pay attention to the risks of becoming too unpopular with his subordinates and with the colonial rulers. Since, reciprocally, colonial civil servants are also placed in a dual situation; they must, simultaneously, defend the chiefdom in the name of indirect rule, and colonial subjects against possible extortion by chiefs. Mair describes a situation made complex by the fact that chiefs, who usually inherit their positions, are considered by their subordinates both as symbols of unity against colonial power and as potential tyrants, liable to take undue

advantage of their position as intermediaries. Besides, chiefs also face competition from other intermediaries between the local populations and the encapsulating society, e.g. from those persons having acquired an important position in trade or those exercising «modern» professions (ancillary civil servants, technicians, school teachers etc.).

In the context of transfer of power from colonial states to the newly independent African states, the «dual» position of the chief, at the interface between the colonial government and their subordinates, becomes even more complicated with the emergence of new African political leaders, who come forward as spokesmen of the populations according to «non-traditional» criteria, and even as opponents to the hereditary legitimacy of chiefs. This «impossible situation» experienced by chiefs, as described by Mair, is not merely the result of their intercalary position, but is due instead to active political competition between former and current actors in the political field in which patron-client relationships play an important role. However, Mair is more interested in the patron-client relationship inside the local power structure than in its transversal dimensions.

As Mair sees it, this competition is not necessarily to the detriment of chiefs, to the extent that, on one hand, the new leaders and educated civil service officers (she insists in this respect on the role played by the associations they create) are also liable to spring from hereditary chiefdoms, and, on the other, the new African governments are tempted to use chiefs and their clients according to the preceding colonial model. This brings us face to face with two new problems which we will consider later on. The first concerns the relationship between customary and modern elites, liable to swing between competition and alliance (Mair anticipates here on «mutual assimilation» of the elites as analysed by Bayart (1989), who sees this as a general characteristic of African states). The second involves the instability of the broker's position. Brokerage is not a status which one attains once and for all, not even in the case of chiefs, viewed by the colonial authorities as the «natural representatives» of the populations. In order to face up to the possibility of constant rearrangements of the power configuration, political brokers are perpetually obliged to take initiatives and thus evolve into «political entrepreneurs».

This reformulation of Gluckman's problematic, in an approach which centres more on actors than on structures, can be found in the abundant socio-anthropologic literature on patron-client relationships, on the increase since the 1950s, with authors like Eric Wolf (1966) on Latin America, Frederick F. Bailey (1960) on India, and Sydel Silverman (1965) and Jeremy Boissevain (1962, 1969) on the Mediterranean.

These authors consider patron-client networks as the by-product of a specific situation of domination. A dominant central political instance – in this case the modern western-type state – dictates general norms which it is not in a position to impose on local societies. Though the state intervenes in the local arenas, it relies more on patron-client relationships than on its own universalistic bureaucratic rules. This reinforces the apparent arbitrariness of its interventions. State intervention on the local level thus suffers from a wide margin of non-predictability. The creation of patron-client links between the administrative apparatus and certain actors issuing from the local social arenas allows, on the other hand, for a certain reduction of the non-predictability of state intervention.

It is precisely this aspect that the French sociologist Henri Mendras develops in his theory of the peasantry (1976) which contains a very concise, but unacknowledged synthesis of the English-language literature on clientelism and brokerage, which might be summarized as follows:

- Relationships between the encapsulating society and peasant society invariably generate intermediary roles and functions; in general, there exists a variety of relays between these two societies, which taken together comprise a mediation system.

- Intermediaries occupy marginal positions at the intersection between these two societies (more recent literature has used the term «interface», cf. Long 1975, 1989), which allows them to be members of one while being recognized by the other, or at best, to be recognized at the same time as members of both societies.

- Double membership opens a field of action (or room for manoeuvre: Mendras agrees on this point with Kuper's objection to Gluckman) in which the broker can engage all sorts of strategies. The main strategy used by the intermediary is to position himself as a «screen» instead of serving as a communication channel between the encapsulating society and peasant society. This allows him to control uncertainty on either side of the interface. Developing this idea of Mendras, we could call intermediaries «gate keepers» who guard the entrances in two directions, leading to the peasant society and to the encapsulating society. They are in fact engaged in watching two gates at the same time.

- The trust placed in intermediaries in one society is used by the same to acquire confidence in the other society and vice versa. Ultimately, it is because the dominant actors from the encapsulating society believe that he acts on mandate by the peasants that he gets attention from authorities and, reciprocally, he is mandated by the peasants because they believe that the authorities listen to him.

- One main function of mediation within the group and between the group and the outside is the transformation of the sense of things and of actions, by giving them different meanings and sometimes contradictory functions, adapted to each universe. We will come back to this idea, referred to as «management of meaning» by Cohen & Comaroff (1976).

- In rural French society, this role of intermediary was assumed by «notables» whose position was characterized, on one hand, by a combination of several registers of power (social, economic and political power; external and internal levels of legitimacy) and, on the other, by a personalisation of their relationships, which is typical for face-to-face societies. Anthropological literature in English develops a similar idea: Mendras' rural French notable bears a striking resemblance to the Melanesian *big man* described by Marshall Sahlins (1963).

- The privileged sphere of action of these notables is not so much the village as the intermediary zones between districts and the administration of the province – we could call this the local politico-administrative system, which Swart (1968) and Bailey (1969) refer to as *local-level politics*⁸.

A number of the ideas expressed by Mendras were formulated several years earlier by Jeremy Boissevain. His book on «The friends of my friends: networks, manipulators and coalitions» (1974) contains perhaps the most complete and clearest analysis of brokers as a social category. The term «brokers» is used explicitly by Boissevain, as opposed to Mendras. An entire chapter is devoted to the subject. Boissevain proposes as the baseline of his analysis a distinction between «first degree resources» (such as land, money, workforce, etc.) and «second degree resources», entailing a nurturing of strategic contacts with actors who, for their part, control first-degree resources. Boissevain's proposes that actors who control first-degree resources be referred to as «patrons» and that those who control second-degree resources be referred to as «brokers».

Given the similarities in the analyses developed by Boissevain and Mendras, it will suffice us to mention four aspects of the former's analysis, of particular interest to this subject.

- Boissevain frees the concept of «broker» from the distinction between the encapsulating and the encapsulated society, and from the premise of an inequality in the distribution of power this implies. In the general sense as proposed by Boissevain, brokers act at the points at which social forms intersect with one another, and are not necessarily integrated into a given social hierarchy.

⁸ On the role played by notables in modern-day France, see Grémion's (1976) fundamental work.

- He sees the broker as an «entrepreneur» who actively manipulates people and information on his own initiative: «A broker is a professional manipulator of people and information who brings about communication for profit» (Boissevain, 1974: 148). Brokers have no personal control over «first degree resources» (land, jobs, subventions, credits, specialized knowledge, etc.), but they have strategic contacts with those who control these resources: «A broker's capital consists of his personal network of relations with people» (ibid: 158). Brokers are network specialists.

- As an entrepreneur, the broker sets out to gain a benefit: he expects a «commission» for his role in the transmission of information. It must be stated that, to Boissevain's mind, this commission, regardless of the economic metaphor which he employs, is not generally remuneration in cash, but a return of services. The commission is not usually paid at the very moment the broker begins his mediator activity, but rather at some point before or after this. The rule of the game is «communicate now and pay later», or «pay now and communicate later»; if we consider the communication networks he controls as the broker's capital, his «credit» is the way in which other people evaluate this capital. The broker thus makes a merchandise out of other people's expectations, anticipations and hopes – about the potential services they can expect in the future. This is why the commission is rarely stated precisely and even more rarely paid in money and in whole at the time of the transaction. If this were to happen, the accounts would be closed and no special relationship of indebtedness would continue to exist between the two parties. It is in the interest of both parties to keep the communication channels open, by under-paying or over-paying at the time of the transaction. Hence, the broker's strategy is to remain vague about commission rates and to keep partners in the dark concerning the actual extent of his network.

- Finally, Boissevain shows that the broker can always try, at a given point, to transform his relational resources into first-degree material resources: a position in the administration, land property, political influence ...

From political brokers to development brokers

While the model of brokerage has by now gained wide acceptance in political anthropology, it has been rarely used in the anthropological study of development. In this area, three older case studies and their theoretic contribution seem of particular interest.⁹

⁹ We could also mention Seeley (1985) who uses the notion of *broker*, in her unpublished doctoral thesis, but without further development. See also Seeley, 1987.

In an article on «The management of meaning», Cohen & Comaroff (1976) propose a comparative analysis of political behaviour in the case of marriage among the Tshidi in South Africa, and a case of brokerage which links the peripheral province of Terre Neuve with Canada's political centre. This study provides a perfect description of a typical development brokerage situation in a «developed» country: Cohen describes the case of a merchant from a small sea-front town who built his political career thanks to his ability to drain off government funds in the direction of his region.

This brings us back to familiar themes and, especially, to the entrepreneurial aspect of brokerage activities which play their part in determining the role of the broker, and which set it apart from other types of intermediation. The broker's strategy consists in making his services, and himself, indispensable. As indicated in the title of their contribution, the authors highlight two aspects of brokers' strategies: management of meaning, on one hand, and the various strategies aimed at valorising their own activity, on the other. The brokers translate the discourses and actions of given actors in terms which make sense to partners situated far away at the other end of the brokerage chain. He plays on the fact that he belongs to both worlds, by emphasizing either his closeness to the local actors or his control of universes situated beyond their reach and scope of knowledge. He takes pains to portray himself as «the man who makes things happen». At the same time, he employs a legitimating rhetoric which portrays him as devoid of personal interest, motivated only by the well-being of the community.

The second text is a brilliant analysis by Nancy Gonzalez (1972), dating from the end of the 1960s, and concerning an association of entrepreneurs and persons from liberal professions for the development of the town of Santiago de los Caballeros, second most important town in the Dominican Republic. The association's main activity is the draining-off of funds in the direction of this town; funds from USAID and other important donors like the Ford Foundation or the World Bank. Gonzalez describes members of this association as brokers at the interface of two worlds. They are well integrated into the political elite of their country through family ties, affinity, friendship or business partnership. When the situation so requires, they willingly express third world, anti-imperialist and anti-American opinions. At the same time, they have an excellent command of English (the majority having studied in American universities) and, in the presence of foreign visitors, they distinguish themselves by their life-style (and that of their wives), which is very American in many respects: clothing, manner of speech, practice of certain sports, house parties ... «So Americans feel at home with

them, and take this feeling of well-being as a sign of the honesty, intelligence, competence and political philosophy of this group» (Gonzalez, 1972: 198).

These strategies are so successful that, in a certain sense, American donors end up as the hostages of this group of brokers, especially since their Dominican counterparts cleverly convey the idea that other non-American organisations and institutions are ready and willing to support their association. In other words, this is a situation in which international clientelism or distribution of power remains diffuse, to say the least. And, Gonzalez concludes, if we suppose that in the relationship between patrons and clients both parties derive some kind of advantage, it becomes difficult to distinguish the patron from the client, or indeed the exact meaning of these two terms. The patron is also liable to become as dependent as the client on the pursuit of the relationship. This observation can be applied directly to the situation of many African villages (for example, in Senegal or Burkina Faso) where NGO donors who wish to start a project are registered on a kind of waiting list.

Finally, Carola Lentz's (1988) study of the Amerindian mountain community in Ecuador shows how villagers are capable of bending and redefining development project originating from the outside. Owing to their mastery of the developmentalist jargon, villagers managed to attract a project from the Adenauer Foundation. This project, for the construction of a community centre, had aroused the interest of migrant villagers as it corresponds to their conception of a civilized village. In fact, many villagers have turned to seasonal migration, and for them the village is no longer considered as a space in which to produce, but as a refuge in times of crisis and as a pole of social and ethnic identification. To the contrary, a cattle rearing project which was closer to the interests of the locally settled population was successfully boycotted by the migrants through a subtle manipulation of local political institutions.

A comparative analysis of African development brokers

While our empirical case studies took place in a wide variety of contrasting situations, the research programme did not pretend to provide a comprehensive sample of the enormous variety of such cases in Africa. However, they offer a basic comparative background which helps in the identification of certain constants and variants, and allows us to outline outstanding tendencies of development brokerage in Africa. We will thus examine the main criteria for those who want to enter brokerage as a «career», as well as various aspects of the career itself, before looking at the integration of brokers into the local political arenas, and at the relationship between brokerage and other forms of mediation. Finally, we will sketch out

some of the contours of a social geography of development brokerage, especially in French-speaking West Africa, where most of our case studies were carried out.

How to become a development broker: discoveries and opportunities

Development brokerage obviously requires certain types of competence, in particular rhetorical, organisational, scenographic acting and relational competences, which we dwell on in a moment. Yet, there is of course no organisation and no school to provide information in preparation for anything resembling a career in development brokerage. The first thing to be observed from case studies is that indispensable competences are acquired «on the job», through practice, based on informal experience.

To become a broker, one does not need to acquire formally programmed competences, for instance comparable to those of an apprentice craftsman. The case of Timidria, studied in Niger by Tidjani Alou (2000), is very instructive in this regard: «these brokers despite themselves» have taken the imperceptible step that leads from humanitarian and political activism (in the broad sense of the word) to developmentalist activism, without there being any clear signs of a deliberate strategy.¹⁰

Thus, the «career» of development broker is not necessarily the result of the deliberate and patient execution of well-elaborated plan, it has more to do with «discovery». We might even speak of «procedural discovery» as opportunities present themselves, and are being taken up, in the course of action. This is not to say that there is no premeditation whatsoever – activist or associative intentions, for example –, but initially it is not usually centred on brokerage activities *per se*. There are other conditions, over which the future broker does not exercise complete control, which are essential to his orientation in this direction.

It is therefore important to note that our use of the term broker does not refer to a concrete status or to any official, or informal position in an institution, or to an emic notion calling on conceptions which exist at a conscious level, in the awareness of the persons involved. No one gets promoted to the status of broker, nobody defines himself as a broker. This is a concept that exists solely for the sake of analysis. It means very little, maybe nothing to actors (except those who read our work, and even then ...). But it allows us to distance ourselves from the self-representation of actors and thus to produce analytical insights of the way actors, who are not able to perceive themselves from this angle, behave. We therefore propose

¹⁰ We think that Tidjani Alou (2000) prevails over Sodeik (2000) on this point when he affirms that intentionality is necessary to enter brokerage. Other authors have referred to «reluctant brokers» (see Geschiere, 1982, a point took up by Lavigne-Delville (2000) and Le Meur (2000).

to distinguish between: (a) the labelling involved in our definition of brokers as agents of the «development configuration» (see Olivier de Sardan, 1995: 7); and (b) the positions these agents occupy, as seen from their own viewpoints and from that of their various partners. It is important to underline this distinction in order to avoid normative confusion. In particular, the use of the term broker does not (at least not necessarily) imply that brokers manipulate on the sly, or that, they are really cynical intermediaries wearing a mask. We are not accusing these NGO leaders, development agents, peasant association chairmen, association activists, facilitators, co-ordinators, politicians, clerks, (some of the many statuses which produce brokers as defined in this paper) of personal insincerity or of a Machiavellian spirit, of deliberately dissimulating their latent function as brokers under a more presentable guise. Hence our insistence on drawing the reader's attention to a possible misinterpretation that we might have provoked unwittingly. Nevertheless, the resources of decentralised projects constitute a stake that can, of course, generate opportunist, self-interested manoeuvres (Blundo, 1994). It might even be argued that sincerity, or even faith in development (in its various forms: participatory, humanist, critical, management oriented, etc.) is an important quality in a broker, who has to believe in the cause he defends: this role would be ill assorted with lucid cynicism (see, Neubert 2000).

In a sense, the development broker does not (cannot) recognize himself as such, nor is he recognized as such by other people. In the same way, a «career» in brokerage is rarely the result of a deliberate plan. Nevertheless, it has a *de facto* existence, as we will see if we accept to view it from the angle proposed in this paper. Of course, actors who have broker potential are able to spot the opportunities offered by decentralised aid. This constitutes, in fact, the main difference between contemporary forms and the aid regime which predominated up to the 1980s. But various detours are required in the course of apprenticeship, as there are no road maps and no road-signs on the way to becoming a broker.

This on-the-job learning seems to require two preconditions. The potential broker must have at least some contacts with development projects. Sodeik (2000) demonstrates convincingly that brokerage is not possible in a zone that does not have projects: the «snowball» effect has to be set in motion. It is only through frequent contact with projects that one can learn, little by little (even if this learning is not perfect; it is enough for a beginning) about their codes, expectations, modes of action, resources. This, among other things, explains why persons who were formally employed by projects as co-ordinators, sometimes manage very well as brokers. However, this is not enough. The future broker also needs to call on experi-

ence acquired «elsewhere», that is outside the village, whether in the educational circuit (secondary school or university: see the studies by Coll, 2000; Le Meur, 2000; Bako-Arifari, 2000; Edja, 2000; Tidjani Alou, 2000; Kossi, 2000), in the urban universe of salary earners (see Le Meur, 2000; Lavigne-Delville, 2000; Kossi, 2000; Mongbo, 2000), in the world of politics (see Coll, 2000; Bako-Arifari, 2000) or as activists in associations (see Coll, 2000; Tidjani Alou, 2000). At any rate, travel is essential (see Blundo, 2000).

These different universes have obviously one thing in common: they familiarize the future broker with contexts «other» than those found in the village, thus providing him with the know-how, appropriate jargon and behaviour which enable him to adjust to partly heterogeneous cultures, and which can be reinvested or recycled in brokerage. We could also say that the broker thus learns how to change roles, or how to go from one «universe» to another. Finally, we could also say that he learns to play the game according a variety of rules, which allows him to profit from the ambiguity around each rule.

But the classroom, the enterprise, the political party and the association are also avenues through which more specific competences required by the development broker can be acquired. We distinguish four main registers of competence which are need by all brokers, to which may be added two additional ones specific to «big time» professional brokers or those on the way to this status.

Four plus two: registers of competence

The most obvious of these registers is rhetoric. The broker has to be able to speak the «development language» (see Olivier de Sardan, 1995: 165, and Olivier de Sardan & Paquot, 1989), on one hand, and the peasant language, on the other (in the case of the field of rural development), and must be an expert in translating from one language to the other. This is obviously due to the fact that the broker holds a position situated exactly at the interface (see Long, 1989) between the development configuration, on one hand, and local societies, on the other. He must master the linguistic and cultural codes in question. Mastery of the peasant language is not the main problem faced by a local broker who was born in the milieu, as is usually the case (although there are cases of «newcomers» who, after leaving school or having returned home from migration, take pains to distinguish themselves from the «natives», or who find themselves stuck with foreign behavioural traits and modes of speech acquired abroad: the ironic remarks they provoke is an eloquent testimony to the fact that such persons can never gain access to local development brokerage ...). It is the acquisition of the «development language» which is more subject to risk, and calls on a specific individual predisposition for

learning on one's own (we will recall that there is no school in Africa which provides training in this domain). This does apply to high civil servants and persons with university education who have acquired professional knowledge in this field (cf. Bako-Arifari, 2000; Kossi, 2000). But in this case, integration into the local milieu can be problematic, as we will see later on.

The second register is organisational competence. The broker must be able to manage an association or an office, manage multiple tasks and co-ordinate activity (see Tidjani Alou, 2000). Promoter, federator and/or capturer: these are the three feathers in his cap. As is often the case, the broker must create organisations, either by providing the idea or by putting himself the groups or associations in place which are liable to become the presentable partners so desperately sought after by development institutions. The typical process (indispensable for NGOs) is the creation of local groups at the «grass-root» level, that is by a group of peasant-producers, usually on the initiative of a peasant-leader (see Blundo, 2000). But this is not always the case: certain groups are created from the «top», on a local (see Mongbo, 2000) or national (see Tidjani Alou, 2000) basis. If he is not a promoter, the broker must enter into relationship with groups already in existence; he must become a federator (capable of bringing a sufficient number of groups and associations together in order to attain the critical mass that certain donors demand: see Coll, 2000; Blundo, 2000), or a capturer (capable of integration, in agreement with its co-ordinators, such and such a group or association into his «portfolio»).

There is a third specific capacity, which we will term scenographic competence. Every projects needs a «show window» (see Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 1997: 448; Neubert, 2000; Sodeik, 2000) likely to entice the potential donor, and to delight the evaluations expert on his missions. This showcase could be an «exemplary» initiative (such as the vegetable garden mentioned by Coll, 2000), which can be visited, or of which a picture (possibly touched over: cf. Kossi, 2000) can be shown. But it could also be a «show», well rehearsed and presented with good taste (cf. Mongbo's, 2000 amazing description of the very elaborate performance presented by the village of Gilten to him in his capacity as representative of a national NGO). Many of the warm welcomes villages reserve for visiting foreigners from the development universe are related to this dramatic competence. Placing the village needs at centre stage, dramatizing its enthusiasm towards development, or showing the advantages of aid already received is no easy task. How difficult, is *a contrario* proven by the numerous indifferent welcomes which a foreigner often receives and which put the skilfully staged welcome ceremonials into an even brighter light. But the play can also be staged for local part-

ners, for example when a village manages to attract an important politician as a visitor (see Blundo, 2000). Dramatic and rhetorical competences are sometimes combined as in the case inaugurations and harangues. This can even go as far as calling on the «art of make believe», mentioned by Blundo (2000) in reference to de Certeau, to the extent that presenting a dynamic village organisation, a group of enterprising local producers, or an innovative «local project» to a partner from the outside is really a «construction of reality» in keeping with the expectation of the partner in question (see also Neubert, 2000).

The fourth register is relational. A broker must be able to appeal to peasants and development experts alike and be able to negotiate with both. He must build up his «clientele» in both senses of the word: he must «sell» his services on all sides, and must obtain and maintain gratitude at both ends. The establishment of a personal network of relationships – of a relational capital – among donors and peasants alike is a hallmark of success sported by the accomplished broker (see Blundo, 2000). At the same time, brokers are generally very careful about barring access to their network, so as to maintain their monopoly over the interface (cf. the personage of Gougi in Coll, 2000). Brokerage and patron-client relationships are of necessity inextricably linked.

To this list of four «basic» competences, we could add two supplementary ones which are the hallmarks of particularly skilled brokers, those who have the know-how which allows them to practise on their own: the ability to «set up a project» (see Tidjani Alou, 2000) and the ability to gain direct access to donors by short-circuiting intermediary levels (see Coll, 2000 and Le Meur, 2000). These are competences of professional brokers or brokers on the verge of professionalisation (despite the fact that they usually maintain their «official» profession). Many brokers do not enjoy this type of autonomy and are obliged to call on specialized external competence, for example at the initial stages of a project (see Edja, 2000).

Generally speaking, these competences taken together require a set of personal qualities (a type of «talent») as well as acquired experience. The village is not a favourable context for this type of experience, hence the necessity of a detour via the outside world for the future broker. Experience as a political activist or as an activist in a civil society association is usually of vital importance: it develops, at the same time, rhetorical, organisational, scenographic and relational competences. These talents can also be put to good use in the accomplishment of the primary task in brokerage, which conditions success: expressing the «problems» («needs») villagers have in adequate terms so that they coincide with the «solutions» («support») development institutions intend to propose (see Blundo, 2000 and Neubert, 2000). In-

deed, it often happens, contrary to the somewhat naïve conception of participatory projects, that the broker's real talent resides less in his ability to «sell» initiatives originating «at the bottom» than in his ability to respond to the dynamics of «project availability» in the development world. We need to underline, once again, that this is not really a question of «perverse» behaviour on the part of brokers, but rather a «perversion» originating in the development configuration itself.

Brokerage as a career

It would be better to use the word «career» in the plural to the extent that brokerage covers a wide variety of job types and functions. A wide variety of profiles can be encountered in the continuum going from bare-foot brokers, general practitioners and amateurs, operating at the village level, at one end, (see Blundo, 2000) to «big time brokers», specialists and professionals, operating at the regional level (see Bako-Arifari, 2000 on the President of Iri Bonsé), at the other. The same actor sometimes advances from one pole to the other. In this case it is a question of trajectory.

Social Trajectories

In fact, brokerage is often a passageway or a stage in a social trajectory, usually marked by upward mobilization. Becoming a broker can be, in itself, a form of social promotion, or a step upwards leading ultimately to social promotion. This could take the form of an internal promotion (the «petty» broker becomes a «big time broker», who has, in general, become a professional) or of external promotion (in which case brokerage is abandoned for another career, usually politics). But we need to keep in mind that the broker is situated at an interface and as such is usually in an unstable position, essentially dependent on a fiduciary¹¹ capital, which can be immediately withdrawn in case of a loss of confidence in the broker, on one side or on the other. In this sense, the broker's career is reversible. He does not have a permanent institutional status, acquired once and for all (see Blundo, 2000; Tidjani Alou, 2000). This derives from the informal character of the broker's position.

Another possibility is to use brokerage to supplement a professional or political career centred for the most part outside of brokerage (cf. Kossi's, 2000 sketch of the professional, and the portrait of the politician N'Diaye in Bako-Arifari, 2000).

¹¹ In the same sense in which certain political scientists (Putnam 1993 on Southern Italy; Hyden 1994 on East Africa) or institutional economists define the «social capital» (diametrically opposed to Bourdieu's definition) as a capital of confidence.

The function of brokerage and collective brokerage

But there are numerous cases in which what we encounter is brokerage rather than brokers. The function of broker can also be exercised in passing, over a short time or part-time by a given actor on the local scene, such as a visiting «development worker» or civil servant in his spare time (see Edja, 2000), without entering brokerage as a career, even on a temporary basis. This brokerage activity «by the way» is usually inserted in collective brokerage frameworks, and can be encountered in two guises: the «broker's club» or the «brokerage chain».

The brokers' club or the fact that brokerage function is assumed collectively by several actors in symbiosis is a prevalent social formula, possibly due to the fact that donors have a strong preference for groups and associations. Three institutional forms are particularly frequent: the national NGO (see Tidjani Alou, 2000 on Timidria in Niger); the hometown association or association for village development which it has by now usually become (see Bako-Arifari, 2000; Lavigne-Delville, 2000); and the federation of (village/peasant/producers) associations» (see Blundo, 2000 and Coll, 2000 on Senegal and Mongbo, 2000 on Benin). It is in fact usually the «managing board» of a NGO, an association or a federation which could be called a «brokers' club». Mongbo (2000) speaks in terms of a brokers' «trade union», and even of a «god-fathers' association». But, for collective brokerage to exist in truth and in fact (cf. the frequent cases of phantom boards, with the president as its only member), this association of several actors needs to be really functional. This gives rise to a relative specialisation of the actors in the brokers' club, which could either be a specialisation in terms of tasks (see Mongbo, 2000 on Gliten and his two «hunting dogs», e.g. the proposal specialists, and the two actors who guarantee the projects' acceptance in the village; or in terms of donors (see Kossi, 2000 for the case of Enouli the 1st) or according to the type of project. Those actors who have contacts on the outside (state, NGO, embassies) occupy strategic positions and usually emerge as club «leaders» (see Mongbo, 2000; Edja, 2000).

Another formula, of a more vertical type, is the brokerage chain (cf. Edja, 2000), in which the local broker networks with other actors situated in contiguity (at the district level, for example, whether state agents or NGO representatives). This connection is liable to extend a long way, and might progress from a Malian «village leader» to the headquarters of a multinational NGO like CARE in Atlanta or from a European charismatic community to the president of a 6S group in Burkina Faso. The brokerage chain, in which the function of broker is integrated in a regional, national or international network, reveals that patron-client relation-

ships are not the privilege of aid beneficiaries but can be easily observed within and among development operators and institutions.

However, brokerage is a highly competitive universe, which confines complementarity within certain limits. An apparently recurrent type of instability is connected to a specific dynamic of brokerage expansion on the local scene: the broker who intends to increase his «portfolio» of peasant groups is forced, at a certain point, to work with assistant and subordinate brokers. In other words, he must get involved in the initial stages of a connection (see Coll, 2000). This incurs the not insignificant risk of seeing the brokers under his control break loose in order to work on their own, or against him. Another possible configuration consists of strategic alliances among local brokers, involving a mixture of collaboration and competition (see Le Meur, 2000).

Brokers in the local political arena

Obviously, the broker is not situated in an amorphous social milieu. He intervenes, as mentioned above, in local political fields the structures of which are currently recomposed under the impact of new forms of decentralised aid. But this does not result in the abolition of pre-existing centres of power. In the context of the new aid conditions, linked to the erosion of state legitimacy at the local level and to the reinforcement of the autonomy of local political arenas, brokers and the supra-national institutions they supervise become particularly important. Brokerage contributes to this process of recomposition, and the broker contributes, in his own interest, to the fragmentation of power in the village. The associations and supra-national organisations to which he is affiliated or which emerge as «collective brokers», have unprecedented powers of negotiation in the context of the local political field.

Brokers are thus able to bring about a relative modification of the local balance of political power, by creating a bias to their advantage or by provoking hostility. At any rate, the broker has to take existing local power centres into consideration. The corresponding strategies of the broker could usefully be grouped into four types.

Strategies of anchorage in the village

Being more or less of an outsider in the local political game, because he is young (a social junior) or because he has travelled, the broker can use the resources he brings to the village to develop a patron-client network there which allows him to gain social status and recognition in the local arena (see Le Meur, 2000). In a variant of this strategy, certain brokers use the capture of development aid as a means for gaining monopoly control of legitimate develop-

ment, thus opening the path for the creation of a specific patron-client system (see Lavigne-Delville, 2000).

Strategies of enhancing village power

Diametrically opposed to this choice, there is the strategy of «traditional» local notables, locally well integrated, who use brokerage to increase their audience and their capacity for action. Because they do not have the necessary competences, or not enough, they are obliged to operate through a brokers' club which they sometimes bring into existence or even direct (see Blundo, 2000; Edja, 2000).

Strategies of neutralisation

Some brokers, though originating in the village, have become outsiders to local political games thanks to the position they have acquired, and have no obvious political ambitions on the local level; the stakes they aim at are situated elsewhere. However, to succeed as brokers they either have to ally themselves with the political actors of the village and/or neutralize potentially hostile local forces. Those who preside over hometown associations of migrants in France or in the capital city (see Kossi, 2000 for Togo) often find themselves in this situation. They frequently come up against suspicion or even hostility on the part of elders or «traditional» aristocrats back home, who they must «inveigle» either through actions which the latter approve (such as the construction of mosques in Pulaar and Soninke regions, as described Lavigne-Delville, 2000) or through continuous signs of respect and attribution of «honorific» positions in village development associations (see Kossi, 2000). Though neutralisation is possibly a cover-up for strategies of anchorage and could well be the first step on the way to becoming a local notable, it often serves as a means of bringing about a peaceful cohabitation between «people in power» and «people in development» at the village level. Those who hold a dominant position in one field agree to be a marginal figure in the other, and vice versa. Tacit consensus thus removes, if only for the time being, potential obstacles which could impede brokerage activity.

Strategies of regional anchorage

This represents another level of action. In the context of the regionalist logic of politics (see Bako-Arifari, 1995), brokerage may be advanced to the regional level (thus mobilizing relatively important investments) in the aim of obtaining or increasing a personal or electoral clientele (see the portrait of N'Diaye in Bako-Arifari, 2000). Development brokerage is in this

case just one of the strings being pulled by the politician, the dividends of which could be added to resources captured from the state for the creation of infrastructure, for example, (these resources being limited, and constantly on the decline, development brokerage tends to become increasingly important).

Straddling

Over and beyond the strategies mentioned above, brokerage and politics tend to entertain a wide range of «selective affinities»: brokerage implies the recourse to political means in order to force acceptance or to eliminate possible hostility (as we have observed, experience as an activist is an asset for the future broker) and political activity generate the recourse to brokerage as a means of proving one's influence (as in the case of certain notables). These affinities exist owing to the fact that the political notable, like the broker, is also mediator. But this does not preclude competition. Brokerage and politics straddle each other. Blundo (2000) gives a detailed description of this situation in Senegal and draws up a list of similarities and differences between local political elites and development brokers (see also Coll, 2000 and Le Meur, 2000).

Consequently, struggles for influence, complex patron-client networks and alliances are to be found at the heart of these two functions. The public interest («the welfare of the village») is the basic standard of legitimacy. All parties concerned play on collective identity, when it is not a matter of creating it and putting it centre stage. They thus evolve into «identity entrepreneurs», albeit under various forms. In some cases, straddling is used by a single actor, a notable or a broker, who cumulates a position in the financing of development project with political responsibilities. In other cases, straddling leads to a confrontation between brokers and local political authorities – when strategies of neutralisation fail, or when one party trespasses on the grounds of the other, or when consensus is interrupted in the presence of an important stake. But in any case, the diversification of the sources of influence and power and the increase in the number of parties generated by aid decentralisation encourages the straddling of politics and brokerage, and, consequently, struggles for influences and the search for new compromises.

The incessant processes of negotiation arising from development brokerage are made even more complex by the existence of other forms of mediation entertaining the same type of relationship based on affinity/rivalry with brokerage as observed in political mediation.

Development brokerage and other forms of intermediation

In fact, there is no clear line separating brokerage from other forms of mediation. The characteristic specific to brokerage (draining off a portion of the «development rent» in the direction off one's village or region) is sometimes superposed with or indistinguishable from other forms of capture and/or transfer of other types of rent. Moreover, development brokerage makes use of other social networks of mediation already in existence. Finally, we could also mention the specific position of project agents, which is often underscored in case studies, and which is of particular importance to the current situation of development brokerage.

Development and other forms of rent

We have already seen the case of the local political leader (village chief or mayor), whose usual function (among others) is to ensure the link between the state and the population. We have also observed that at a certain level of celebrity or a certain level of control of networks in the high spheres of administration, local political leaders are liable to capture certain state resources (the construction of a school, the choice of a regional «capital», etc.). But there are other actors capable of doing the same: *prefets*, for example, or even agricultural technicians or extension agents (cf. the example of CADRERS in Benin under Kérékou, in Mongbo, 1995; Bako-Arifari, 1995). Similarly, the draining-off of the «migration rent» (remittances of Malian migrants residing in France sent to their home villages) sets off phenomena which bear a close resemblance to development brokerage (see Lavigne-Delville, 2000). The appropriation and use of the cotton rent (partially collectivised in the form of a «collective refund» to the producer's association) also bears some resemblance to development brokerage (cf. the financing of the Bankora/ACOODER rural development co-operative in Benin: Bako-Arifari, 1999).

Three other types of rent (in the broad sense of the word) cut across rural Africa (and across African towns, to a certain extent), producing results comparable, in some ways, to those arising from development, with which they come into contact. As in this latter case, to capture these rents one has to turn to intermediaries. The development rent aside, these rents include migration rent, state rent and the cotton rent.

Brokerage and pre-existing social mediation networks

Interface positions in the village are not only exploited to capture rents. Many other interface positions exist between the village and the outside world: religious leaders (priests or imams, catechists or prophets, pastors or deacons ...), civil servants posted in the village (school

teachers, nurses, extension agents ...), merchants, political activists, people from the village who have succeeded, retired persons who have resettled, migrants who have remained in contact, young drop-outs in charge of certain functions in local co-operatives, professional agricultural groups, etc. Each of these positions usually has a double network of relationships, one in the village and one outside. Each person occupying a position at the interface is liable to activate this double network, either occasionally or on a more permanent basis. Interfaces constitute a type of relational infrastructure on which potential, temporary or regular brokers can depend. As is well known, an existing network might be used to convey other social, symbolic, political, or material resources than those it was meant to convey. Development brokerage networks are no exceptions to the rule and can either use existing networks or create new ones. For example, the importance of religious networks in development brokerage has already been underlined (Long, 1968; Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 1998b; Laurent, 1997).

The typical case of the project agent

But there are certain professional intermediaries who have particularly strategic links with local development brokerage. This has been illustrated time and again in the fieldwork on which this paper is based. We are referring to rural project agents and other project workers. Theirs is a profession exercised at the interface par excellence.¹² They are supposed to diffuse («vulgarise») technical knowledge originating from the outside in the direction of the local populations and to sustain (or promote) local dynamics. Employed by «projects» situated in town and directly dependent on foreign donors, they live in the village (in which they were born, in some cases). There is a pinch of brokerage, so to speak, involved in this profession. Some agents go even further, and either become involved in brokers' clubs or networks or become full-time brokers, who, in their new function, make use of the know-how and network of relations they had acquired as project agents (see Edja, 2000; Coll, 2000). In these days of participatory development, a paid project agent, commonly known as a «community» agent, is almost sure to be a promoter of local collective structures, regarded as essential to «self-development». Even though the «promoter» of a peasant organisation is not necessarily a broker (see Neubert, 2000; Sodeik, 2000), many of them are or become brokers, in deed if not in words. In this respect, the relationship between project agents and the «peasant leader», seen against the backdrop of brokerage, is indeed a strategic one.

¹² Cf. Olivier de Sardan & Paquot, 1989; Koné, 1994; Lühe, 1996.

The unequal distribution of brokerage in West Africa

Development brokerage is not usually aimed at as a career. This is due to the fact that it can only occur when mediation between the «world of development» and local arenas is made possible or fostered by a certain economic, social and political climate. As Sodeik (2000) points out, there are pre-conditions for the emergence and «facilitation» of brokerage. These conditions being unequally filled from one country to another as well as from period to another, brokerage does not assume the same importance in all countries at all times. Senegal is, for example, the typical paradise for NGOs and decentralised aid (see Blundo, 2000; Coll, 2000), especially when we aid capture to the migration rent coming from abroad (Lavigne-Delville, 2000). This also applies to Burkina Faso, where the abundance of aid to local projects has led to the creation of a structure in charge of aid co-ordination within the central administration, or to Eastern Africa (see Neubert, 2000) and perhaps to the majority of English-speaking African countries, which seem to have arrived earlier than French-speaking countries on the scene of development brokerage (Bratton, 1990). Conversely, there are other countries which do not have comparable circuits of aid diffusion in which to «plug» brokerage activities. This is the case of Benin (before 1989, see Bako-Arifari, 2000; Edja, 2000; Mongbo, 2000; Sodeik, 2000), not to mention Niger (Tidjani Alou, 2000), at least up until recently.

Besides, the conditions of development brokerage also vary from one region to another in a given country. Conditions are not the same in the peanut-producing basin and in far-off emigration zones in Senegal (Blundo, 2000; Lavigne-Delville, 2000), they also differ between the south and the north of Benin, depending on the existence or non-existence of other forms of rent with which development aid can be combined (pineapples in the South, see Le Meur, 2000; cotton in the North, see Edja, 2000). The lack of a significant economic stake constitutes, according to Sodeik (2000), one of the main reasons behind the absence of brokers in a region on Northern Benin, despite the fact that «potential» brokers do exist. But there exist other types of resources which are not directly productive but which could be mobilized in neighbouring zones in North-Benin (Bako-Arifari, 2000).

Lastly, the distribution of brokerage varies considerably in terms of time, due, in particular, to the recomposition of the national political landscape. The process of democratisation and the advent of multi-party politics have in some cases set off brokerage in countries under formerly authoritarian regimes (Togo, cf. Kossi, 2000; Benin, see Bako-Arifari, 2000; Le Meur, 2000; Mongbo, 2000; Sodeik, 2000; Edja, 2000; Niger, cf. Tidjani Alou, 2000).

However, in certain countries like Benin, recent forms of brokerage, viewed retrospectively, are thriving on pre-existing hometown associational networks and on the opening-up of the local political game which was already promoted by the former regime (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 1998a, 1998b).

Hence, national and regional conditions of brokerage are extremely diverse and subject to variation. We have not been able to establish, on the basis of the case studies carried out by our research programme, any clear correlations between the conditions of the economic, social and political environment and the emergence and diffusion of brokerage. Besides, the fact that our case studies were carried out in a limited number of countries (a large number of them in Benin and, to a lesser extent, Senegal), with a very heavy concentration in French-Speaking West Africa, does not allow for a sufficient identification of the parameters governing the unequal distribution of brokerage in Africa. However, we could attempt an identification of the main parameters, as long as we do not try to establish mechanical determinisms between the process of brokerage and the conditions in which it occurs, seeing that the individual or collective broker also contributes to creating the conditions for brokerage, by his activities in intermediation or through the communication he/they establish, even when conditions happen to be unfavourable at the outset (see Kossi, 2000; Tidjani Alou, 2000).

Economic metaphors like the brokerage «market», brokerage «supply» and «demand» and «encounter» are useful in describing the conditions of this unequal distribution, on the condition that we keep in mind that supply and demand are social constructs and constructed meanings. We might say that brokerage supply, e.g., the amount of flows, the conditionalities attached to them, and their accessibility by local actors (see Sodeik, 2000) as well as brokerage demand, that is the predisposition in local actors to seek external resources, and the existence of certain intermediaries disposed, at least potentially, to take on these functions, are subjected to a whole range of influences variable over time. The same could be said of the conditions of their encounter, that is of the type of mediations brokers set into motion. As mentioned above, these are liable to be associated in unequal parts with other rents (migratory, state, agricultural), but also with certain administrative practices or different types of political regimes.

As far as brokerage supply is concerned, the development apparatus varies considerably from one country to another. English-speaking African countries, for example, benefited from non-governmental aid and organisations, in particularly that related to Christian charity (Long, 1968; Moore, 1996), at an earlier date than French-speaking countries (Bratton, 1990).

They also benefited from a greater degree of decentralisation, even in the case of authoritarian regimes (Barkan *et al*, 1991; Lucas, 1994). Some countries are better than others at capturing decentralised aid flows. We have already mentioned the case of Senegal and Burkina Faso. In cases like this, the decentralised aid supply generates brokerage. The question is whether the abundance of supply is necessarily a decisive factor determining the emergence of brokers. The demand for brokerage can also create the supply of decentralised aid, as demonstrated by Kossi (2000) for Togo, Mongbo (2000) for Benin and Lavigne-Delville (2000) for Senegal. In this case of demand creating supply, classic circuits of development aid controlled by government agencies usually usually serve during the initial stages of the brokerage process.

As far as the demand for brokerage is concerned, the question is whether or not it is possible to identify across countries, regions and local societies, particular predispositions for the search for external resources and the emergence of intermediaries. It would certainly be not prudent to look for cultural affinities with brokerage. In fact, some of our field cases (see in particular Le Meur, 2000; Lavigne-Delville, 2000; Blundo, 2000; Edja, 2000) stress the importance of the processes of upward social mobility as the context in which brokers emerge, or at least the strategies of reinforcing the local anchorage of their own positions. This would support Barkan's hypothesis (Barkan *et al*, 1991) according to which associative action, of which brokerage is an example, requires a relatively fluid social structure. However, research by Coll (2000), Blundo (2000) and Lavigne-Delville (2000) has shown that brokerage can also thrive in societies which are very hierarchical, without being necessarily monopolised by groups of high social status. For example, Tidjani Alou (2000) shows that in Niger brokerage arises from the mobilization of traditionally dominated groups (black Touaregs).

Hence, the variables presiding over the distribution of brokerage should rather be looked for in the contexts under which supply and demand of brokerage encounter each other, and not elsewhere. It is these situations (or changes in situation), as opposed to the socio-cultural characteristics of local societies or the quantity of aid flows, that explain the extension of brokerage in a given country or region at a given point (even if, these other, socio-cultural elements, must also be taken into consideration). This could be an economic crisis which a local society experiences, a deterioration of the conditions of agricultural production, political marginalisation (see Kossi, 2000; Mongbo, 2000) or, frequently, changes in the modes of political regulation between local societies and the state. In particular, the intervention of the state and its agents, in an attempt at gaining the support of local political and eco-

conomic elites, far from being an impediment to brokerage, is liable to promote it (see Bako-Arifari, 2000 for Benin; Barkan *et al*, 1991 and Lucas, 1994, for Nigeria; Woods, 1994 for Côte d'Ivoire; Geschiere & Gugler, 1998 from a more general perspective). In fact, this seems to us to be the «overdetermining» element in the emergence and consolidation of brokerage: the local anchorage of the state and the process of its construction through the regulation of competition among its elites. This accounts for the phenomenon of «straddling» between the function of broker and other socio-political roles, and between aid brokerage and strategies aimed at «capturing» rent either from the state, from migration or from (cotton) rebates.

In this light, it is important to accord special attention to the decentralisation reforms currently under way in (French-speaking) Africa, following upon the Senegalese experience which has already become history and which is quite enlightening in this regard (see Blundo, 2000), and upon the even more dated practice of decentralisation in most English-speaking countries (Barkan *et al*, 1991). These reforms simultaneously enhance the importance of development brokerage and modify its practice. Town and regional partnerships (twinning) and so-called decentralised co-operation (spearheaded by local communities in the North) are no doubt the first fruits of this process. At the level of average-sized and small towns in Africa, and in rural areas as well, local elected representatives will be faced with the challenge of becoming more enterprising, or, in other words, of becoming development brokers. Rather than observing, as has so far often been the case, a certain form of complementarity and at times of rivalry between «traditional» notables and development brokers, political and brokerage functions might well have to be increasingly combined (see Bako-Arifari, 2000 for the personage of N'Diaye in Benin, who thus becomes a model destined to be reproduced and integrated locally).

For want of a decisive conclusion on the parameters underlying the unequal distribution of brokerage in Africa, we are left with the following points which we wish to underline. The first point to be taken into consideration in an anthropological analysis of this phenomenon concerns economic (and quantitative) factors liable to provide a better orientation for fieldwork by putting it in relation to general aid conditions. The second point is the need for a more systematic recourse to comparative research which would allow for a better evaluation of the role played by the various parameters discussed above. Nevertheless, despite the risk of repetition, we need to remain extremely cautious in the face of the temptation to establish automatic relationships of cause and effect between the process of brokerage and the attendant socio-economic conditions. The relevant question is how does the individual or collec-

tive broker contribute to creating the conditions of brokerage through his activity of intermediation and his mobilization of communication networks, and how does he, as a result, exert influence, in turn, on the environment?

Conclusion

Obviously, this paper, and the research programme from which it is derived, lays no claim to having provided an exhaustive treatment of national situations, of all aspects of aid or of the various levels of analysis of social change. Hence, as mentioned above, the absence of case studies on certain French-speaking countries (like Côte d'Ivoire or Burkina Faso) and even more so on English-speaking African countries is an obvious deficiency to our comparative ambitions. We could also mention the absence of case studies on urban areas, notwithstanding the fact that a quick perusal of the literature available comforts our opinion that the overall logics of the configuration as a whole, as it emerges from our observation, would probably stand up to the test of research in urban areas as well. Moreover, our emphasis on the project form of aid is guided by the fact that the local impact is easily observed, while the effects of more global policies («structural adjustment», budget aid, programme aid can only be observed as a background. Besides, there is still a lot to be done in terms of increasing documentation and studies on the effects of new forms of aid on systems of production and systems of exchange. Another original extension of this analysis would be to take the entire brokerage network into consideration and to include its outgrowths in countries and organisations in the North.

This could result in a broader base of comparison, by also taking the diversity of development aid «sub-cultures» observable in regions and continents other than Africa into consideration. Are the well-established practices of NGO activism in Latin America (Koschützke, 1994; Deler *et al.*, 1998), or the political context peculiar to brokerage enterprises in Asia (Ockey, 1992; Nelson, 1994) liable to modify the analyses presented in this paper or are they liable to highlight other particularities of the situation in Africa? Do the lobbying activities observed in industrialized societies prefigure the future of development brokers in Africa, exemplified by the pressure exerted by African organisations for the defence of artisan fishery on certain European Community institutions (Chauveau & Samba, 1999)?

Despite these obvious shortcomings of our research programme, our case studies of brokerage allow us to analyse long-term trends in African societies and in particular the processes of nation-building. An empirical study of development brokers leads us therefore to a

broader reflection on the relationships between African states, local modes of governance, and intermediary and associative organisations, in which development brokers are actors of great importance. By following their emergence, the trajectories and the strategies of brokers, our case studies show that the seemingly bounded entities of the state (at both the local and central levels), of «civil society» and of formal local political organisations are in reality traversed by networks, are overlapping and are marked by phenomena of alliance and rivalry, which renders these «bounded» categories less efficient as means of understanding the nature of the changes under way.

It would therefore be highly misleading to interpret development brokerage as a praise-worthy initiative of members of the «civil society», in their stand against «bad governance» and the monopoly of the state apparatus over external aid. The new modalities of development aid do not constitute a total break with the existing relationships between the state and local authorities. They rather integrate pre-existing configurations and reinforce their tendencies. It is not aid decentralisation which has caused the withdrawal of the state. However, it has served to further weaken the state's control over the relationships between villages and the outside world. Indeed, it has encouraged the loss of legitimacy by the state, increased the autonomy of local political arenas, contributed to the fragmentation of power at the village level to the advantage of new brokers, and lastly, it has conferred on associations and supra-local organisations unprecedented resources and competences of negotiation in the local and national field of politics.

The results of empirical studies encourage us to keep in mind the structural ambivalence of the relationships between the «civil society» and the state, on one hand, and local power configurations, on the other. They pinpoint the fact that civil servants and intellectuals, who make up the administrative and political elites of the state, are more active than ever, directly or through associations, in brokerage, and that this activity is for them a source of increased legitimacy, both within state apparatus and in political arenas at the village and regional levels. Reciprocally, development brokerage constitutes a political launching pad, on the local and sometimes even the national level, for new notables. Moreover, there is no proof that the state and its local agents are incapable of renegotiating and recuperating in the field a part of the legitimacy lost on paper, as suggested by several studies on decentralisation (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 1998b) – especially since, in recent years, donors have introduced certain nuances into the doctrine of systematic withdrawals of the state.

Despite the fact that the emergence of development brokers increases the difficulties encountered by the state in its efforts to gain effective footing in local arenas which are more independent than ever before, this phenomenon also is a new element in the complex configuration of relationships between different levels of public policies. The new methods used to capture the development rent introduce a certain amount of confusion in the definition of classic social categories (state agents, development agents, local authorities, leaders of associations, NGO co-ordinators, school drop-outs and other locals who, having failed in town, have moved back to their villages, etc.). In other words, brokerage does not only allow us to «read» these social and political recompositions, it is also a material factor which contributes actively to them.

Of course, it is difficult to determine *a priori*, without studying the matter case by case, the impact of the emergence of development brokerage on the relationship between the state and its agents, between classic centres of local authority and the new intermediary organisations based on brokerage. But it would appear, as far as these new organisations and brokers in development are concerned, that it is not only a matter of bringing projects to the village. For these new actors, it is also a question of defending «community» interests in national spaces, despite centrifugal influences which sometimes arise, and despite the fact that development brokerage allows some to cumulate a position in the classic bureaucratic and administrative apparatus and with a position of responsibility in local associations and networks. Development brokers are thus in a position to mediate between and straddle two fields: The first is the developmentalist apparatus. Brokers and brokerage associations constitute a kind of additional local development lobby (even though the local anchorage of the development aid apparatus which it generates does not necessarily lead to an increased «participation» of all of the categories which comprise the population). The second is the field of «connection» between the urban and rural milieus (Geschiere & Gugler, 1998). Seen in this light, development brokerage could be factor in reducing the cleavage between urban «citizens» and rural «subjects» (Mamdani, 1996).

Though the situations are far apart, could we not venture to say that that schoolteachers and notables of the second half of the 20th century in Africa may play role of promoters and modernizers assumed by this social category in rural France at the end of the 19th century (Weber, 1976). In view of their differences in origin and trajectory, will African development brokers become the promoters of new historical compromises which will orientate, if only partially, political and social changes in Africa during the 21st century?

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