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The politics of Development:

Anthropological perspectives

Jeremy Gould & Eija Ranta

1. Introduction

This chapter explores the *topoi* and trends of anthropological engagements with development as an expression of broader efforts at the decolonization of anthropology. From its function as a translator, broker and facilitator of the modernization projects that emerged from the breakup of the world colonial system, anthropology has consistently struggled with its role as a trustee of a ‘global liberal project’ (see Young 1995). Against this backdrop, we examine the relationship of anthropology to the politics of development through the prism of a long-term process – incomplete and perhaps ultimately unsuccessful – of disassociating anthropology from the (post)colonial project of domination through improvement.

The relationship of anthropology (a field of knowledge production) with development (an assemblage of social engineering technologies) has historically been fraught and yet the two have always been, as American anthropologist James Ferguson (1997: 170) insists, ‘intimately intertwined.’¹ Debates have raged over the importance of harnessing anthropological skills and insights to make development more effective or ‘people-centred’, as well over the need for anthropologists to speak out against indignities or exploitative practices incurred through the practices of development. It has often been assumed that long-term fieldwork makes anthropologists sensitive to people’s needs and knowledge through which ‘anthropology illuminates those aspects of development which other disciplines ignore’ (Grillo 1997: 5). Scholars have argued about the constitutive role of development (and its colonial precursors) in the evolution of anthropological knowledge production (and vice versa); others have made far-reaching claims for the ability of anthropology to render transparent the ways that development agents and organizations work and think (Eyben 2000;

¹ A number of careful and systematic surveys of the relationship between anthropology and development have been published over the years including those by Hoben (1982), Escobar (1991), Lewis (2005) and Edelman & Haugerud (2007). While we have made extensive use of these reviews, it is not our intention to replicate the useful and interesting arguments they have put forth.

2008). The intimacy of anthropology's relationship to development is not, then, intrinsically cosy. Indeed, Ferguson (ibid.) once characterized development as anthropology's 'evil twin.'

Partly this uneasiness between anthropology and development could be explained by a very strong preconception of what anthropology was supposed to study: it has been 'driven by the appeal of the small, the simple, the elementary, the face-to-face' (Appadurai 1986: 357).

While the political economy school of anthropology has focused on states and capitalist world-systems, it has largely been concerned with the response of local communities to external penetration (Ortner 1984: 141–4). Consequently, it has been the academic slot of political scientists and economists to study the institutions of modernity (the state, markets, and so forth), while rural populations, indigenous communities, and ethnic minorities are examined by anthropologists (Sharma and Gupta 2006). Development, in fact, represented a danger to anthropological theory which was built upon 'the description and comparison of societies as little contaminated by development as possible' (Ferguson 1997: 161). Indeed, it was only after the emergence, in the late 1980s, of disbelief in modernization paradigms and universalist development paths that anthropologists actually started to pay critical attention to the study of development as something else than an applied field marginalized by the mainstream (Grillo 1997: 1). Along the way anthropologists took various positions in relation to development (Lewis 2005). At times, anthropologists were 'antagonistic observers', those maintaining critical distance and scepticism towards the idea and practice of development. At other times, they chose the position of 'reluctant participants' within aid agencies and institutions due to practical need for income generation or other outside pressures. A third perspective is that of 'engaged activists', a position from which anthropologists have used knowledge derived from their long engagement with certain groups of people to defend their societal cause. (ibid.: 472.)

This essay seeks to introduce and interrogate such debates and positionalities by scrutinizing the terms and frameworks through which anthropology and development have been brought into contestation during the postcolonial era. We will argue, following a long line of critical scholarship, that their mutual gestation under colonial government cast a long shadow over both anthropology and development.² A key premise of this essay is that the imperial legacy

² Key works in this tradition include Asad (1973; 1991), Escobar (1991; 1995), Stocking (1991), and Stoler (1989) among others, several of which are discussed below.

– above all its epistemic habits established through colonial government – continues to shape the way anthropology and anthropologists participate in the politics of development.

The politics of development

The ‘politics’ referred to in our title has found countless forms of expression: from debates on the floor of the UN General Assembly over global development goals (eg., Ilcan & Phillips 2010) to the ‘hidden transcripts’ and associated forms of ‘peasant resistance’ embedded in top-down developmental interventions (Scott 1990). In this essay, we approach the politics of development via a simple analytic that highlights discursive struggles over the design and definition of developmental *means and ends*. We understand development as a set of means (practices), variable over time and space that are justified in terms of (ambivalent and endlessly shifting) ends – growth, productivity, poverty reduction, good governance, and so on. The presence of anthropologists in real-world fields appropriated by developmental practices puts them in contact with the means of development, above all the project mode of external intervention. In many cases, anthropologists become involved, productively or critically, with these means, without engaging in the discursive practices that produce the ends that justify them. At other times, often marked by critical junctures of geopolitics or economic upheaval, anthropologists can get intensely engaged in debates about the purported ends of development. In both instances, developmental practice has responded to anthropological engagements, and the ways that developmental means are reformed or altered has, in turn, affected the conditions under which anthropologists confront development. As we shall show, these struggles, and their repercussions for development, have been documented with increasing precision over the past several decades. Less well studied are the implications of these struggles for anthropology itself. We return to this issue in the concluding section of this essay.

In order to make this undertaking even remotely manageable, we must delimit our field of scrutiny. The most important of these delimitations concerns how we understand ‘development.’ Development is an intrinsically complex term that entails multiple meanings. Quarles van Ufford et al. (2003), for example, have provided a tripartite definition of development. According to them, development can be characterized as ‘hope’, a horizon of a better future; as ‘politics/administration’, that is, system of agencies and techniques of aid; and as ‘critical understanding’, in which development stands as a site of knowledge about the

world. There are tensions and disjuncture between these different dimensions. (ibid.: 18.) The perspective adopted here is more specific, drawing on a distinction formulated by Cowen and Shenton (1996) between immanent and intentional forms of development. Immanent development was taken to be ‘a natural process in which phases of renewal, expansion, contraction and decomposition followed each other sequentially according to a perpetually recurrent cycle’ (ibid.: viii). Intentional development, in contrast, is seen, not as an unfolding of ‘nature’ but as deliberate human efforts to bring about a certain kind of change. Thus the first notion, traceable to Enlightenment thought and 19th century liberalism (ibid.), refers to large-scale historical processes, particularly under capitalism, while the latter is pertinent to the post-WWII development aid apparatus. Gillian Hart (2001) has subsequently glossed this distinction as a contrast between ‘small d’ (immanent) vs. ‘big D’ (intentional) development.

For the purposes of this essay, we will be focusing on the politics of intentional, big D development. From this vantage point, the politics of development thus reveals itself as contestations over the ends and means of deliberate efforts to engineer new forms of social institutions, attitudes, and behaviour, often under the auspices of a ‘project’ dedicated to the introduction of new or modified technologies of economic, political and social life. Thus, while it has become increasingly popular over the past decade among anthropologists to explore global institutions and structures (e.g., Appadurai 1996; Burawoy 2001; Comaroff & Comaroff 2001; Hart 2002; Tsing 2005), and engage with the epochal shift often characterized as the Anthropocene (see Sayre 2012), we will not engage here with these trends.³

In a much-cited chronology, Wolfgang Sachs (1992) dates the genesis of Development to Harry Truman’s inaugural address in 1949, which impelled the economic and moral rationale of Western nations to provide financial assistance and technological transfers to ‘underdeveloped areas.’⁴ Ever since, development has been intimately linked with the idea of modernization and economic growth (Lewis 2005: 472). For our purposes, Development has an older pedigree, rooted deeply in practices of colonial government. In our understanding, closely aligned with that of Tania Li’s formulation (2007), which for its part draws on the

³ While we are both trained anthropologists, we have worked above all in an interdisciplinary development studies environment. This is clearly reflected in our choice of writers and debates.

⁴ Edelman and Haugerud (2005: 53) suggest that Truman’s speech can be traced back to the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference in which international financial institutions (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) were established in order to assist nation-states in their growth-oriented national economic planning. These plans were strongly influenced by the ideas of the British economist John Maynard Keynes.

thought of Michel Foucault (e.g., 1991), the roots of the relationship between anthropology and development must be traced to the initial will of colonial administrators and missionaries to ‘improve’ colonial subjects.

This is not to suggest that ‘improvement’ was the sole, or even central aim of colonial rule. Quite the contrary; European imperialism and its modalities of colonial domination were put in place above all to expedite economic exploitation for the benefit of Empire of ‘native’ populations and the lands (and mineral wealth) they populated. And yet, it is also true that colonialism was a vehicle and expression of European ‘imperial liberalism’ (Pitts 2005; see also Mehta 1999). Colonial rule was justified to European constituencies, in large part, as an exercise in Christian compassion and civilizational duty (*ibid.*; cf. Arendt 1968). On the other hand, the exploitation of unwilling, indeed hostile populations demanded deliberate techniques and measures to enhance their capacity to participate in the economic projects of colonial exploitation, be these plantation agriculture or extractive industries. Some of these colonial techniques were implemented in the name of local self-governing practices and cultural traditions (Li 2007); others were direct and brutal. Such forms of ‘improvement’ were neither benign nor compassionate and were universally met with outrage and resistance by their ‘beneficiaries.’ Such hostility was commonly dealt with through coercive means, but occasionally – and with increasing frequency as imperial rule approached its late stages – colonial administrators sought to draw upon anthropological expertise and insights to design governmental means that might pre-empt or temper local resistance.

Often, the anthropological skills drawn upon by colonial governors were quasi-professional at best (e.g., Kuklick 1978; Stocking 1991). Many colonial administrators sought to learn local languages and document indigenous systems of knowledge and cultural practice in order to improve their governmental skills; very few had any anthropological training. But by the middle of the 20th century, anthropologists had become part and parcel of the colonial enterprise, and commissioned projects of anthropological inquiry, as well as dedicated research centres – like the famous Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in colonial Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) manifested the integral role that anthropological knowledge production played in colonial government (Shumaker 2001; Ferguson 1997: 159–61). Such professional engagements reflected the dictates of two high doyens of British social anthropology, who had called for anthropology to be both ‘applied’ (Evans-Pritchard 1946) and ‘practical’ (Malinowski 1929) and thus ‘of the highest importance to the practical man in the colonies’ (*ibid.*: 36).

The entanglement of anthropology with colonial government is widely acknowledged and yet the relationship defies a simple definition. The 1960s and 1970s saw considerable moral outrage over anthropology's complicity in colonial exploitation (Asad 1973; Gough 1968; Hymes 1972; Lewis 1973; Stocking 1991). Due to its ties to colonial governance, the discipline was called the 'daughter' of imperialist violence that 'made the larger part of the mankind subservient to the other' (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 126). And yet, this is only a partial truth. Indeed, Talal Asad (1991: 315), a pioneer critic of colonial anthropology, notes that 'the role of anthropologists in maintaining structures of imperial domination has, despite slogans to the contrary, usually been trivial.' Asad hastens to add, however, that despite this, 'the reverse proposition does not hold.' Indeed, the institutions of colonialism, like those of Development they prefigured, have been pivotal to the evolution of the epistemic habits of practicing anthropologists. This is reflected in the fact that anthropology's formative canon of ethnographic fieldwork was facilitated, and often funded, by European colonial powers. By the same token, there are few anthropologists who have not been affected in greater or lesser ways by elements of the development apparatus in their field sites. But even more crucial, and less variable, than these material underpinnings is the fact that 'European power, as discourse and practice, was always part of the reality anthropologists sought to understand, and of the way they sought to understand it' (ibid.).

Anthropologists have from the get-go embodied ambivalent and often suppressed feelings about Western efforts to improve subject populations, be these rationalized by reference to salvation, order, progress, modernity or development. It is nevertheless safe to say that postcolonial development-as-modernization is, if not necessarily a malicious sibling, at the very least an inescapable fact of nearly any anthropological endeavour.

The means and ends of development

Politics, in Giorgio Agamben's (2000: 60) well-known epithet is 'the sphere of pure means.' This is also true of development. Development as a form of intentional social engineering manifests itself above all as instrumental practices of intervention and government in the name of 'improvement.' And yet, these means cannot and do not take place irrespective of the rhetorical ends they are meant to serve. The politics of development – contestations over the design, scope and timing of interventionary practices and their effects – might thus be said to manifest a version of what Annelise Riles has termed 'means-ends reversals.' Writing

about the inter-relations of anthropological and legal approaches to property, Riles (2004: 789) observes: ‘Like partners on a see-saw, anthropologists and lawyers are operating the same device in countervailing, albeit mutually enabling, ways. At each stage, the appropriations of the ends of one disciplinary knowledge as the means of the other consist in practices of reversal.’

For most of the post-colonial era, we suggest, development professionals and anthropologists have operated a similar see-saw device. Critical anthropological commentary has persistently appropriated developmental ends in order to legitimize anthropology’s own epistemic means. Failures to achieve professed developmental ends of prefigured technological projects or fixed-term social experiments are scrutinized in order to valorise anthropology’s own means – above all, an ethnographic propensity for open-ended, richly contextualized engagement. Developers, for their part, have responded to these criticisms by appropriating the normative ends implied in anthropological critique – i.e., inclusivity, pluralism, justice – as reconstituted developmental means. These ‘new’ means have found expression in developmental discourses and practices of participation, ownership, rights and sustainability. In this way, anthropological interpolations in the politics of development have tended to engender mutually enabling cycles of critique and reform. Escobar’s (1991: 660) remarks, formulated a quarter of a century ago, continue to resonate today: ‘[d]evelopment anthropology, as it is currently practiced, is largely determined and constrained by views of development and anthropology that conform closely to mainstream models in both fields.’

The cyclical vacillation implied in the trope of a see-saw device can only be maintained, then, as long as developers and anthropologists recognize the legitimacy of one another’s practices. Developers can only appropriate the normative ends implied in anthropological critique insofar as these ends can be rendered as developmental – as compatible, in other words, with the bio-political aim of improvement. Similarly, the anthropological assessment of an intervention’s means implies that these means are assumed to be linked, in ways accessible to rational assessment, to enhanced well-being of anthropology’s subjects of study, or similar ‘humane’, liberal ends. In other words, for a mutually enabling see-saw choreography to be sustained, anthropologists and developers alike must entertain the premise of improvability through the liberal-rational means at the disposal of the development apparatus. To paraphrase Riles (*ibid.*: 789), ‘it is this means-ends reversal that constitutes the disciplinary difference [between anthropology and development] and hence sets the epistemological boundaries’ for an anthropology of development.

As we will attempt to show in what follows, certain anthropological perspectives on the politics of development appear to have finally breached the epistemic boundaries defined by the the premise of improbability. This epistemic border-crossing began with the introduction, towards the end of the Cold War, of the notion of post-development. More recently, post-developmental discourse has made significant headway in its struggles to detach itself from the rational-liberal frame of development rooted in colonial modalities of government. This move, inspired by Deleuzian visions of alternative and plural ontologies (about which more below), is not the only attempt to subvert colonial conceptualizations of subject populations from anthropology. At the same time, we can see the emergence of a parallel means-end reversal which seeks to invert the ‘productionist’ ethos that drove colonial exploitation, and which remains at the core of the Development apparatus.

But we are getting ahead of our narrative. In what follows, we discuss the dynamics of the means-end reversals around which the politics of development has conventionally revolved. Through this survey, we seek to demonstrate the rifts and tensions within this relationship which eventually led to the questioning of the see-saw device and the emergence of an epistemic politics within anthropology and kindred fields within which basic premises about the the improbability of subject populations have been questioned.

2. Problematizing the means of development

Given the profound impact of colonial government on anthropology, an ‘anthropology of development’ in the strict sense of the term was relatively slow to emerge in the wake of the unravelling of European colonial empires.⁵ Unsurprisingly, the initial identification of (under)development as a topical problem requiring an instrumental response did not arise in anthropology. The problem of development in the sense adopted here, as Escobar (1991; 1995) succinctly shows, emerged from a dialogue between economists and great power strategists in the post-WWII years. Colonial anthropologists had thought and written about ‘social change’ for many years (Wilson & Wilson 1945; see also Forde 1953), but the most immediate antecedent of postcolonial anthropology of development was the quintessentially American field of ‘applied’ anthropology. The question of Development (as against that of

⁵ The first explicit reference to the anthropology of development’ is Rubin 1961. The first book bearing the phrase in its title – a conference collection – is Brokensha et al. 1969.

‘small d’ social, economic or cultural change) thus entered anthropology in the margins of the discipline (eg., Geertz 1963; Arensberg & Niehoff 1966; Belshaw 1974; cf. Frank 1973) and was driven more by pragmatic than academic concerns (Green 1986: 2; cf. Escobar 1991: 669). During the 1940s and 50s, the Truman administration employed a fair amount of anthropologists in development policy making and foreign assistance programs (Hoben 1982: 351). While applied anthropologists later nearly disappeared, they started to re-emerge in large numbers during the 1970s paradigm shift from economic growth and technological transfers to emphasis on social development, basic needs approach and direct work with the poor (ibid.). Although applied anthropology started to boom outside the academia, the application of anthropology to (under)development continued peripheral to the academic job market, and it is only as development begins to emerge as an independent object of academic scrutiny in the 1980s do we see the consolidation of the ‘anthropology of development’ as an academic sub-field ‘in full regalia’ as Escobar (1991: 662–3) put it.⁶

It is at this point that the anthropology of development begins to articulate an autonomous conceptual-methodological scaffolding. To explore what this implies, and how it relates to the means-end reversal between anthropology and Development, let us zoom in on the work of a prominent school of development anthropology: the actor-oriented approach (AOA) of Manchester-trained anthropologist British Norman Long and his academic entourage.

At the development interface

A core concept for the AOA school was the ‘development interface.’ This idea emerged in the 1980s to provide an analytical characterization of the sociological field within which top-down development interventions played out. As a theoretical construct, its roots were in Weberian sociology with a focus on action, epistemic habits and individual interests. But it also echoed Habermasian concerns with the commoditization of the lifeworld, as well as Bourdieu’s problematization of the social ‘field’ as a game-like site of contestation. Its main proponents were clearly inspired by the turn from ‘structure’ to ‘practice’ in post-1968 social

⁶ It has been noted though that rigid boundaries between practical and academic anthropology were first and foremost descriptive of the US context, while in Europe, multidisciplinary development research institutes have been common and well-recognized especially in Britain, the Netherlands and Scandinavia with established links to both mainstream academic anthropology and development agencies (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 42). Furthermore, in comparison to its European counterparts the USAID has tended to count less on university-based anthropological research than on applied anthropologists in think-tanks and consultancy firms (ibid.).

theory (celebrated in Sherry Ortner's [1984] seminal overview of trends in the anthropological theory of the day), an alignment signalled by Long's profession of AOA as the key to resolving the structuralist 'impasse' (Booth 1985) in development theory.

Long's primary use for the AOA was to interrogate the dynamics of negotiations among different interested parties at a development interface. Within this literature, a development interface referred to a dualist configuration with a local community on one side ('target populations', 'beneficiaries'), and a development agency on the other. This latter signifier could, in different circumstances encompass 'the state' and/or a 'donor agency,' often operating as a sort of state proxy to provide services state were unable or unwilling to provide. 'Development interfaces,' notes Long (2004: 234) 'contain within them many levels and forms of social linkage and discontinuity, as well as a multiplicity of different and potentially conflicting value positions, worldviews and rationalities. It is here – at the interface – that policy is put into action, reshaped or radically transformed.'

The notion of interface was intended to enrich or supplant the mechanical understanding of development as the introduction of a technological innovation with a more nuanced and politicized analytic. Development projects could no longer be seen as orderly, linear processes of technological adoption or adaptation, but were now cast in quasi-military metaphors, as 'arenas' (Crehan & von Oppen 1988) or 'battlefields' (Long & Long 1992). Development projects were seen as sites of normative contestation (evoking American anthropologist Sally Falk Moore's [1978] 'semi-autonomous social fields', with its Bourdieuvian echoes), involving conflicts of knowledge, interests and values. So, while the basic set-up of a development interface juxtaposed 'the state' vs a 'community,' in empirical reality, this social field was assumed to encompass a wide repertoire of interests and strategies, also (and above all) within the population which is the designated target of an intervention.

The AOA literature encompassed a broad body of empirical work extending from southern Africa to Latin America (see Arce 1993; Breusers 1999; Long 1989; Long & Long 1992; Mongbo 1995; also Crehan & von Oppen 1988) and continues to influence development studies (e.g., Beck 2016). AOA implied a focus on the lifeworlds and interlocking 'projects' of actors, and the development of theoretically grounded methods of social research that allowed for the elucidation of social meanings, purposes and powers (Long 1989: 1–10, 221–43). It also required delving more deeply into the social and cultural discontinuities and

ambiguities inherent in the ‘battlefields of knowledge’ that shaped the relations between local actors, development practitioners and researchers (Long & Long 1992).

Long (1967) carried out his original doctoral thesis research under the auspices of the colonial-era Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Zambia (Brown 1973; Werbner 1984; Van Donge 1985; Musambachime 1993; Shumaker 2001). The overall orientation of RLI anthropologists (which included Godfrey Wilson and Max Gluckman (as well as Raymond Apthorpe, who would resurface in the 2000s as an avatar of the anthropology of Aidland; see Apthorpe 2011) evinced little developmentalist ethos, nor much politics for that matter. Rather than embrace the colonial conceit of imperialism’s civilizing mission, the Rhodes-Livingstone scholars saw themselves aligned with colonial subjects in their efforts to endure the indignities of colonial rule (Hooker 1963; Gould 1991).

It was not until Long relocated to Peru, where he carried out commissioned work on the military government’s land reform, that he became focused on development *per se*. It was through this work, and subsequent projects in rural Mexico, that the AOA took shape. Unavoidably, given the political context, this work accepted the fact of externally imposed development interventions as a systemic given. Its innovative character was in its attempt to provide a nuanced account of individual agency within this system.

Indeed, Long’s AOA, which evolved in the 1970s and 1980s, was clearly framed by the postcolonial developmentalism of the Cold War era. The AOA belabours the murkiness and complexity of human action at the development interface, arguing for an approach which deconstructs all manner of dualist presumptions about the nature of roles, relationships and expectations among both interveners and their targets. Increasingly, these analyses evoke political tensions within the interface, evinced by a vocabulary of ‘contestation,’ ‘struggle,’ and ‘resistance.’ But this is not a politics of the strike, the guerrilla skirmish or the ballot-box. Rather, the politics of AOA-inspired development anthropology revolved around tugs-of-war over the epistemic frameworks and managerial procedures of development interventions. This line of research has proved resilient and productive, and several strands in contemporary development anthropology can be traced back to the AOA literature. These include ethnographic case-based studies of ‘NGOs and development’ (Kontinen 2004; see also Lewis & Kanji 2009), work on local natural resource struggles, including disputes over land rights (e.g., Lund 2008); as well as a continuing interest on projects and interventions (e.g., Mosse 2005).

This is not to say that the AOA school was apolitical. Many scholars using this approach had an implicit, (possibly repressed) agenda which found expression in their concern with resistance and commoditization. This agenda foundered with the demise of Marxist anthropology (under the weight of increasingly obscure ‘modes of production’ debates and the implosion of real socialism) and the limits for progressive action in Peru, Mexico and other authoritarian field contexts. Despite continued efforts to promote his methodological scheme, Long never fully succeeded in reconciling the political tensions emanating from a constitutive focus on facilitating Development with a normative, class-centric alignment with those in resistance to it. In the meanwhile, the end of the Cold War brought about a fundamental transformation of the landscape within which anthropology encountered development opening the door to other frames and orientations.

The ends of politics

The end of the Cold War did little to further politicize anthropological studies of development. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent dismantling of the Soviet Union it was widely argued that global capitalism had won, and subsequently, there was no longer a need for politics. This shift created, among other things – and, one imagines, quite unintentionally – new discursive space for the emergence of a fully-blown critique of development as a civilizing mission. Indeed, the spread of free market universalism eventually questioned the whole concept of development (Edelman and Haugerud 2007: 8). At the heyday of economic globalization and global market liberalization the need for state-led development planning became seriously questioned, as markets were assumed to allocate resources optimally (ibid.). However, neoliberal policy regimes adopted, or co-opted, much of the language and *topoi* of popular causes of the 1980s. Such development terminologies as democracy, human rights, good governance, poverty reduction and sustainable development, as well as corporate social responsibility, became intimately intertwined with larger-scale economic reforms since the 1990s. As new manifestations of means-ends-reversals, these developmental means were perceived instrumental for the achievement of the full potential of free market universalism.

These trends seriously undermined the basic state-community interventionist configuration at the core of the development interface logic. The neoliberal revolution that swept across much of the global South, left marginal groups and communities cut off from rural markets,

previously sustained by agricultural subsidies and from the patronage of ‘rolled-back, and increasingly ‘hollowed-out’ states. While the state was downsized, civil society organizations, local communities, indigenous peoples’ groups and so forth were actively re-constituted to do its work of governance. Development was vigorously ‘NGOized’ (Alvarez 1998) – local agents who had previously spearheaded resistance to non-democratic governments, to encroaching commoditization, or to the epistemic violence of agronomic or biomedical expertise, were now recruited as managers for the burgeoning ‘non-governmental’ sector, supposed to fill the gap left by ‘liberalized’ states in retreat. This often meant the outsourcing of ‘facilitation’ and ‘empowerment’ tasks to local elites and transnational NGOs. Discussing Guatemalan indigenous people, an American anthropologist Charles Hale (2002) claimed that development projects aimed at enhancing indigenous peoples’ cultural recognition, in fact, disciplined indigenous NGOs and communities to govern and control themselves. In this process of ‘neoliberal multiculturalism’, structural inequalities deepened and class-based conflicts over redistribution of resources were outrightly neglected from development interventions. Thus, ‘culture’ bypassed political and economic concerns.

This world-historical watershed resonated in many ways in the production of anthropological knowledge about ‘development.’ In terms of ‘small d’ development, anthropologists shifted from 1970s dependency theories, world-system approaches and political economy back to ‘anthropology’s traditional focus on small-scale phenomena’ (Edelman & Haugerud 2007: 18). During the 1990s, few anthropologists criticized neoliberalism (this was, of course, later reversed, see below), and rather celebrated the rejection of meta-narratives and the return to the study of micro-phenomena, identity issues and cultural difference (ibid.). The AOA anticipated in many profound ways the kinds of methodological moves that the (neo)liberalization of the ‘field’ engendered. But of course, the AOA with its Weberian conceptualization of the actor as a relatively autonomous individual player also prefigures the resurgent liberalism of the post-Cold War period with its ideological landscape of petty capitalist entrepreneurialism and rampant political brokerage.

In terms of big D development, one can see then, in the breakdown of the Cold War, three quite distinct anthropological responses to the politics of development. One continues to pursue ‘applied’ anthropological projects – dedicated under neoliberal auspices to issues of participation, empowerment and resilience. Such endeavours are deeply embedded in the practices and organizational logics of local and transnational NGOs, and tend to resist

framing their work in relationship to ‘decolonization,’ for a variety of reasons. A second strand, discussed in more detail below, complicates the dualist scheme of the developer and the developpee by abandoning the logic of the project (Olivier de Sardan 1998), in favour of an ‘entangled social logics’ approach in order to better accommodate the empirical scrutiny of complex, messy fields populated by a wide range of players mobilized by the notion of development. The third strand, taken up in the final section, inverts the ethos of ‘development’ entirely by subjecting it to radical postcolonial critique. In line with the demise of cultural and historical ‘metanarratives’ of modernity (Englund and Leach 2000), anthropologists gravitated toward a more explicitly ‘non-normative’ orientation to knowledge production.

The ‘entangled social logics’ of development

The work of French anthropologist Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan and his several associates, in Denmark, Germany, West Africa and elsewhere, explicitly built on the AOA within a framework they have termed the ‘entangled social logics’ (ESL) approach. For Olivier de Sardan (2005: 12) ‘there is hardly anything to object to’ in the AOA. Indeed, he considers it a ‘touchstone in development anthropology’ that opened up the field of development intervention for new interrogations. That said, Olivier de Sardan (ibid.) eventually became dissatisfied with the way the AOA had settled into a ‘hermetically closed loop’ prone to using empirical cases primarily to illustrate its key premises.

Perhaps the single-most important departure in the work of Olivier de Sardan and his key collaborators (in particular, German anthropologist Thomas Bierschenk), is their insistence on the necessity of a ‘non-normative... anthropology of development’ (Bierschenk 2008: 2). For the ESL school, non-normativity implies navigating between the Charybdis of ‘deconstructionism’ and the Scylla of ‘populism.’ The deconstructionists include anyone active in the anthropology of development with slightest taint of Foucauldian influence (i.e., Escobar and Ferguson). Deconstructionists, according to Olivier de Sardan (2005: 5), tend to see development as a monolith and thus lose sight of its ‘incoherences, uncertainty and contradictions’. Populists, on the other hand, harbour ‘romantic vision of popular knowledge’ (ibid.: 9) and/or dream of reforming Development from the inside (ibid.: 7).

This new framing of development anthropology protects, empowers and privileges anthropologists (and other scholars of development) via an ethos of detachment and impartiality. It is not necessary to take sides in the complex and shifting negotiations among the parties to an intervention over power and asset allocation. The role of anthropological labour is no longer one of smoothing the way for ‘success’ (of the intervention, or even of the negotiation). There is no question of promoting ‘resistance’ or of supporting ethnic or nationalist versions of populism. The task is now to simply document the dynamics of power and, above all, to demonstrate the superiority of extensive empirical fieldwork, which authorizes the discourse of ESL anthropologists. Of particular interest is to demonstrate the multiplicities of interests within ‘local communities.’ Rather than perpetrate an archaic language of class formation, the ESL school (not unlike the AOA) highlight the epistemic dimension in the conjuncture of multiple ‘logics’ in development arenas. The anthropologist can somehow stand outside, or above, these populist battles. It is acknowledged that the anthropologists’ interests and values are in many ways invested in these contestations. But the possible complicity of ‘our’ knowledge practices in the ways that different forms of life and knowledge are valorised does not come under systematic scrutiny.

Alongside the ESL approach, other branches of the so-called ‘ethnographies of aid’ also endorsed a non-normative positionality (see, for example, Gould and Marcussen eds. 2004; Mosse 2005; Mosse and Lewis eds. 2005). British anthropologist David Mosse (2008: 8) aptly encapsulated the goals of this strand of development research by stating that the ‘ethnographic question is not whether but how development...work[s]; not whether [it] succeeds, but how “success” is produced’. Mosse’s lauded but also controversial book *Cultivating Development* (2005) was a prime example of this statement. Offering a detailed ethnography on how an agricultural project in India worked – one in which he himself had been employed as a technical expert – Mosse argues that development policy processes produce their own success. By asking how discourses and practices of development are produced and how they work, he demonstrated the internal discrepancies between policy and practice, unintended effects of policy efforts, multiple intentions and social logics between different kinds of actors, and the real-life functioning of things beyond official discourses. Theoretically, Mosse’s analysis focused on social agency in development endeavours in critical response to ‘subjectless Foucauldian analysis’ (Lewis & Mosse 2006: 4), a theme to which we will turn below. Recently, Mosse (2011) has examined development expertise and

what he calls ‘travelling rationalities’ – ideas of international development experts that are considered universally applicable and neutral constructions – more thoroughly.

The anthropology of indigenous knowledge

Developers appropriated bits and pieces of the wisdom of AOA and ESL –type analyses to re-engineer development project design in a more ‘inclusive’ or ‘participatory’ fashion.⁷ Following the anthropological ‘discovery’ that project beneficiaries often harboured ‘expert knowledge’ about their own livelihoods (Brokensha et. al. 1980; Chambers 1994; Swantz 2008; see Briggs 2005; Pottier et al. 2003), development policies began to incorporate mention of the importance of local, traditional or indigenous knowledge for development (i.e., World Bank 1998). Multidisciplinary, team-based research approaches, such as rapid assessment procedures (RAP) and participatory rural appraisal (PRA), reflected this realization (Edelman & Haugerud 2007: 47).

Since the late 1980s, social anthropologists and development practitioners became interested in indigenous knowledge as a response to development problems, ‘the failures of externally driven, transfer-of-technology, top-down development’ (Pottier et al. 2003: 1). While modernization paradigm had portrayed traditional customs as obstacles to development, this thinking reversed the pattern: it perceived them as strength and valuable means for development. Romanticized visions of indigenous peoples’ idyllic harmony with nature (Ellen & Harris 2000: 12), made indigenous knowledge a popular development strategy especially in sustainable resource management, environmental issues, farming, and agriculture (Brokensha et al. 1989). However, it was fairly soon criticized that indigenous knowledge as a development alternative is often a simplification, an over-generalization, whose main merit of success – embeddedness in local cultures – disappears when entering national and international development apparatuses. Pottier pointed out aptly that there is never exclusively local knowledge – or exclusively global, universal knowledge to that

⁷ Development interventions also sought to be more conducive to individual, entrepreneurial agency. One might argue that the growing influence of microsociological analysis on the design of Development policies derived from the triumph of institutionalist theory in development economics in the 1990s (see Jameson 2006; Chang & Evans 2005; World Bank 2001; Klein 1977). The more general point, of course, relates to how clearly AOA and ESL approaches resonate with economic institutionalism, and how compatible these versions of development anthropology are with the thinking underlying neoliberal reforms.

matter – but knowledge production is rather a ‘negotiated translation’ involving ‘complex negotiation practices linked to knowledge interfaces’ (2003: 5).

The relationship of this technique to the politics of indigenous liberation was questionable. According to Agraval (1995), indigenous knowledge as a technical development discourse failed to question the status quo political and economic arrangements that produce and maintain unequal power relations both in specific settings and as globally. Therefore, rather than liberating its objects of scrutiny, indigenous knowledge as a development discourse, in fact, helps to ‘cement in place the oppression’ (Agraval 1995: 431). What is needed, he suggests, is an analysis of power relations related to the production, distribution, and use of indigenous knowledge both in development enterprises and in political struggles. Yet this was not possible within the developmentalist framework. A paradigm shift from means to ends was needed, a complex move to which we will turn in the following.

3. Scrutinizing the ends of development

Discussions about local knowledge and participatory techniques encouraged development anthropologists to advance more equitable and people-centered development practices. At the same time they also fueled, arguably, a much broader critique of development altogether (Grillo 1997: 13–4). Instead of inventing and polishing ever more sophisticated tools for development interventions, discursive struggles over the means of development evolved into those over the ends of development. The politics of development was deployed into myriad efforts at imagining alternative future horizons; alternative ends. This section introduces diverse strands of anthropological critiques of development starting from post-development thinking (Escobar 1995; Rahnema and Bawtree eds. 1997; Sachs 1992) and moving into the discussion of alternative epistemologies and ontologies (Blaser 2013; Escobar 2013).

Furthermore, such notions as *vivir bien* or *buen vivir* in Latin America are introduced as examples of development criticism at the spheres of policy making. It is argued that it is only the post-developmental thinkers who managed to raise the issues of the overall rationale of development as a contradictory set of (unachievable) ends, and only very recent thinkers, like Blaser (2010) and de la Cadena (2015) who propose a genuinely alternative set of political ends ‘outside’ development. Finally, this section examines the Foucauldian shift within anthropological critiques of development, from the work of James Ferguson (1994) to Tania Li (2007) and others. Rather than asking whether development works and how it can be made

better, this strand of inquiry has sought to turn its attention into critically pondering how notions of development are constructed and operationalized.

Toward alternative ends?

During the late 1980s, many anthropologists started to question the very notion of development and to search alternatives to it. They shifted from examining development alternatives to finding alternatives to development, that is, ‘the abandonment of the whole epistemological and political field of postwar development’ (Escobar 1991: 675). The concept of ‘post-development’ started to be used by Arturo Escobar (1992; 1995) who, among others (Latouche 1993; Pieterse 1998; Rahnema and Bawtree eds., 1997; Sachs 1992), questioned the very idea of ‘development-as-modernity.’ Development was perceived as a Western hegemonic discourse rooted in ideologies of modernity, growth, capital accumulation and the exploitation of nature, which spread across the Global South through such instruments as imperialism and development cooperation. Tariq Banuri (1990, 66), for example, argued that

[t]he project of modernization has been deleterious to the welfare of Third World populations not because of bad policy advice or malicious intent of advisers, nor because of the disregard of neo-classical wisdom, but rather because the project has constantly forced indigenous people to divert their energies from the *positive* pursuit of indigenously defined social change, to the *negative* goal of resisting cultural, political, and economic domination by the West.

While questioning the ethos of modernization in principle, early development critique often found it difficult to disengage itself from a commitment to bettering the plight of the poor.⁸

Witness the rest of the above quotation from Banuri:

In order for the improvement in welfare of Third World people to become possible, we have to stop believing that this is something only ‘we’ can do for ‘them’; we have to stop trying to quantify and measure the ‘quality of life’ (or other indicators of ‘development’) because these measurements become a licence [sic] to intervene in ‘their’ lives on the grounds that ‘we’ know what is objectively and undoubtedly ‘good for them’.”

Emerging post-development thinking came to reject a patronizing warrant for externally driven ‘improvement’ altogether. From the 1980s onwards, the debt crisis, the associated ‘lost

⁸ More recent anthropological critiques include, for example, Tania Li’s ethnography (2014), which challenges modernization narratives of development agencies in Sulawesi, Indonesia.

decade' in economic development and social welfare, and the increasing dependency of developing countries on transnational banks, development agencies and corporations raised resistance and critique all over the global South. Search for alternatives outside the parameters of 'Development' rose empirically from diverse strands of social movement activism and theoretically from the critique of modernization paradigms and the emerging neoliberal restructurings. Such groups as indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities were perceived to introduce new forms of doing politics, while at the same time encompassing various local knowledge patterns and epistemologies.

The fundamental critique advanced by post-development thinkers was that in order to solve problems of constantly increasing global inequalities and asymmetries, structural political-economic changes are urgently needed. Development agencies, however, lacked the will and means to effect structural change that targeted the very core of global capitalist relations. In this sense, post-development had linkages with structural Marxism, dependency theory and world systems theory that explained the existence of global inequalities by histories of conquest, imperialism and economic exploitation (Ferguson 1997: 163–4). The history of development was essentially that of global capitalism that actively underdeveloped certain areas of the world (ibid.). However, it was more than this, because socialism was also perceived to be committed to economic development and growth and to be rooted within the paradigm of modernity (Gudynas 2011). Post-development sought to look beyond development altogether. The postmodern 'incredulity toward metanarratives' (Lyotard 1984) – such as modernization and Marxism that both tended to attach universal meanings of economic growth to the notion of development – opened a theoretical space for local alternatives; multiple local histories, knowledge and epistemologies.

There was, then, a paradigm shift in discussing development as a discourse rather than merely as a form of economic and technological progress or a form of external domination. Arturo Escobar, who had studied with Foucault at Berkeley in the early 1980s, was a pivotal figure in this reframing. Escobar's book *Encountering Development* (1995) was instrumental in defining development through the use of Foucault's terminologies of discourse and power. According to him, development as a discursive construct consisted of forms of knowledge (concepts, theories, and so forth), a system of power which functions through the practice of development, and forms of subjectivity through which people perceive themselves either as 'developed' or 'underdeveloped' (1995: 10). Through this complex 'development apparatus' various forms of power and domination were produced and maintained. It furthermore had

various effects on how the Third World was constructed and represented as ‘underdeveloped.’

For Escobar and kindred post-developmentalists, the history of large scale historical development processes, what Cowen and Shenton had termed ‘immanent development’, reflected European historical cycles and structures of industrialization, capitalism, modernization, and globalization. People outside Europe, for their part, were harnessed into processes of ‘development’ through destruction, violence, and colonial conquest. If *longue durée* development was born out of systematic exploitation of ‘Others’ (e.g., Said 1989) whose lives contemporary developmental interventions are supposed to improve, one is eventually forced to inquire into terms according to which the ends of Development were defined. Academic scholars as well as social movements and activist networks alike raised fundamental challenges concerning whether this system of ‘Development’ could ever bring about ‘improvement’ to the exploited if its fundamental presumptions and conditions were not rethought and, eventually, transformed. Post-developmentalism can thus be seen as a critique of capitalism (and neoliberalism) but also as a critique of colonialism and coloniality – and in the end, a critique of the universalistic claims of ‘modernity.’ As Mario Blaser (2013), one inquires, is there is anything beyond this supposedly universal system of ‘all-encompassing modernity’? Are there alternative ends – ideal worlds that we want to see – outside the paradigm of ‘Development’? Subsequently, there emerged a shift from deliberate human efforts to engender certain kinds of social change into thinking about alternative ways of organizing history. Whole new ways of being and doing were imagined.

In his recent works that reflect the emergence of alternative development paradigms, such as *vivir bien* or *buen vivir* (the ‘good life’, or ‘living well’) in Latin America, Escobar (2010) has conceptualized ‘epistemic/cultural decolonization’ as a tool for alternative futures. He argued that epistemic decolonization confronts two issues: first, economic globalization and the neoliberal development paradigms; and second, the ‘modern project’, which refers to ‘the kinds of coherence and crystallization of forms (discourses, practices, structures, institutions) that have arisen over the last few hundred years out of certain cultural and ontological commitments of European societies’ (2010: 9). His account belongs to anthropological analyses concerned with post-developmental politics in local, state and supranational contexts, including the largely anticipatory analysis of an emerging ‘post-liberal’ politics. These contemporary analyses do not simply provide critique of historical processes of commodification and globalization, but highlight the work of alternative epistemologies and

the politics of knowledge production. An important contribution to this discussion is Mario Blaser's (2013) suggestion on the need to develop a 'project of political ontology', which accepts ontological differences and, subsequently, enables the identification of ontological conflicts. Academic scholarship drafted these alternative ontologies and epistemologies often through knowledge and ideas deriving from those indigenous and native populations that colonialism had exploited. Thus, knowledge production was intimately intertwined with politics and power.

Development as an all-encompassing apparatus

The Foucauldian shift in anthropology of development was another critical response to the domination of modernization paradigms and Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches within academic literature. While Escobar utilized Foucauldian tools to conceptualize relations between the North and the South on the global scale, James Ferguson's book *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1994) was one of the first accounts that introduced a Foucauldian reading to the ethnographic examination of specific development interventions in specific locations. It has later been followed up by many anthropologists of development (Ferguson and Gupta 2005; Green 2010; Hale 2002; Li 2007; Ong 2005). In addition to post-development critique, this was another way of looking beyond the 'interpretative grid' (Ferguson 1994) of development, the framework that had for long been unable to solve the underlying structural problems causing poverty and inequality.

Through the study of the World Bank funded Thaba-Tseka agricultural project in Lesotho, Ferguson examined both the discourses that development institutions produce and the consequences that their interventions have. Ferguson claimed that development agencies produce development discourses that construct the object of their intervention and the problems inherent in it in such ways that they can be conceptualized and solved with the knowledge and expertise available to the agencies themselves. The conglomeration of concepts and institutions working through these logics formulate the so-called 'development apparatus'. In Foucault's sense, this 'apparatus', or *dispositif*, was to be perceived as a complex set of mechanisms and structures that produce and maintain the exercise of power.⁹

⁹ Various ways of understanding *dispositif* are discussed in a recent pamphlet by Giorgio Agamben (2009).

Yet, interventions of the development apparatus occur in complex political, cultural, and social settings in which various forms of rule and authority exist.

Even if development projects would succeed or fail in their own terms, the argument goes, they often have other unintentional and unrecognized yet systemic effects. Ferguson suggested that a common unintentional effect of development interventions was the increase in state bureaucratic power and the deepening of authority of the ruling elite. The issue of state bureaucratic power has been later dealt, for example, in Green's (2010) ethnographic works in Tanzania. Ferguson thus showed how 'development apparatus' conceals its true operations – the spread of state bureaucratic power – in the technical idiom in which development discourses are portrayed. In other words, the development apparatus suppresses politics, while at the same time performing extremely sensitive political operations. This observation led Ferguson to conceptualize the development apparatus as 'anti-politics machine'. By this he meant that matters of great political importance – distribution of land, of the means of production, and so forth – are turned into seemingly technical issues through development knowledge and expertise. The conceptual and institutional apparatuses of development agencies effectively exclude locally important political questions from the palette of aid interventions. Ferguson thus introduced an important concept to anthropological vocabulary: depoliticization.

Ferguson's study was instrumental in shattering the idea of development as intrinsically 'doing good'. While many ethnographers were inspired by this line of thinking, Ferguson's approach was also criticized (e.g., Hyden 1994, Agrawal 1996). It was noted that its 'poststructuralist' portrayal of the development apparatus was insular and unidimensional, ignoring its empirical diversity. Nevertheless, Escobar's *Encountering Development* notwithstanding, Ferguson's *The Anti-politics Machine* remains the most widely cited case study in the anthropology of development.

Another variation of Foucauldian analysis of power in development is offered by anthropologist Tania Li (2007) who combines it with Gramscian ideas of situated political contestations over means of production. In contrast to Ferguson who perceived of the development apparatus as an anti-politics machine,' the main emphasis in Li's account is on analysing the entangled relations between development and political contention, as well as on overt resistance to development. By utilizing Foucault's notion of 'government', she understands development as a calculated means of governing and controlling individuals and

groups of people in a desired way. What Li calls the ‘practice of government’ occurs through the translation of ‘government’ into technical exercise through concrete bureaucratic programs and projects. Yet, instead of formulating a closed machinery, Li argued that the practice of government is part of a complex web of ‘biopolitical’ interests and relations through which people are managed, controlled, and targeted as objects of development in a way that delimits – but does not impede – their opportunities to question and confront existing power relations. A counterpart to the concept of the practice of government emerges here: the ‘practice of politics’. While the practice of government was earlier explained as a calculated mode of enhancing the wellbeing of populations through technical means, Li defines the practice of politics as a critical challenge that ‘shapes, challenges, and provokes it’ (2007: 12), hence, the suggestion that development is in essence an overtly political issue.

4. Conclusions

The aim of this essay has been to unravel anthropology’s efforts toward disassociating itself from the (post)colonial project of domination through ‘improvement,’ an uncomfortable legacy reflected in Edmund Leach’s (1982: 50) confession that ‘I consider “development anthropology” a kind of neo-colonialism’. Although our critique of anthropology’s imperial legacy was linked primarily to its relationship with development studies, Ferguson (1997: 167) has remarked that

[a]cademic anthropology itself continues to be defined in disciplinary terms that are in some ways continuous with its nineteenth-century roots as the science of the less developed. Indeed, in this sense, development (or its absence), far from defining a mere subfield within the discipline, continues to be at the heart of the constitution of anthropology itself.

The notion that emerged in post-Cold War anthropology of a ‘non-normative’ approach to development is ostensibly a device to ensure scientific rigor. For Olivier de Sardan, this implied suppressing two cardinal epistemic sins: Foucauldian deconstructionism and romantic populism.¹⁰ But a non-normative anthropology of development was also a manoeuvre to disassociate anthropology from the normative groundings of postcolonial developmental practices, and thus signal a commitment to the decolonization of the

¹⁰ Many Foucauldians have also sworn by non-normativity, but perhaps not the deconstructionists Olivier de Sardan et al. had in mind.

discipline.¹¹ Of course, colonial anthropologists also espoused – for different reasons no doubt – their own normative neutrality with respect to the racialized discrimination and exploitative structures of colonial government. This was a fundamental condition of their research and its funding, to which the tragic story of Godfrey Wilson, first Director of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute, clearly attests (Brown 1973). Non-normativity, for colonial and postcolonial anthropologists alike has also implied a disassociation from politics, especially the politics of the state. Or rather: ‘politics’ does enter the literature of postcolonial development anthropology as an object of scrutiny – involving practices of patronage and corruption, for example (e.g., Blundo & Olivier de Sardan 2006) – but not as a context within which anthropological analysis must reflexively situate itself. By the same token, the ‘politics of development’ appears consistently as interests, logics and rationalities driving the behaviour of instrumental actors (managers, experts, beneficiaries, brokers) in their exercise of or reaction to developmental practices. The focus, then, is firmly on the realm of means, while the normative ends implied in these forms of action and rationality remain beyond the scope of analysis.

Except, of course, that they do not, at least inasmuch as the choice of anthropological sites and objects invariably reflects a generalized liberal sensibility which pits autonomous citizens against overbearing, self-interested and intrinsically despotic governments.¹² In this, a core concern of development anthropology mirrors the rhetorical ends of international development institutions with their liberal commitment to human rights and good governance.

Recently, we can note a concerted swing away from the non-normative liberalism of post-Cold War anthropology of development. This is not, in the first instance, a shift toward the ideological frames of the Cold War, i.e., a rediscovery of Marx, of proletarian or peasant resistance. Indeed, it takes different forms, of which we would like to single out two for commentary in lieu of a conclusion.

The first example is that of James Ferguson, who appears in most discussion of anthropology of development as a development critic (or ‘Foucauldian deconstructionist’) commonly grouped together with the emerging post-developmental schools associated with Arturo

¹¹ Olivier de Sardan’s PhD thesis was supervised by Georges Balandier and Jean Rouch, two of France’s most articulate critics of anthropology’s colonial legacy.

¹² And in its paleo-feminist version, autonomous women are assumed to confront an overbearing, self-interested and intrinsically despotic patriarchy.

Escobar. At first blush, there is a close kinship relationship between Ferguson's move to 'decenter' development's self-understanding in anthropological analysis and the ESL's profession of non-normativity. Ferguson (1994: 18) writes that

It should be clear... that the approach to be taken to the problem of the 'development' industry in Lesotho will be, in keeping with the anthropological approach, 'decentered' – that is, it will locate the intelligibility of a series of events and transformations not in the intentions guiding the actions of one or more animating subjects, but in the systematic nature of the social reality which results from those actions.

Ferguson's notion of decentering does indeed suggest some form of 'non-normativity' but in practice, his perspective also shares much with the Left (post-Marxist) 'populism' that underscored the work of Norman Long and the AOA (although he never cites them).

Ferguson's critique of the development apparatus as an 'antipolitics machine' is not a rejection of politics, rather the contrary. In contrast, the non-normativity of ESL group as well as of Mosse, is – while not in itself explicitly 'antipolitical' – would seem to be bereft of any explicit political alliances, real or potential. These writers aspire to suspend normative assessment, and yet their bracketing of the normative implications of 'development' implies an epistemic nonchalance concerning the 'socio-ontological' conditions under which 'development' constitutes an intelligible subject/object of discourse.

In retrospect, Ferguson's work in *The Antipolitics Machine*'s flirtation with post-developmentalism was a prelude to work that is clearly not outside the normative *dispositif* of modernity. His subsequent ethnography of a Zambian mining community in decline, *Expectations of Modernity* (1999), waxes unapologetically nostalgic for his informants' lost opportunities for self-improvement. His most recent book, the far-reaching *Give a Man a Fish* (2014) is an explicit return to conventional development issues, representing a nuanced analysis of a novel set of policy means in the Southern African context (cash transfers and related social grants) dedicated to the alleviation of poverty's indignities.

Unlike other scholars discussed above, in this latest work Ferguson revives and updates his engagement with Foucault, drawing on the new scholarship that has emerged in the wake of the translation and publication of Foucault's College de France lectures. The Foucault of GAMAF is not the harbinger of a nefarious 'neoliberal governmentality' of his earlier essay (Ferguson & Gupta 2002), but a subtle thinker for whom 'government and politics alike were always more about experimentation than denunciation, puzzling out possible ways forward in concrete settings rather than deducing the correct path from a general political theory (ibid.:

32). This allows Ferguson to position himself pragmatically (and thus normatively) within the realm of political discourse regarding practical governmental means.

The second approach is the latest take on post-development thinking. It focuses on alternative ontologies and radical re-thinking of politics. An exemplary case of this approach is Peruvian anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena (2015), who reaffirms the role of politics in post-developmental thought in another register. For de la Cadena, the non-modern ontologies embodied by Andean *tirakuna* (shamen and earth beings) encompass ‘politics’ – also in the conventional sense of ‘peasant resistance’ (to hacienda landlords, for example) but ‘not only’ – there is also another politics, of the earth, of knowledge that pertains on a different plane, is of (and makes) a different world than that of modernity/development. The introduction of earth, nature, mountains and animals to the registers of politics forces us to question – and re-define – the concept of politics. Here de la Cadena continues with Blaser’s (2013) discussion of ontological alterity. The ‘not only’ of de la Cadena’s *tirakuna* is more of a ‘both/and’ than ‘(n)either/(n)or’ conjunction. It encompasses conventional politics (of peasants land struggles) but also extends to existential realms of identity and community not captured under the rubric of ‘peasant politics’. It is not ‘non-normative’ by a long shot, but neither is it comfortably embraced by liberal themes of rights and identities. As such, it offers a radical effort at decolonizing anthropology.

This latest turn seriously questions conventional ways of defining both development and politics, by demanding increased reflexivity concerning anthropologists’ epistemic habits when seeking to subsume ‘alternative ontologies’ under conventional liberal framings. Such fundamental challenges to conventional thinking suggest that the anthropology of development, despite the harsh polemics it engenders, remains alive and vigorous. Its various strands continue to provoke debate and reflexivity about our perceptions and understandings of the forms and dynamics of social life, as well as of the parameters of human ‘improvement.’ This is a practical and intellectual challenge which is certainly not restricted to the politics of development. The strength of anthropology has always been its ability to accommodate a variety of perspectives and to enable dialogues between them. As we see it, the main challenge to the anthropology of development concerns its ability to finally exorcise the remnants of colonial governmentalities, and embrace genuine epistemological pluralism.

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