Anthropology and Development

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Challenges for the Twenty-First Century

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Prelude: Development, Post-Development and More Development?

> The idea of development stands like a ruin on the intellectual landscape. Delusion and disappointment, failures and crimes have been the steady companions of development and they tell a common story: it did not work. (Sachs, 1992: 1)

> Welcome to 'Development World'. The pursuit of development has become a global concern and no one is unaffected. Aspiring to manage change in economic, political, social and cultural arenas, development is a world-shaping project. (Axelby and Crewe, 2013: ix)

Whatever happened to the anthropology of development and its 'postmodern challenge'? When we published the first edition of this book in 1996 (entitled *Anthropology, Development and the Post-Modern Challenge*) development was under sustained theoretical fire. Discredited for its evolutionary and Euro-American-centrism, and attacked by writers such as Wolfgang Sachs (1992) and Arturo Escobar (1995) for its role in the maintenance of postcolonial power relations, it seemed possible that in the next ten or twenty years development might expire altogether and that new framings of progressive change might arise. Even if reports of its death were greatly exaggerated, the era of 'post-development' thinking seemed to be upon us. Within anthropology postmodern critiques were also causing significant disquiet. Accused of creating exoticised representations of 'the other' and methodological techniques in which anthropologists subjugated and objectified the people they researched, the discipline seemed, for a while, in danger of losing its confidence, or even turning into a sub-field of literary critique, a direction suggested by Clifford and Marcus's 1986 book *Writing Culture*.

Anthropology, Development and the Post-Modern Challenge addressed these questions by arguing that the discipline should not balk at becoming directly involved with social problems. The book was a rallying cry for

anthropological engagement in development, in all its varied meanings. In it, we argued that while the 'post-modern' attack on development was theoretically beguiling, it was in danger of contributing to an apolitical disengagement by anthropologists not wishing to dirty their hands with the dubious business of trying to change the world for the better. Indeed, we argued that Escobar's analysis homogenised and simplified development, which by the 1990s involved a lot more than colonial-style planners pushing people around. Instead, we suggested that while they had previously been treated within the discipline as working in an inferior sub-field, anthropologists *of* and *in* development had much to offer. What they had to offer was not only useful to what Axelby and Crewe (2013) call 'Development World', for example in helping to formulate new policies and practices which prioritised issues of power, poverty and inequality rather than economic growth or modernisation, but these anthropologists also had an important role to play in bringing rich insights around the relationship between social relations and economic change to academic anthropology itself.

Tracing the links between ethnographic work and new, often (at the time) radical directions in development we argued that anthropology's influence in shaping new formulations that moved far beyond the monolithic colonial discourse described by Sachs, Escobar and others was potentially huge. The questions of access, control and effects that anthropologists asked informed development work that had power, unequal access and inequality as its focus. Ethnographic methods were key to new ways of seeing and doing. Indeed, based on anthropological practice, new techniques for gathering information and using it to effect change were fast catching on in Development World, such as the various participatory learning and action (PLA) approaches that became popular during the 1990s.

So, what happened? Was Escobar right in his prediction that development was reaching its end game? Over the last twenty years the rate and substance of change is remarkable in two ways. In the first sense, it has been profound and rapid. The world we described in 1996 was very different from the contemporary post-9/11 era of war, securitisation and, more recently, financial meltdown, recession and austerity. While the so-called 'BRICs' (Brazil, Russia, India, China) have been hailed as emerging economies for their rapid rates of economic growth, industrialisation and urbanisation, other countries, most notably in southern Europe, have experienced dramatic de-development as a result of the global

financial crisis. Where and with whom development work is supposed to take place is increasingly blurred, as distinctions between 'the developed' and 'undeveloped' world become increasingly problematic. Meanwhile not only have new governments, agencies and donors entered the fray as givers of aid and do-ers of development – India and China are obvious examples – but ethical conduct and schemes of improvement have been taken on by corporations as a badge of honour. Great moral value is placed on improving the lives of others, especially if they live on the other side of the world. Today, philanthropy is the hobby of choice for billionaires, pop stars and actors, who rush to endorse projects and causes while making 'poverty history' or 'turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide'[1] at the click of a mouse, paying a donation or wearing a wristband.

In the second sense, change is remarkable only for its absence. As Axelby and Crewe (2013) insist, development – both as a concept and a set of practices – still continues to wield huge power globally. To this extent the story remains the same, regardless of the stones thrown from both sides of the political divide. Development's capacity to absorb critiques and turn what were once radical alternatives into de-politicised common practices while on the central stage business goes on as normal is testimony to its enduring power. This applies equally to its ideological dominance: the view that economic growth and other measures will lead to the social good, generally imagined as involving Westernisation or modernisation. The United Nations Millennium Goals (MDGs), for example, are, naturally, *development* goals, as are the post-2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that have been designed to follow on from these.[2] Meanwhile the development industry continues unabated. Universities continue to offer degrees in development studies, government Departments of Development remain in place, civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are tasked to carry out development, and many thousands of experts, consultants, fieldworkers and officials rely upon it for their livelihood. And it continues to touch the lives of almost everyone.

So what of the anthropology of and in development? In this second edition of *Anthropology, Development and the Post-Modern Challenge* we argue that anthropology's potential to analyse and describe processes of change, and contribute to alternative visions, remains as powerful as ever. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, rather than being on the margins, the anthropology of development has in many ways been increasingly absorbed into the mainstream. In the twenty years since the book was first published the field has become enormous. This is

partly because so many anthropologists are working in contexts of rapid economic transformation, globalisation and cultural complexity that questions of change are impossible to ignore or corral as a sub-field. Today only a small minority (indeed, a handful?) of anthropologists engage in research with communities or groups that could be considered to be unaffected by the wider world. Even if this were not the case, what matters more than the context in which fieldwork is carried out are the questions that anthropologists ask. That the world is changing is nothing new. What *has* shifted is not only the rate and scale of change, but anthropology's willingness to acknowledge, document and theorise it. Anthropological studies are nowadays framed by questions concerning global capitalism, conflict, governance, migration and environment, to name a few of the most obvious. If the anthropology *of* development is in its broadest terms the anthropology of change and transition, or of global economic systems, then we are hard pressed to identify where the boundaries lie between this and the anthropological mainstream.

There remains, however, a body of work that is clearly *of* development. Here we need to pay attention to human geographer Gillian Hart's (2001: 650) helpful distinction:

> between 'big D' Development defined as a post-second world war project of intervention in the 'third world' that emerged in the context of decolonization and the cold war, and 'little d' development or the development of capitalism as a geographically uneven, profoundly contradictory set of historical processes.

One meaning refers to development as unfolding capitalist change and the other to the intentional, planned change that takes place within 'Development World' (Axelby and Crewe, 2013). We shall be using this distinction between big D and little d throughout the book.[3] We suggest that early twenty-first-century anthropology of development is now animated by questions that pick up where Escobar et al. left off to study post-development (see, for example, Escobar, 2008, 2010). This newly animated anthropology of development is a large and rapidly expanding field of study of which we can only describe a fraction of the work being undertaken. What does it mean to analyse development work and knowledge as a discursive field? How might we understand policy and projects, not to say the cultural worlds of those who produce them, in these terms? Centrally, how might we understand new approaches to development,

including micro-finance, Fair Trade and entrepreneurial schemes that aim to mine the market potential of the 'bottom of the pyramid' – in Prahalad's (2004) influential phrase – as linked to global governance and the ongoing hegemonic might of global capitalism? How might we understand the developmentalisation of welfare – now increasingly relabelled wellbeing – in the form of large-scale investments in social protection interventions, such as conditional cash transfer schemes, micro-insurance and commodity subsidies? What moral economies underlie these schemes, and how can anthropological theory be used to explain them?

For both development and Development, we argue that the questions of *access*, *control* and *effects* that we outlined in the first edition remain core concerns. Since these primary questions are the same, we have left some of the original book intact: who gains and who loses? What is happening or has happened and why? What are the underlying dynamics of power at all levels and scales? As before, we argue that these seemingly simple questions must remain at the heart of anthropological analysis of both senses of d/Development, to be used as an ethical yardstick both for those working within the industry, and for those using academic research to critique it. Indeed, while once derided as the discipline's 'evil twin' (Ferguson, 1997) the anthropology of D/development has more recently been celebrated as its 'moral narrative' (Gow, 2002). In a world increasingly divided between haves and have-nots, where profit and economic growth seem invariably to involve disenfranchisement and exclusion for those at the margins, and where morality and personhood are played out via consumption it is anthropologists who are best placed to offer empirical evidence and analysis of how global systems work and what this means for ordinary people. It is also anthropologists, armed with cross-cultural perspectives, who are able to offer fresh ways of seeing, to combat the accepted orthodoxies: for example that 'the market' can cure the world's ills or that global capitalism's economic systems are rational (see Graeber, 2011).

Here it is useful to distinguish between anthropology as critique ('of') and anthropology as enabling or involving action, or 'in' development (Hale, 2006). As with the first edition of the book, we have divided the chapters with this distinction in mind, offering an updated account of the history of engaged anthropology in general and anthropologists 'in' development in particular, along with an overview of academic analyses and ethnographies 'of', adding new sections to cover the directions the field has taken since the late 1990s. But again, while useful for thinking about different types of

activity – the first using anthropological perspectives in order to critique, the second using anthropological perspectives in order to change things– the boundaries between 'of' and 'in', or 'pure' and 'applied' are ever more fuzzy. This is partly because in recent years the political pressures to justify academic research have been piling up, with an increasingly instrumentalist approach being taken by funders and policy-makers. In Britain, for example, bureaucratic exigencies for academics to produce 'impact' in order to gain funding and as part of government audits of 'academic excellence' have forced anthropologists to think more seriously about the effects that their work has beyond academia.

The problem with the separation between 'pure' and 'applied' is the implication that research 'for research's sake' is somehow locked in a box marked 'ivory tower' and has no value beyond that. Yet, as we argued in the first edition of this book, ideas matter. Merely because the person producing research is not the same person who is designing policy, protesting or leading social movements does not mean that the research has not played an influential role in the actions that ensue. While there are clearly anthropologists who are research-oriented and those who are actively engaged in policy, advocacy or protest, 'pure' research leads to insights and ideas that go on to inform 'applied' work. If in any doubt of how scholarly critique and theory can lead to change, one need only think of the ideas of Karl Marx!

What form has this synergy between research, ideas and action taken in recent years? Writing in the mid-1990s we were excited by the possibilities that anthropology offered in changing development agendas. Ideas from feminist anthropology, research into the interface between scientific and indigenous knowledge and the ethnographic focus on everyday lives and perspectives, not to say power dynamics, contributed to an array of new directions that offered the hope of breaking free from the dominant discourse. Since then there have been successes but also failures. Many of the most radical ideas – empowerment and participation, for example – have been taken on, absorbed but also de-politicised by development. This can be read as a sign of positive change, but in many instances has involved a watered down version of the original ideas. In some cases potentially radical practices have been reduced to 'box-ticking' exercises. In this sense, Escobar was right in his prediction that the discourse would always absorb change, yet remain essentially the same, writing that 'the new discourses exist in the same plane of the original concept, and this contributes to the

discourse's self-creation and autoreferentiality' (1995: 201). Yet we end by outlining new ideas and new approaches which offer alternatives as well as critiques of mainstream development, and which meet the challenges of the twenty-first century.

The book is structured as follows. After our introductory Chapter 1, which provides a brief outline of development theory, and the changes to Development World that have taken place since 1996, we move in Chapter 2 to an updated account of the histories of applied and 'engaged' anthropology, as well as its more recent appearances in the shape of 'protest' and/or 'anarchic' anthropology. This spans anthropological involvement with development but also its wider role in advocacy, protest and action. In Chapter 3, we provide a review of the anthropology 'of' d/ Development, both up to 1996 when *Anthropology, Development and the Post-Modern Challenge* was published, and in the years that have followed. After having scoped out and updated the field of study and action, Chapter 4 moves to the ideas and approaches which, back in the mid-1990s, we argued provided ways of breaking out of the discursive strictures of mainstream development. Since it is our argument that the core questions of access, control and effects remain the same, we have left this chapter mostly in its original version. In Chapter 5 we revisit some of the ideas that, in the 1990s, we argued held the potential for progressive change within development, showing how in some quarters these have been reduced to what Cornwall and Eade (2010) have termed 'buzzwords and fuzzwords'. Despite these problems, we argue in the Conclusion that this does not mean that, in other contexts, the potential of these ideas, or for other forms of anthropological engagement, is any less. Rather, anthropology can critique more conventional projects and transcend the confines of projects carried out in the global South. It has much to say also about the global North, about new forms of development and about transcending development altogether to provide fresh insights concerning the nature of empowerment, participation and gender.

In writing this new edition, our aim is also to provide the reader with a sense of the historical depth of the anthropology of, and in, D/development. For this reason we have included some of the original sections of the 1996 edition while adding up-to-date accounts of what has happened since. As before, we have been selective in our coverage of the wide-ranging field of development and, in general, have adopted the policy of sticking to what we know. As a result, we again do not engage in any depth with issues

such as medical anthropology, environmental sustainability or climate change, or with the worlds of international humanitarian assistance. The world has changed a great deal but the core questions that anthropologists ask remain largely the same. The need for an engaged anthropology is as pressing as ever.

1

Understanding Development: Theory and Practice into the Twenty-First Century

What is 'development'? How did it become both so important and so problematic? In this introductory chapter we outline the history of development and its theoretical underpinnings, from its Enlightenment origins to the present before asking what became of 'the postmodern challenge'? The chapter is broadly presented in two parts. The first half of the chapter spans the period up to 1996 when the first edition of this book was published. It introduces the 'aid industry', analyses the history of the idea of development, and discusses the rise and fall of its grand theories. In the second part, we discuss some of the wide-ranging changes that have taken place during the past two decades, both within the world at large, where the balance of global power has shifted in significant ways, inequalities both within and between nations have increased, and where there has been a post 9/11 policy emphasis on securitisation; and also within the world of development. This has seen an increased and growing role for the private sector, an increased emphasis on managerialism and results in the development intervention field, and the rise of non-Western donor countries such as China that offer low-income countries new choices in relation to aid and projects.

Development: history and meanings

In virtually all its usages, development implies positive change or progress. It also evokes natural metaphors of organic growth and evolution. The *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines it as 'stage of growth or advancement' (1988: 200). As a verb it refers to activities required to bring

these changes about, while as an adjective it is inherently judgemental, for it involves a standard against which things are compared. While 'they' are undeveloped, or in the process of being developed, we (it is implied) have already reached that coveted state. When the term was used by President Truman in a speech in 1949, vast areas of the world were therefore suddenly labelled 'underdeveloped' (Esteva, 1993: 7). A new problem was created, and with it the solutions; all of which depended upon the rational-scientific knowledge of the so-called developed powers (Hobart, 1993: 2).

Capitalism and colonialism: 1700–1949

The notion of development goes back further than 1949, however. Larrain has argued that while there has always been economic and social change throughout history, consciousness of 'progress', and the belief that this should be promoted, arose only within specific historical circumstances in northern Europe. Such ideas were first generated during what he terms the 'age of competitive capitalism' (1700–1860): an era of radical social and political struggles in which feudalism was increasingly undermined (Larrain, 1989: 1).

Concurrent with the profound economic and political changes that characterised these years was the emergence of what is often referred to as the 'Enlightenment'. This social and cultural movement, which was arguably to dominate Western thought until the late twentieth century, stressed tolerance, reason and common sense. These sentiments were accompanied by the rise of technology and science, which were heralded as ushering in a new age of rationality and enlightenment for humankind, as opposed to what were now increasingly viewed as the superstitious and ignorant 'Dark Ages'. Rational knowledge, based on empirical information, was deemed to be the way forward (Jordanova, 1980: 45). During this era polarities between 'primitive' and 'civilised', 'backward' and 'advanced', 'superstitious' and 'scientific', 'nature' and 'culture' became commonplace (Bloch and Bloch, 1980: 27). Such dichotomies have their contemporary equivalents in notions of undeveloped and developed.

Larrain links particular types of development theory with different phases in capitalism. While the period 1700–1860 was characterised by the classical political economy of Smith and Ricardo and the historical materialism of Marx and Engels, the age of imperialism (1860–1945) spawned neo-classical political economy and classical theories of imperialism. Meanwhile, the subsequent expansionary age of late