

Epilogue

“What is to be done?”

“I understand your skepticism about ‘development.’ But after all, there really are an awful lot of poor, sick, hungry people out there. What’s to be done about it? If ‘development’ isn’t the answer, then what is?”

These are rather grand questions, to be sure. But in developing the argument I have presented here, I have found that many people have responded to it in just these terms. There seems to be a certain frustration with the fact that my analysis traces the effects or mode of operation of an apparatus without providing any sort of prescription or general guide for action. The first response to this sort of objection must be that the book never intended or presumed to prescribe, and that this is not what the book is all about. But it is perhaps worth making clear that this reluctance to dispense prescriptions is not a matter of neutrality or indifference. Indeed, I am no more indifferent to the political-tactical question of “what is to be done” than I am to the poverty and suffering of so much of the world. So I end the book with this epilogue – a brief personal statement on these issues – in anticipation of the reactions that many readers may have to the argument, and in hope of helping to draw out more clearly the implications of my analysis. Since these issues are, as I have argued from the start, intrinsically political, this must necessarily be a political statement. I offer it here not in order to suggest that everyone should share my politics, but to lay out as clearly as possible my belief that “development” is far from being the only available form of engagement with the great questions of poverty, hunger, and oppression that rightly pre-occupy us in thinking about the Third World.

Any question of the form “what is to be done” implies both a subject and a goal, both an aim and an actor who strategizes toward that aim. The question “what is to be done about all the poverty, sickness, and hunger in the Third World” immediately identifies the undoubtedly worthy goal of alleviating or eliminating poverty and its suffering. A first step, many would agree, toward clarifying that goal and the tactics appropriate to achieving it is to reformulate it somewhat more politically: since it is powerlessness that ultimately underlies the surface conditions of poverty, ill-health, and hunger, the larger goal ought

therefore to be empowerment.¹ But the question of the subject, the actor who is to do the “doing,” still remains completely unspecified. A great deal of liberal policy science fills in the gap left by this lack of specificity in its own unacknowledged way, implicitly translating the real-world question of poverty into the all too familiar, utopian form of the question: given an all-powerful and all-benevolent policy-making apparatus, what should it do to advance the interests of its poor citizens? In this form, it seems to me that the question is worse than meaningless – in practice, it acts to disguise what are in fact highly partial and interested interventions as universal, disinterested, and inherently benevolent. If the question “what is to be done” has any sense, it is as a real-world tactic, not a utopian ethics. “What is to be done?” demands first of all an answer to the question, “By whom?”

“What should they do?”

Often, the question was put to me in the form “What should they do?”, with the “they” being not very helpfully specified as “Lesotho” or “the Basotho” (cf. Chapter 2, pp. 60, 62). The “they” here is an imaginary, collective subject, linked to utopian prescriptions for advancing the collective interests of “the Basotho.” Such a “they” clearly needs to be broken up. The inhabitants of Lesotho do not all share the same interests or the same circumstances, and they do not act as a single unit. There exists neither a collective will nor a collective subject capable of serving it.

When the “developers” spoke of such a collectivity (“they,” “the Basotho,” “Lesotho”) what they meant was usually the government. But the government of Lesotho is of course not identical with the people who live in Lesotho, nor is it in any of the established senses “representative” of that collectivity. As in most countries, the government is a relatively small clique with narrow interests. Significant differences in points of view and interests can certainly be found within this governing circle, and undoubtedly one can see in at least some of these differences the indirect traces of popular demands, which even the most undemocratic politician must in one way or another take into account. But, speaking very broadly, the interests represented by governmental elites in a country like Lesotho are not congruent with those of the governed, and in a great many cases are positively antagonistic. Under these circumstances, there is little point in asking what such entrenched and often extractive elites should do in order to empower the poor. Their own structural position makes it clear that they would be the last ones to

undertake such a project. If the governing classes ask the advice of experts, it is for their own purposes, and these normally have little to do with advancing the interests of the famous downtrodden masses.

If the question “what should they do” is not intelligibly posed of the government, another move is to ask if the “they” to be addressed should not be instead “the people.” Surely “the masses” themselves have an interest in overcoming poverty, hunger and other symptoms of powerlessness. At a certain level of analysis, there is no disputing that those who experience poverty and oppression must be first among those concerned with the question of what is to be done about it. But once again, the question is befuddled by a false unity. “The people” are not an undifferentiated mass. Rich and poor, women and men, city dwellers and villagers, workers and dependants, old and young; all confront different problems and devise different strategies for dealing with them. There is not one question – “what is to be done” – but hundreds: what should the mineworkers do, what should the abandoned old women do, what should the unemployed do, and on and on. It seems, at the least, presumptuous to offer prescriptions here. The toiling miners and the abandoned old women know the tactics proper to their situations far better than any expert does. Indeed, the only general answer to the question, “What should they do?” is: “They are doing it!”

As I argued earlier, the “development” problematic tends to exclude from the field of view all forces for change that are not based on the paternal guiding hand of the state; it can hardly imagine change coming in any other way. But, from outside that problematic, it seems clear that the most important transformations, the changes that really matter, are not simply “introduced” by benevolent technocrats, but fought for and made through a complex process that involves not only states and their agents, but all those with something at stake, all the diverse categories of people who craft their everyday tactics of coping with, adapting to, and, in their various ways, resisting the established social order. As Foucault remarked of the prisons, when the system is transformed:

it won't be because a plan of reform has found its way into the heads of the social workers; it will be when those who have to do with that . . . reality, all those people, have come into collision with each other and with themselves, run into dead-ends, problems and impossibilities, been through conflicts and confrontations; when critique has been played out in the real, not when reformers have realised their ideas.

(Foucault 1981: 13)

Southern Africa is not a place where such a “critique of the real” is difficult to foresee. The uncertainties of the contemporary situation are immense, and all but the most banal predictions are more than usually impossible. But there is no doubt that massive changes of one sort or another are inevitably coming in the whole regional political and economic system. Various categories of Basotho will participate and *are* participating in making these changes in the various ways appropriate to their circumstances, be they mineworkers joining the large and rapidly growing National Union of Mineworkers, political activists working with the liberation movements, women fighting for empowerment and autonomy in the villages, or targeted “farmers” resisting the encroachments of the bureaucratic state. They are not waiting for consultants to come and tell them what must be done.

It remains conceivable that at various points in these struggles, in various organizational locations, there may in fact be demands for specific kinds of advice or expertise. But, if there is advice to be given, it will not be dictating general political strategy or giving a general answer to the question “what is to be done” (which can only be determined by those doing the resisting), but answering specific, localized, tactical questions. The possibility of this form of engagement of expertise with political movements of empowerment is explored in greater depth below.

“What should we do?”

A second, and apparently less arrogant, form of the question is to ask not “what should they do?” but “what should we do?” But once again, the crucial question is, which “we?”

For many, the answer seems to be either “we, the governments of the West,” or “we whose job it is to ‘do’ something,” i.e., “we ‘developers’.” In either case, the question “what should we do?” quickly becomes “what should the ‘development’ agencies and the ‘donors’ do?” But like the “they” of “Lesotho,” the “we” of “development agencies” as the implied subject of the question falsely implies a collective project for bringing about the empowerment of the poor. Whatever good or ill may be accomplished by these agencies, nothing about their general mode of operation would justify a belief in such a collective “we” defined by a political program of empowerment.

There is, however, a second and more productive way of posing the question “what should we do?”; that is: What should we scholars and

intellectuals working in or concerned about the Third World do? To the extent that there are common political values and a shared agenda, a real “we” group with shared political aims and common tactical problems, this becomes a real question. My experience suggests that many academic social scientists – and perhaps most anthropologists – working in southern Africa do broadly share what one might call a left-populist perspective. Having worked with a broad range of “ordinary people,” often for long periods of time and with at least a certain degree of intimacy and affection, these intellectuals are often sympathetic with popular causes and suspicious of the usual claims that the elites and experts know best. Their instincts are generally democratic, egalitarian, and anti-hierarchical. Their political proclivity is to support struggles for empowerment on the part of exploited peasants and workers, and to oppose neo-colonialist and bureaucratic domination. “Development” researchers, too, are far from being all conservative bureaucrats. Many, especially anthropologists, share these same popular and democratic commitments, and seek practical ways of advancing them. Indeed, at least some “development” workers see themselves as practicing social activists. There is even a measure of continuity between contemporary “development” work and the popular and student movements centering on Third World issues that so many Western countries experienced during the 1960s. In spite of the very common involvement of “development” with counter-insurgency throughout the post-war period, a surprising number of Western progressives have been drawn to “development” work by way of political commitments to and solidarity with Third World causes. There are sometimes romantic and even missionary overtones to these engagements, to be sure; but often enough there is a real commitment to work for liberating, empowering social transformations. For these many scholars, intellectuals, and experts in various settings who would wish to apply their energies and talents on the side of economic and political empowerment, the tactical question “what is to be done” is indeed a real one. But any answer to this question must entail, if only implicitly, a theory of how economic and political empowerment comes about.

For anyone who shares the political commitments I have been discussing, making “development” the form of one’s intellectual political engagement would seem to imply the view that democracy, equality, and empowerment are to be worked for and brought about through the benevolent intervention of state agencies – that these progressive changes are to be advanced through the action of progressive planners

acting on proper advice. There may well be specific contexts where this does happen. At a minimum, one can say that however bad “development” interventions have been for the “beneficiaries,” no doubt many of them might have been worse were it not for these left-populists working from the inside. But there are distinct limitations to this way of theorizing the process of empowerment, and corresponding dangers inherent in this strategy of engagement.

Operating on the theory that the oppressed classes are to be delivered from their poverty and powerlessness through government agency can easily lead to a falsely universalizing or even heroizing view of the state. Further, experience suggests that identifying government intervention with progress and reform is likely to facilitate the dismissal or even suppression of the often oppositional forms of action initiated by those identified as requiring the intervention. Acting on such a theory, it is all too easy to enter into complicity with a state bureaucracy that, after all, in all but the most extraordinary situations, serves the dominant or hegemonic interests in society – the very social forces, in most cases, that must be challenged if the impoverished and oppressed majority are to improve their lot. The apparent alternative of looking to the “international agency” rather than the state as the author of the benevolent, empowering intervention contains all the same dangers. The international apparatus typically has a different agenda than the local government does, but in its interests, and in its effects, it is no less conservative. The difference here is between the guardians of the global hegemony and those of the local hegemony. As with local government, positing “development” agencies as the active principle charged with the task of empowering the poor may involve a certain lack of fit between subject and predicate.

Certainly, national and international “development” agencies do constitute a large and ready market for advice and prescriptions, and it is this promise of real “input” that makes the “development” form of engagement such a tempting one for many intellectuals. These agencies seem hungry for good advice, and ready to act on it. Why not give it? But as I have tried to show, they seek only the kind of advice they can take. One “developer” asked my advice on what his country could do “to help these people.” When I suggested that his government might contemplate sanctions against *apartheid*, he replied, with predictable irritation, “No, no! I mean *development!*” The only “advice” that is in question here is advice about how to “do development” better. There is a ready ear for criticisms of “bad development projects,” so long as these

are followed up with calls for “good development projects.” Again, Foucault’s analysis of the prison is relevant: “For a century and a half the prison has always been offered as its own remedy: the reactivation of the penitentiary techniques as the only means of overcoming their perpetual failure; the realization of the corrective project as the only method of overcoming the impossibility of implementing it” (Foucault 1979: 268). In “development,” as in criminology, “problems” and calls for reform are necessary to the functioning of the machine. Pointing out errors and suggesting improvements is an integral part of the process of justifying and legitimating “development” interventions. Such an activity may indeed have some beneficial or mitigating effects, but it does not change the fundamental character of those interventions.

It is hardly a novelty to suggest that organizations like the World Bank, USAID, and the Government of Lesotho are not really the sort of social actors that are very likely to advance the empowerment of the exploited poor. Yet such an obvious conclusion makes many uncomfortable. It seems to them to imply hopelessness; as if to suggest that the answer to the question “what is to be done” is: “Nothing.” Skepticism about the “development” intervention is read as political passivity. “Applied” researchers, the cliché goes, are willing to go out and get their hands dirty working for “development” agencies; “academic” researchers, on the other hand, stay in their ivory towers, and keep their hands and consciences clean. But is this really the only choice? Again, we return to the question of where empowering, progressive social changes come from. What forces are likely to bring such changes about? The elites of local government? USAID and the World Bank? Surely these are not the only possible answers. Working for social change is not synonymous with working for governments; indeed, it is perhaps not too much to say that the preoccupation of governments and government agencies is more often precisely to forestall and frustrate the processes of popular empowerment that so many anthropologists and other social scientists in their hearts seek to advance.

If, as I have suggested, the “development” intervention is not the only way for anthropologists and other social scientists to engage their intellectual and scholarly energies with the great questions of poverty and oppression, then what are the alternatives? How can we work for the social and economic changes that would make a difference for the ordinary people we have known as informants, neighbors, and friends?

One of the most important forms of engagement is simply the

political participation in one's own society that is appropriate to any citizen. This is perhaps particularly true for citizens of a country like the United States, where – thanks to an imperialistic power projected all across the globe – national politics powerfully impacts upon the rest of the world. But is it not also the case that there exist special opportunities – and even, as Chomsky (1969) has argued, special responsibilities – for political work for those with special knowledge, training, and expertise?

With respect to one's political engagement in one's own society, I think the answer is clearly yes. The anthropologist participates in the political process not only as citizen, but, willy-nilly, as "expert." Through teaching, public speaking, and advocacy, many Western anthropologists have applied their specialized knowledge to the task of combating imperialist policies and advancing the causes of Third World peoples. The involvement of American anthropologists in opposing US policy in Central America is a good example of this kind of engagement. The anthropologist who has seen "his village" exterminated by death squads, for instance, has both a special perspective and a distinctive political role to play on debates over aid to the "Contras" or support for El Salvador. Likewise, the field researcher who knows the Palestinians as real, flesh and blood human beings, and not only as shadowy figures brandishing machine guns, is in a position to combat the deceptions and misinformation that are put forward to justify the denial of Palestinian self-determination. And the anthropologist with first-hand knowledge of the realities of Southern Africa has both an opportunity and a responsibility to enter into the political debates surrounding *apartheid* and the world community.

Whether such a useful and appropriate role is available to the researcher in "the field," however, must remain in every case an open question. My own sense is that opportunity for such a role would exist only (1) where it is possible to identify interests, organizations, and groupings that clearly represent movements of empowerment, and (2) when a demand exists on the side of those working for their own empowerment for the specific skills and expertise that the specialist possesses. There are no doubt circumstances under which work for state or international agencies would meet these conditions. But the state is not the only game in town. The more interesting, and less explored, possibility is to seek out the typically non-state forces and organizations that challenge the existing dominant order and to see if links can be found between our expertise and their practical needs as they determine

them. Such counter-hegemonic alternative points of engagement ("counter-hegemonic" status depending always on an analysis of the local context, of course) might be found in labor unions, opposition political parties and movements, cooperatives, peasants' unions, churches and religious organizations, and so on. Such oppositional foci of power often have practical needs for empirical research, and sometimes even budgets and institutional support for it.

We must entertain the strong possibility that there will be no need for what we do among such actors. There is no guarantee that our knowledge and skills will be relevant. We must recognize that it is possible, too, that different kinds of knowledge and skills will be required, that the nature of our intellectual activity itself will have to be transformed in order to participate in this way. But the possibilities are there to be explored. Where such alternative points of engagement are available, of course, there may well be severe difficulties to be overcome in deliberately working against the existing dominant order. Official permission may be difficult or impossible to obtain, government harassment may in some settings make such research difficult, or even dangerous. There is no reason to assume that such an approach to applied research will be possible in every setting. But against such formidable obstacles, there may be some practical advantages, too. Anthropologists come cheap; they do not require big budgets or equipment or laboratories. What they do require is on-site room and board, inter-personal connections with a broad range of informants, and a stimulating intellectual context. Counter-hegemonic organizations and institutions can often provide these as well or better than the big state and international agencies, even where research budgets are small or non-existent. They may not be able to spring for a room at the Hilton, but the anthropologist's problem is usually getting out of the Hilton, not into it. Institutional linkages with such counter-hegemonic social forces will have to be built and worked at. They are not the connections that come most easily, and such a form of engagement will come about only by working against the grain, not simply by waiting to be summoned. But it is possible to imagine a network of researchers committed to forging such links, and to anticipate a day when such connections might multiply to the point where they become, if not commonplace, at least no longer so extraordinary.

These kinds of engagements will no doubt never replace or even seriously challenge the predominance of "development" in the world of applied social-scientific research. Such work will probably never by itself provide a living, let alone a profession or a career; by its nature it

must remain an intermittent and marginal practice. It does not take the place of "development," and it does not occupy the same space. It does, perhaps, offer a form of engaging one's intellectual and scholarly energies with the work of political and social transformation in a way that is consistent with the democratic and populist commitments that so many anthropologists share.

Notes

1 Introduction

- 1 This division of "mountains" from "lowlands" is sometimes expanded to a four-zone classification: lowlands, foothills, mountains, and the Senqu river valley, a strip of relatively low-lying land that winds some way up into the mountains.
- 2 The following lists of donors and "development" agencies have been assembled from the following documents: UNDP 1980, GOL n.d., GOL 1977, GOL 1975, TAICH 1976. The list is only as accurate as these documents, and it does not pretend to be authoritative. A number of agencies have no doubt been left out. It should be noted, too, that the donors and agencies listed are involved in Lesotho on very different scales; some are major actors on the local scene, while many others are involved in only a very minor way.
- 3 On "development assistance" to Lesotho, see Jones (1982), Wellings (1982, 1983), Curry (1980), Singh (1982), Linden (1976).
- 4 See, for instance, Myrdal (1957, 1968, 1970), Seers (1979a, 1979b), Streeten (1970, 1972), Hirschman (1963, 1967), Tendler (1975), Brookfield (1975), Bryant and White (1982), and Chambers (1983). More specific studies include Hunter, Bunting and Bottrall (1976), Morss *et al.* (1976), Arnold (1982), McNeil (1981), Mickelwait *et al.* (1979), and Morss and Gow (1983).
- 5 Within Marxism, it should be noted, there have been several important writers opposed to the neo-Marxist approach to development. Bill Warren (1973, 1980) has argued a strong case for imperialism as a historically progressive "pioneer of capitalism" and shown how much fight the orthodox Marxist view still has in it. For others, such as Cooper (1981) and Hyden (1980, 1983), if capitalism is not the engine of Third World development that Warren makes it out to be, this is only because it is frustrated by the resistances it encounters there. African underdevelopment is thus the sign of resistance to capitalist and state incorporation; from the point of view of capitalist development Africa is "under-exploited," its peasantry "uncaptured." Anne Phillips (1977) has attacked the whole neo-Marxist focus on the ability or inability of capitalism to promote "development" as an idealist approach attempting to base the case for socialism on an ethical objection to capitalism rather than on a scientific investigation of tendencies and forces immanent in capitalism. Gavin Williams (1978) and Corrigan, Ramsey, and Sayer (1978) have also attacked the neo-Marxist view of "development."
- 6 Writers in this vein include Magdoff (1969), Frank (1969), Hayter (1971, 1981), and Heatley (1979).
- 7 See works cited in Willis (1981).
- 8 Theorists in this vein include, with important differences, Althusser, Bourdieu, Bowles and Gintis, and Michael Apple. See Willis's afterword and