Revisiting Foucauldian Approaches: Power Dynamics in Development Projects

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This article sets out to rethink the usefulness of some aspects of the work of Michel Foucault to the study of development. Drawing on the detailed ethnography of a development consultancy, it focuses on how change was induced in an important and long-standing rural development project in West Africa. Foucauldian approaches provide a valuable conceptual framework for unravelling the regimes of rationality underpinning development institutions and practices. However, they fail to address satisfactorily the relation between discourse and agency within hierarchically stratified contexts. This article attempts to integrate the notion of discourse in an analytical framework specifically aimed at studying dynamics of power and hierarchy in development.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dynamics of power in development have been approached from different theoretical perspectives. The approach which focuses on development as a discursive formation[1] is particularly influenced by Michel Foucault's work on discourse and power/knowledge. This approach looks at development as an historically and culturally specific form of rationality which is inseparable from related regimes of practices and configurations of power. Leaving aside strictly linguistic uses of discourse [*cf. Roe, 1994; Apthorpe and Gasper, 1996: 4*], 'discourse' here coincides with the general definition provided by Grillo: 'A discourse (for example, of development) identifies appropriate and legitimate ways of practising development as well as speaking and thinking about it' [*Grillo, 1997: 12*].

The notion of discourse commonly employed in sociological and anthropological studies of development rests on Foucault's characterisation of the discursive field as the difference 'between what one could say correctly at one period (under the rules of grammar and logic) and what is actually said' [*Foucault, 1978: 18*]. This definition seems to work best in grand historical reconstructions of the conditions of possibility of the phenomenon of development. It implies that 'practices don't exist without a certain regime

of rationality' [*Foucault, 1991a: 79*]; that this regime of rationality is historically rooted; and that it works as a structure of knowledge, allowing, at any particular time, certain events and patterns of agency (for example, sending food aid in response to famine), and rendering unthinkable, unsayable, and undoable others (for example, using slave labour). Discourse works as a structure external to individual or collective actors, and to a large extent unacknowledged. Insofar as it invests actions and objects with meaning, and it bestows people with morally charged identities, discourse is a form of power. It is a power which precedes and encompasses agency: 'Power produces; it produces reality, it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him [*sic*] belong to this production.' [*Foucault, 1991b: 194*].

Foucault does not dismiss manifestations of power which become evident when powerful subjects impose their will upon others, giving rise to struggles against exploitation and domination [*cf. Foucault, 1983: 212*]. But, in the political and social dimensions of his work, he focuses on 'biopower', a form of power which 'categorizes the individual, marks him [*sic*] by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognise in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects' [*Foucault, 1983: 212*]. Foucault sees biopower as characteristic of modern governmental rationalities, yielding both totalising and individualising effects [*cf. Gordon, 1991: 8*]. The relevance of this notion for an understanding of power in development is illustrated by Arturo Escobar's suggestion to speak of development as 'a historical construct that provides a space in which poor countries are known, specified, and intervened upon' [*1995: 45*].

Under the regime of biopower no one controls, nor escapes, normative rationalities. These rationalities underpin hierarchies, and hence even powerful actors (their roles, functions and patterns of conduct) are subject to them. In the greatest part of his work, Foucault unravels the conditions of possibility for the establishment of specific power relations and the institutions they bear upon, rather than focusing on power as experienced by actors occupying different positions in a hierarchy. At a conceptual level, this entails, in a Nietzchean fashion, dispensing with the constituent subject and instead including the constitution of subjectivity itself in the research agenda [*cf. Foucault, 1980: 117*]. Methodologically, this approach relies on 'genealogy' to identify the events responsible for the constitution of normative rationalities through history, and without reference to a subject [*cf. Foucault, 1977: 146*].

A well known application of Foucault's theory to development is James Ferguson's study of the Thaba Tseka Project in Lesotho. Against those studies which take a development project to be explained 'when all the

interests behind it have been sorted out and made specific' [*Ferguson, 1994: 16*], Ferguson sees overarching 'discourses of development' as structures of knowledge which (pre)determine the ways in which development projects are 'allowed' to function and development practitioners are 'allowed' to act in specific historical contexts:

> seeing a 'development' project as the simple projection of the 'interest' of a subject (the World Bank, Canada, Capital, Imperialism) ignores the non- and counter-intentionality of structural production [. . .]. One must entertain the possibility that the 'development' apparatus in Lesotho may do what it does, not at the bidding of some knowing and powerful subject who is making it all happen, but behind the backs or against the wills of even the most powerful actors. [*Ferguson, 1994: 18*]

Explicitly following Foucault's analysis of the prison, Ferguson claims that, just as prisons fail to reform the inmates, so development fails to reduce poverty. Such apparent failure in achieving its explicit objective, however, corresponds to a success in the real function of development, namely expanding state power while at the same time depoliticising its own (pre-eminently political) task [*cf. Ferguson, 1994: xiv*].

Ferguson argues that focusing on the strategies of individuals or groups as if these were responsible for the course taken by events dismisses the fact that actors exist within wider historical and social forms of rationality which have structural properties: 'if the process through which structural production takes place can be thought of as a machine, it must be said that the planners' conceptions are not the blueprint for the machine; they are parts of the machine' [*Ferguson, 1994: 276*]. Following Foucault, instead of thinking of 'development' as the outcome of struggles and negotiations between actors controlling different stakes of power, he perceives actors as embedded in particular forms of knowledge which imply certain power relations and strategies of struggle. We are told that the effects produced by 'development' are the outcome of 'unacknowledged structures' [*Ferguson, 1996: 20*], and the 'constellations of control' they give rise to are 'all the more effective for being 'subjectless' [*1994: 19*].

Foucault's theory of power, and Ferguson's application of it in his analysis of the 'anti-politics machine', have been criticised for providing a totalising view of history. It has been argued that too much emphasis on external structures and discourses fails to give a cogent account of human agency [*cf. Fardon, 1985; Giddens, 1987: 98; Grillo, 1997*]. Anthropological studies of development have consistently shown that so-called 'project beneficiaries', and marginal groups in general, resort to a multiplicity of strategies and forms of negotiation or resistance in order to carry out their own 'projects in the

Project' [*Long, 1989; Arce, Villarreal and de Vries, 1994; Grillo and Stirrat, 1997; Torres, 1997; Arce and Long, 1999; Bierschenk, Chauveau and Olivier de Sardan, 2000*]. If the majority of these contributions have tended to emphasise what might be called 'room for manoeuvre at the bottom', several authors highlighted the ways in which people 'at the top' are able to make a difference to policy events [*Grindle and Thomas, 1991; Haas, 1992; Keeley and Scoones, 1999*]. Amongst those supporting this view, de Vries has the merit of raising the issue of responsibility, which tends to be obfuscated in discursive approaches:

> there is (…) something wrong in assigning responsibility to some impersonal 'development apparatus'. Blaming some abstract 'anti-politics machine' for the marginalization of the settlers absolves a number of actors who might, rather consciously indeed, have been in favour of such an outcome, and others who did not care very much about its consequences [*de Vries, 1992: 93*].

The philosophical issue at stake is that of how, if actors are fully cultural and social beings, they can do anything which is not already present, suggested, or imposed on them by their society and social group [*cf. Ortner, 1984: 155; McNay, 1992: 61*]. Foucault's writings tend to establish a 'destiny relationship' between agency and its products [*cf. Fardon, 1985: 130*]. In other words, given a historically specific encompassing structure of knowledge, could actors have 'acted otherwise'? To what degree is their pattern of conduct predetermined by structural forces alien to their agency and volition (a destiny)?

   Anthony Giddens has argued that 'Foucault's history tends to have no active subjects at all. It is history with the agency removed. The individuals who appear in Foucault's analysis seem impotent to determine their own destinies' [*1984: 98*]. In his own work, he has illustrated both the constraining and enabling properties of structure (duality of structure), suggesting that the agents' capacity to monitor action reflexively implies a degree of 'context freedom'. Indexicality of contexts, namely, the characteristic of social arenas to be organised through publicly recognisable institutions and concepts, is central to the duality of structure. It constrains socialised individuals by providing them with pre-existing meanings and institutions, responsible for common awareness of the settings of action and a meaningful social world. But indexicality is also enabling, as it allows individuals to adopt a reflexive stance *vis-à-vis* overarching contexts, and critically to induce change [*cf. Giddens, 1984: 100*]. Following Giddens, actor oriented approaches to development see agency as dependent on the capability of the individual to 'make a difference' to a pre-existing state of

affairs [*cf. Long, 1989; Long, 1992; Long and Van der Ploeg, 1994: 82; Long, 2001*].

This debate is complicated by the problem of consciousness. At one level, with McNay, Foucault's writings fail to distinguish between 'practices that are merely ''suggested'' to the individual and practices that are more or less ''imposed'' in so far as they are heavily laden with cultural sanctions and taboos' [*McNay, 1992: 75*]. At another level, while Foucault, Giddens and Bourdieu develop different theories of power, they share a notion of agency which implies that the agent relates to socio-historical contexts in an unconscious way [*cf. Giddens, 1984: 26; Bourdieu, 1990: 55*]. Both Giddens and Bourdieu differ from Foucault in that they focus on the ways in which actors strategically use cultural resources at their disposition to unfold idiosyncratic projects. But they too propose that socialised, historical actors pursue their strategies at a level of knowledge that eludes consciousness of the cultural rules of the game (the discourses) they willingly or unwillingly partake of [*cf. Fardon, 1985: 141*]. Against this, Mouzelis has argued that:

> participants are capable and willing to take a discriminatory stance *vis-à-vis* institutional and figurational wholes in order consciously to generate transformational or conservational projects. Bourdieu and Giddens' key concepts hinder the explanation of situations where actors try, in a quite deliberate and conscious manner, to use rules and resources (in Giddens' case) or their positions and dispositions (in Bourdieu's) not as means but as topics [*Mouzelis, 1995: 125*].

The implication of this argument for the study of development is that the effects produced by discourses of development cannot be seen as the outcome of entirely 'unacknowledged structures' [*Ferguson, 1994: 20*]. These structures *can* be acknowledged (as proved, ironically, by Ferguson's own work), and to some extent resisted in the form of writing and/or political activism. Failure to address this point results in the improbable suggestion that the only actor capable to 'decipher' the structural conditions for action is the social analyst. Discursive and structuralist approaches share a tendency to privilege the sociologist's explanation with respect to the actors' interpretations of events. Socialised actors are seen as relating to context in an unconscious manner, while the observer's interpretation is removed from context and acquires an absolute value [*cf. Bourdieu, 1977; Rabinow, 1984: 23; Fardon, 1985: 141*]. This intellectual strategy plays the 'God's eye trick' by concealing the situatedness of its own perspective [*Haraway, 1988*]. However, it has been argued convincingly that claims to objectivity miss the point, and reflexivity can only be achieved by subjecting the position of the sociologist to the same critical analysis as that of all other actors [*Bourdieu,*

1977; Haraway, 1988]. The sociologist as well as the subjects of sociological analysis are all engaged in providing positioned interpretations; what changes is their situated perspective in relation to the events. This has theoretical and methodological consequences for an appraisal of Foucauldian approaches to development.

Theoretically, it urges us to think in terms of a plurality of discourses, in relation to which actors are differently positioned by virtue of their status and identity. While no discourse is intrinsically 'truer' or 'falser' than the others, some discourses develop into a discursive configuration, and others exist in a state of marginality. In his work on governmentality (and to some extent in the History of Sexuality), Foucault's thinking accounts for hierarchy and agency in the deployment and control of discourses more than is usually recognised. He introduces the notion of 'strategic reversibility' to account for forms of resistance to governmental power, and argues that the history of government as the 'conduct of conduct' is interwoven with the history of dissenting 'counter-conducts' [*cf. Gordon, 1991: 5*].[2] This allows him to raise questions directly pertinent to the situations created by 'aid':

> What individuals, what groups or classes have access to a particular kind of discourse? How is the relationship institutionalised between the discourse, speakers and its destined audience? How is the relationship of the discourse to its author indicated and defined? How is struggle for the control of discourses conducted between classes, nations, linguistic, cultural or ethnic collectivities? [*Foucault, 1978: 15*]

While these questions indicate an awareness of hierarchically stratified subjectivities reacting to and manipulating discourses, Foucault does not tell us how he reconciles these views with his work on the prison and his earlier studies [*cf. McNay, 1992: 49*]. It is difficult to assess the implications of this quote for Foucault's theory of power/knowledge. Because Foucault equates power and knowledge [*cf. Foucault, 1991b: 27*], he limits the extent to which actors can be seen actively to manipulate knowledge in power games which do not take place between equals. In this respect, the analytical tools developed by Pierre Bourdieu may be better suited to examine the place of agency and hierarchy in development. This is because Bourdieu's work allows us to think of development in terms of fields (for example, the field opened by a project's or programme's 'intervention'). The configuration of the field at any one time is determined by the distribution of capital among the actors occupying positions in it, including the sociologist. Hence, external structures (Foucault's power/knowledge) influence agency, but the config-uration of external structures is continuously being reshaped by the actors' strategies, in proportion to their relative power. [3]

Methodologically, bringing under scrutiny the position of the observer entails reconsidering not only the status of his/her interpretations, but also the nature of ethnographic writing [*cf. Marcus, 1995; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997a; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b; Marcus, 1999*]. Self-reflexivity with regard to the positioning of the researcher throughout fieldwork finds its counterpart in an awareness of the ways in which one's writings fit into the wider arena of multi-vocal representations concerning the object of research. Part of one's research consists in 'disentangling dense webs of already existing representations, some of which are likely to have been produced by the subjects themselves' [*Marcus, 1999: 23*]. Hence, one's writings exist in parallel with a multiplicity of other situated texts: '[e]thnography thus becomes a kind of writing machine among others' [*Marcus, 1999: 23*].

The conceptual and methodological issues outlined above are not unrelated. This is due to the particular nature of the object of study. The field opened by development intervention[4] is characterised by different cultural spaces discontinuous from each other (the area of project intervention, donor and recipient countries' Ministries and aid institutions, etc.), and it brings together different categories of actors (planners, development workers, so-called 'beneficiaries') belonging to different cultural and social formations [*Long, 1992; Long, 1996*]. Foucault worked across time within the same spatial and cultural domain. But what happens when one addresses cultural as well as temporal discontinuities [*cf. Donham, 1998: 6; Stoler, 1995*]? The analyst is faced with complex and permeable interfaces between different discourses. One must assume varying 'degrees' of context freedom *vis-à-vis* discourses into which actors are socialised, and culturally exogenous discourses. The room for manoeuvre available to agents willing to manipulate discourses of development changes with their relative implication into these discourses. Moreover, it is not only that there are different discourses, but also that these discourses are stratified along axes of inequality [*cf. Moore, 1994: 100*].

The study of development has benefited from the application of 'mainstream' Foucauldian notions of discourse and power/knowledge. These notions have made possible a critical deconstruction of the totalising discursive formation of 'aid', the constellations of power it gives rise to, and its concrete impacts on North–South relations. However, dominant development discourses are syncretically integrated into different structures of knowledge, undergoing a continuous process of (re)localisation [*cf. Long, 1996: 50; Fardon, 1995*]. In this process, 'dissenting counter-conducts' tactically manipulate dominant structures of knowledge as marginal actors envisage different trajectories for development interventions. Actors manipulate discourses of development in a deliberate manner, both as means and as topics [*cf. Mouzelis, quoted above*]. In this paper's conclusion, I argue

that this order of questions cannot be addressed satisfactorily by Foucauldian approaches unless they are adapted to the specific characteristics of the object of study.

The case discussed below offers a review of the negotiations which took place over the evaluation of the performance of an important integrated rural development Project (hereafter IRDP) in a West African country in the Sahel. I too had a role in this story, for as a consultant I was asked to contribute to redefining the project's strategies and objectives. My position, at once of researcher and 'circumstantial activist', forced me to reflect on how my own project of interpretation/representation interacted with the events I observed and participated in [*Marcus, 1995: 113; Marcus, 1999: 17*]. For reasons of confidentiality, I have disguised the identity of this Project, and of all the persons involved in it.[5] The contribution of anthropological theory and methods to the analysis of development reveals background knowledge of negotiations and decision making, which is concealed by official documents and reports. This enquiry contributes in important ways to our understanding of the informal and moral criteria underpinning development work, but in the process it must avoid harming the privacy and interests of the people involved. While my choice to anonymise was induced primarily by ethical considerations, I feel that it did not compromise the general argument, which is based on an assessment of the categorical and institutional roles of the actors, rather than their individual identity. It may be helpful if I briefly summarise the circumstances that this paper comments upon.

IRDP was conceived at the beginning of the 1980s under an umbrella programme known as Initiative to Fight Against Desertification in the Sahel (hereafter, First Initiative). It was primarily aimed at fighting against desertification and soil erosion. It was financed by a Western aid agency (hereafter AID) and, until 2001, implemented by a United Nations agency (hereafter UNX). For 15 years since its beginning in 1983, IRDP was a 'flagship' of AID and UNX development practice. It was widely acclaimed by the recipient country's authorities, AID planners, UNX experts, members of IRDP staff, consultants and various groups of 'beneficiaries', especially for the effectiveness of its Soil and Water Conservation (SWC) techniques, and the involvement of the target population. AID and UNX disputed the Project's 'paternity' between them, and IRDP was described as 'the jewel in the crown' of donor aid to the Sahel region of Africa.

However, by the end of the 1990s, AID planners were under pressure to conform to a new development paradigm which emphasised the primacy of poverty reduction amongst policy goals, and the necessity to let poor people themselves determine what their needs were, and how they should be met. AID policy makers formulated a new Programme to fight against desertification for the reduction of poverty in the Sahel (hereafter, New

Programme) and, against this new policy framework, IRDP suddenly appeared as a 'failure'. The ideas which supported the original Project formulation, and Project activities and methods, had become outmoded with respect to new overarching policy models, and had to be changed. IRDP had to be turned into an 'example' of the new policies, and a consultancy was sent to operate this transformation.

This article describes a situation whereby a powerful development discourse managed to impose itself *in spite of* the interests and negotiations of different categories of actors. Which forces direct policy and implementation? What degree of 'context-freedom', or room for manoeuvre, do different groups of actors have with respect to overarching discourses? What happens when some actors support a line of conduct embedded into dominant discourses, and others do not? Can 'dissenting' actors, who fail to abide by the rationality of overarching discourses, ever make a difference to policy? Addressing these questions exposes the relative strengths and limits of Foucauldian approaches to development. It also provides insights into the broader question of how much room for manoeuvre we can expect to be available to actors whose voices and perspectives are not represented in dominant development rationales.

II. THE INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (IRDP)

In December 1982, a joint identification mission in which UNX, an AID team, and the CILSS (*Comité Inter-états de Lutte contre la Séchéresse dans le Sahel*) participated, laid out an outline of problems related to desertification, soil erosion, and drought affecting what would become IRDP's intervention area in the Sahel. A second mission was sent by AID in March 1983 to the same area, resulting in the formulation of an 'Operational Plan for IRDP'. In December 1983, AID signed an agreement with the recipient country, which assigned UNX the Project's execution. The World Food Programme of the United Nations (WFP) would provide food for work rations for local labour working for the Project. The Project started its activities in May 1984. In 1991, the Project intervention area reached its present extension of about 13,000 square kilometres, with about 400 villages and 300,000 inhabitants. The funds provided by AID amount to a total of about US$ 60 million up to the end of 1999. The World Food Programme contributed 12 million food rations, whose value is estimated to correspond to about US$ 17 million.[6]

IRDP is a Project for 'fighting against desertification'. Although 'environmental rehabilitation' always remained its primary activity, it carried out a whole range of different types of interventions. The project's popularity derives from the nature of its environmental rehabilitation approach. It is

possible to distinguish a first group of activities in the field of soil and water conservation aimed at protecting the environment against erosion and at rehabilitating degraded lands for farming and herding purposes. These include the construction of anti-erosion bunds; reforestation trenches on slopes and hillsides; windbreaks in the valleys; dense tree planting along water-courses; and dense planting of trees and rows of dry millet-stalks on sandy dunes. Other activities are specifically aimed at controlling the hydraulic regime, and include the building of hydraulic structures in gabion weirs, such as check dams, detention dams, water spreading dams and earth dams. IRDP also conducts different types of activities in the field of social development. These include farming, herding, and fishery extension; hygiene and sanitation training; micro-credit; the establishment of a rural radio; and activities for the promotion of the role of women.

Approximately, by the end of the Third Phase in 1999, IRDP had created 50 artificial lakes, two extension dams, 40 earthfill dams and 20 dikes. It had applied soil and water conservation techniques to 6,500 hectares on glacis lands, 3,000 hectares on plateaux, and 580 hectares on hill-slopes within the intervention area. It had produced and planted, with the cooperation of women's groups, about 16 million reforestation seedlings. It had built 40 schools, three maternity centres, four vaccination parks, three veterinary posts, 15 village shops, 70 storehouses, and 65 village wells. It had promoted the formation of about 200 women groups which were involved in activities coordinated by project extension agents, including micro-credit, adult literacy courses, planting reforestation seedlings, and hygiene committees. Also about 20 male farmer groups had been formed and were assisted by Project extensionists on techniques to improve farming productivity. This is far from being a complete list of Project activities over its first three phases, but it gives an idea of the nature of the project's intervention.

There have been few systematic attempts to measure IRDP's impacts on local livelihoods, and the indicators of impact available are far from satisfactory. Due to the scarcity of reliable quantitative assessments of Project impact, the most meaningful indicators of IRDP results are the statements of members of the target population (some of which are reported below), and comparisons of aerial photographs taken before and throughout Project intervention. These different sources concur in suggesting that IRDP has succeeded in improving the conditions of the region's resource base and system of production.

IRDP continuously received demands for the opening of work-sites from villages in the intervention area, which influenced the selection of intervention sites, provided that they conformed with the project's methodology. However, in its first three phases, it was primarily 'technical' criteria which determined the nature and sequence of interventions, and the

participation of people from the local population took place primarily in the form of employment on Project worksites. By the end of the Third Phase, this mode of popular engagement in Project activities did not count as 'participation' anymore within new international development discourse.

The labour force is constituted of volunteers of the villages in which the works take place, remunerated in World Food Program (WFP) food for work rations.[7] Most of the 400 villages falling in the intervention area know the Project through its 'fight against desertification' worksites. Because almost all adult men migrate seasonally to find manual jobs in the capital or other large cities in neighbouring states, the project's labour-force consists mainly of women and adolescents. Project works are normally stopped, or substantially decreased, in the rainy season (June–September), when men come back from abroad to work in their fields. They leave again after the harvest. Cereal production varies consistently from year to year, and in good years it might be just enough for some wealthier farmers to provide food for the household, while in average years it is in deficit, and migration earnings and food rations, when available, are used to integrate consumption. IRDP operates on a vast region, and there are variations to this pattern.

Society in the intervention area is highly stratified, and higher classes are wealthier, possess more and better lands, and have a larger web of social connections to rely upon in times of scarcity. Better off people, mainly concentrated in bigger villages, will do work on Project sites only if in real need, as this work is characterised as low status and is physically demanding. In this sense, food for work is 'self targeting', as it is mostly those people who do not have the means to fulfil their yearly food needs who will be willing to work for the project. This is the condition of the vast majority of women and men living in small villages. These villages are recurrently vulnerable to drought and food deficit, and anthropometric measurements show medium to advanced levels of malnutrition, which are most acute amongst children.

For this poor majority, IRDP provided services and built infrastructures which had, according to local producers, scientists, planners and consultants alike, a visible impact on the local system of production (especially through the availability of water and fodder), and had a monopoly on employment opportunities during the slack season for women, who remained in the villages when their husbands migrated. As we shall see below, IRDP's popularity among so-called 'beneficiaries' was due to the fact that Project intervention was perceived by men and women alike as improving their living standards. But despite the project's popularity in the intervention area, by the second half of the 1990s the nature of Project activities and methods had become obsolete with respect to prevailing development paradigms. AID

had been criticised by a mid-1990s DAC Peer Evaluation and planners had to incorporate new international concerns into their development practice, of which IRDP stood as a visible example.

III. LIKE WEARING A UNIFORM: ACHIEVING CONFORMITY IN DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSES

In the year 2000, 17 years after the beginning of IRDP upon the bases set by the First Initiative, AID prepared a new umbrella programme. The New Programme was characterised by an emphasis on participation and local ownership, and was only one facet of a more general redefinition of AID policies which, at least since the mid-1990s, had tended to put poverty at the top of the aid agenda, and to establish the centrality of participatory approaches. This trend reflected an increasing coherence of AID policies with those of other international aid institutions. Hence, a second DAC Peer Review of AID argues that, since the mid-1990s Review, AID had achieved considerable progress in the poverty reduction field, including 'the decision to mainstream poverty reduction in [AID's] programme, consistent with the International Development Strategy'.

AID policy documents are explicit in recognising that change in policy models involved a convergence with international trends, and particularly with the World Bank's position. Although an emphasis on 'participation' appears in AID documents at least since the 1980s, and was not absent from the First Initiative, the coupling of poverty reduction and a particular type of participatory approaches (inspired by Robert Chambers' writings on PRA) belongs to a new generation of development policy models [*cf. Stirrat, 1997*]. AID policy documents attribute to the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers a pivotal role in defining the framework of poverty reduction efforts.

AID professionals who had followed the New Programme's preparation claimed that AID perceived the New Programme as a way to further consolidate its alignment with the World Bank's Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Dr Allen, a researcher and development worker who contributed substantially to the conception and the writing of the New Programme, argued that AID planners saw the positive experience of IRDP as a way to insert themselves in the international debate of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers.

According to Dr Allen, the main difference between the First Initiative and the New Programme was the greater emphasis which the latter put on the notion of participation. Dr Allen had known IRDP since its early phases, and thought that IRDP had been successful in many ways, but found its management approach centralised and top-down, and in contrast with the new

participatory tenets of AID. According to him, despite IRDP's 'undeniable technical achievements', other AID projects in the Sahel had been more successful at stimulating the participation of local people. He attributed this to IRDP's first Project Manager's approach (Dr Baker), in which he recognised both qualities and defects:

> [Dr Baker] took the Project in his hands and started working, overcoming enormous difficulties: the bureaucracy, the garage, machines, contracts … it was him, with incredible sacrifices and organisational skills, who surmounted all difficulties, but at the same time, he became, as it often happens, a kind of satrap of the Project. There was a dialogue between [Dr Baker] and the prefect, who at the time was the number two of [the recipient country's dictatorial] regime, and probably [Dr Baker] was in contact with the President himself. All decisions passed from the authoritarian channel which had the prefect at the top.

Dr Allen had followed AID development policy and practice for years, and while he had collaborated with AID on many occasions, he had done so mostly as an external adviser and consultant. He had been a pioneer of participatory approaches in AID. Already in the 1980s, his writings stressed the importance of adopting a participatory demarche, in IRDP and in all AID interventions. However, Dr Allen recognised that the recent emphasis on participation which characterised the New Programme did not come primarily from an internal reflection on 'lessons learned' from AID projects, but exemplified a more general tendency of development bureaucracies to conform to the same policy models:

> This is how bureaucracies work: first they check if you are wearing the uniform and then they listen to you. That's why there is such a tendency for everyone to say the same things in the same way. Because otherwise you are excluded from this hierarchy that is supported by bureaucracies: […] these are hierarchies that give you or do not give you the imprimatur.

'Wearing the uniform', or adhering to the same overarching frameworks, at the end of the 1990s, meant conforming to what Stirrat and Henkel [*2001*] have called 'the new participatory orthodoxy'. Because IRDP is highly visible and stands as an example of its kind, according to AID officials it could not be allowed to run counter to the new participatory approaches. As Dr Clark, one of the coordinators for the Programme's conception and implementation argued, 'IRDP should now become a reference point for a

forthcoming series of new experiences in the Sahel along the lines of the New Programme'.

Dr Clark welcomed the fact that AID 'had IRDP', as it could serve as a template for new projects in the region. Differently from less successful projects financed by AID, IRDP was known, in the development field, for its success in the 'fight against desertification'. Transforming this 'flagship' Project into an example of participatory approaches would validate AID policy in poverty reduction and muster political support to AID. According to AID officials responsible for the coordination of the New Programme, the most important AID Project in the area could not diverge from new AID approaches in development.

A series of consultancies, aggrandised as 'missions', were organised to make IRDP comply with the New Programme in the second half of the 2000. IRDP was then entering its Fourth and (supposedly) final phase. The consultancies also had to identify the main strategic axes along which the Project was going to function during its last years of work in the region. A briefing with Dr Clark was organised for the consultants before their departure. At the meeting, he supported the view that the Project had to change from a Project that manages preconceived activities to one that provides services to the local community, for activities selected by the community itself. He wanted the Project to put an end to 'its top-down approach':

> we are not going to define a list of specified activities, we are not going to set aside 100 millions for papaya and 150 millions for 'ant-breeding'! Local people will have the opportunity to obtain loans, getting a chance to realise their objectives. They are the ones who know best what is the most profitable investment in their context. This way, it will be the people [...] who will decide what is the best way to make use of the Project.

One consultant who had been working in IRDP for almost 15 years, residing there for eight years, aware of the importance attached to hydraulic and rehabilitation works by the people living the intervention area, argued that the main supporters of the hydraulic works component were indeed some of the local inhabitants, and that it was 'local people' who first insisted that the Project carried out its environmental rehabilitation works. But Dr Clark responded:

> if we start with this attitude we'll never end. I understand that it is important for the Project to 'make works', but now the priority is to change the Project's approach and methodology. In this phase, even if

not a single work was realised, I would not worry. The only works that should be done are in the aim of testing the new approach.

The strongest supporter of IRDP's changes (Dr Clark) had never been to IRDP, and knew little, if anything, of the local social organisation and production system. His role in AID did not require him to be familiar with individual projects, but to ensure that AID projects were coherent with AID development policies. These policies were informed by overarching development discourses. IRDP had always been invoked at workshops and in publications as a success story, which legitimised AID's policy and UNX's technical solutions. Now it had become unfashionable on the international development scene. Change was not, or at least not primarily, compelled by observations of problems 'in the field', but rather by the necessity to show that AID's projects and policies were consistent with international development paradigms. Ironically, this highly 'top down' change was operated in the name of 'bottom up' and 'participatory' ideals.

IV. RECONCILING DIFFERENCE: THE MEETINGS BETWEEN DONORS AND RECIPIENT OFFICIALS

In the country hosting IRDP, the 'mission' was accompanied for the first five days by Dr Davies, a representative of AID. Dr Davies had followed the activities of IRDP closely since its inception and had been to IRDP on several occasions. Within AID, he belonged to a network of support to IRDP, which tried to bring together different interests and perceptions of the project's role. The main reason for his presence at the beginning of the 'Mission', was to meet the Minister of Agriculture and to make the opening speech at the project's Pilot Committee meeting.

The Minister delivered a message of the Head of State to the 'Mission'. The message outlined the recipient country's priorities for the project's future agenda, and it expressed the President's wish to 'see the experience of IRDP extended to other districts'. He expressed his country's goal in the field of environmental development as 'the control of surface waters', in which, in his words, 'IRDP stood as an unparalleled example'. The President also wished the tenure question and the management of common property resources in the Project area to be taken into serious consideration by the Project in the future.

The President at the time of our consultancy, had been closely connected to the Project and its manager in the 1980s, when he held the post of Prefect in the Project intervention area. The project's methodology in the 'environmental rehabilitation' field was well known to him, as he had followed Project activities and results for some years. A replication of IRDP's

environmental approach in other regions had been one of the President's objectives in his election campaign. IRDP's strategies in the field of environmental rehabilitation were consistent with his country's rural development policies, and represented one of the main reasons for the appreciation of AID's work at the end of the 1990s. Hence, from the perspective of the recipient country's authorities, IRDP was especially valuable for its 'hard', infrastructure building components, introducing a first difference from AID's perspectives. A second difference exposed historically rooted variations in the interpretation of the notion of 'participation'.

National visions of the project's 'participatory status' were influenced by the ways in which it had intertwined with the country's political history in the course of its long life-span. In the recipient country, IRDP had once been known as an example of popular 'participation'. The project's First Phase coincided with the establishment of national institutional frameworks for the participation of all citizens into national reconstruction. The immediate priorities of the country's participatory institutions were drought control and famine relief. The massive female participation in IRDP's environmental rehabilitation works became the emblem of presidential populist visions of development, and was widely celebrated in the national press, as well as in the reports of WID[8] oriented gender consultancies. In the first five years of Project intervention, national participatory structures and Project participatory approaches coincided: '[IRDP] has been elaborated to serve as a technical, logistical and financial support to [national participatory structures] in the [Project intervention area]' [*Project Report, 1987*]. Because of the ambiguity of the notion of 'participation' [*cf. Mosse, 2002*], in the recipient country many people saw the Project as an example of popular participation to environmental reconstruction.

Dr Davies's acquaintance with the project's history in national politics, and in general with different actors' views about the project, was vital at the Pilot Committee Meeting, which was held on the day following the Mission's visit to the Minister. Here, Dr Davies emphasised elements of continuity between donor and recipient perspectives on the project, and he did not fail to mention the connection between IRDP and the President. When the National Project Manager[9] spoke, he reminded the audience that project staff had already started preparing for the Fourth Phase, sometimes referred to as 'disengagement phase'. To the manager, 'disengagement' entailed 'progressively remitting responsibility toward the management of natural resources and infrastructures to the local inhabitants'. He went on to describe the options taken by Project staff in order to achieve this goal, which he saw as the fundamental objective of the Project at this advanced stage.

At the meeting with the Pilot Committee, the New Programme was not mentioned. Statements were made to emphasise commonalities of intent and

reduce discrepancies. Having completed their meetings in the capital, the consultants moved to the intervention area, where they were to remain for about three weeks.

V. FINISH WHAT YOU HAVE STARTED OR GO AWAY: LOCAL REACTIONS TO PARADIGM CHANGES ACROSS GENDER AND CLASS

Project staff had started introducing the idea of the winding up of the Project to the people of various villages. At a meeting including the representatives of approximately 15 women groups from different villages and the respective village chiefs, the Project manager exhorted everybody to start thinking that the Project was going to finish in a not too distant future. He went on to say that in its final stage, the Project would shift its focus from infrastructure building to stimulating a sense of ownership of resources among the 'beneficiaries'. The people were disappointed, and openly expressed the wish that the Project would stay. One village chief reacted worriedly: 'Our village has been waiting for the Project to take its water problems into consideration for years and years. Is the Project going to leave without completing its task?'

At the end of the meeting, I remained in the village to meet some people while the rest of the party made its way back to the headquarters. A man in his mid-forties, who had worked as a site leader on Project intervention sites, thought that there was still a lot to do for the Project in the region, and commented evocatively: 'It is like when you start constructing a building: you have to complete it'. I thought that his statement concisely summed up the local position: it implied that the Project should continue carrying out its 'original' activities, identified with the infrastructure-building component of IRDP intervention, rather than switching to new ones. Overall, no one wanted the Project to leave. An elder commented in a concerned way: 'If the Project were to leave for good it would be a catastrophe here'. The project's activities had not been uniformly distributed in the intervention area. Some villages had benefited more than others from Project interventions, and resented the idea that the Project might leave without addressing their specific problems. There was an inter-village competition over Project activities, and different categories of actors within each village tried, for slightly different reasons and in different ways, to attract the Project to their village. At the root of the Project's popularity among the 'beneficiaries' were food for work and the results of environmental rehabilitation works.

Women who had worked on Project worksites could describe very accurately several categories of Project intervention. They all insisted that the Project should stay and carry out more works close to their villages. Some of them explicitly said that they wanted to work for the Project in order to obtain

food for work rations. A woman said that it had been two years now that the Project had not come to work in her village: no new trenches had been made, and old trenches had not been maintained. 'We want work', she said. 'What kind of work?' I asked. 'Stones work'[10] she replied. Fewer women mentioned the impact of the activities on the environment, mainly for granting them access to water. Some women argued they had thought the Project would never leave and said that if the Project was going to leave, no one would help their villages anymore. Men and women, elites and commoners, never failed to express their preference for the infrastructure building component of IRDP, and attached less importance to other Project activities.

In the local construction of gender roles, male household heads are seen as responsible for the subsistence of their household's members. Seasonal migration is presented, by men and women alike, as the way in which men fulfil their 'breadwinner' role. Migrating to cities around the month of November and returning in May, adult men are able to earn the cash which is needed to buy food to cover the production deficits on their own lands. Women stay behind with elders and children, and feed themselves and their families with the cereal reserves from their household's harvest. It is women who provided the bulk of the labour force for IRDP, as Project works are interrupted during the rainy season when migrants return and local producers focus on agricultural work. In the local vernacular, women often referred to the Project as 'work', and both men and women argued that the Project 'benefited', or 'was useful' to their villages. Women invariably emphasised the importance of food for work. Instead, the environmental impact of Project activities was mentioned more frequently by village elders and men.

A widow in her thirties, with two dependent children, had worked on the Project's worksites for four years. When I met her, it had been a while since there had been a worksite in her village. 'We want work!', she said, when I asked her what she thought about working with the Project:

> We want work, we are always ready to work, tell them to come to [our village]! The women's group is active in our village. [...] When the Project worked here, they brought us millet [food rations], they brought us machines, they brought tools,[11] and we did our work and these things were helpful to us. But now all the other villages have had new worksites, except for us. Many works have been carried out in [a neighbouring village], but the Project has forgotten [our village]. If I could, I would go to work in other worksites.

Would she work without food rations, I asked. 'No, I wouldn't, I need them to feed my family. The Project gives rations for the work, why should I work

without them?' She followed the literacy course, I said, would she continue the course if there were no rations with it? No, she wouldn't. No woman I met was willing to work in the worksites without the rations. As some of them put it: 'would *you* work for nothing?' 'We want work', was a refrain in every village I visited. Because almost nobody was willing to work without rations, it was clear that the main reason why women wanted the Project to open worksites in their villages was to have access to food for work.

Men's position with regard to Project interventions was slightly different. The Project's impact on productive resources was more significant for local men than for women, as men have greater access to, and control over, land and cattle than women. Despite a husband's long periods of absence from his village, and the responsibility accrued to wives while the men are migrants, women control and own a smaller proportion of productive resources than men. As a consequence, men displayed a greater awareness of the Project's environmental impacts. When asked to comment upon the Project works, they would almost invariably mention the creation of new water resources and the increase in vegetation.

I recorded the following account at a small gathering at the compound of a respected elder from a village where the Project had carried out a large variety of activities. I had asked him if he could tell me the story of the Project. The neighbour exclaimed: 'The works the Project did for us are many: it did the dam for us, it did the trenches, it did the [anti-erosion] bunds, it did the school, it did the store-house ... what has it not done for us?' A woman grinding millet said 'Praise be to God!', as a sign of agreement. Then our host began talking:

> In the past there were many trees in [this village] and people used to hunt wild animals who hid in them. The hills were covered with thick bush. But then many problems were brought by the drought: the people suffered for lack of food, desertification reduced the fodder and then followed the death of the animals. The trees which covered the hills decreased and the (temporary) river course became deeper. Many men migrated. And the village people couldn't prevent the destruction of the soil.
> Thank God, the Project came and restored the land. It did many different things. It planted trees in the hills, and it planted trees on the dunes: it planted so as to stop the wind's erosion, and it fixed the [temporary] river, so that the water would stay for the people and the animals.
> The Project opened a worksite in [this village], and distributed food rations. In the worksite, people worked for the preparation of anti-erosion bunds, for which machines are needed for subsoiling and for

carrying the stones. Many women worked in the land rehabilitation activities and got food rations to bring home. [...]

The work of village people was to gather stones on the hills and load them on the trucks, and then cover the anti-erosion bunds with them to make them resistant. In a worksite they also built the dam using stones and trucks. The Project built a road and a school for the children of our village. Trees started growing again on the hills. Harvests of sorghum and millet on the glacis relieved the people.

He stopped. During his talk the neighbour and the woman interjected expressions of consent many times, saying 'that's true', 'Praise be to God!', or simply clicking their tongues. The presentation of the Project's activities resembled the accounts I recorded in other villages which had hosted many worksites.

Also in the town where the Project had its headquarters, the mission had a number of 'official visits' on its agenda. Perhaps the most important one was with the regional customary authority,[12] who had a strong personality and always claimed what he perceived as his right to have a say on the Project's activities in the region falling under his influence. Project managers would consult him before starting a new type of activity, and, in general, official missions used to pay him a visit and report to him about the mission's objectives. On this occasion, he addressed the consultants with a severe tone. Having listened carefully to the mission's reasons for being there, he replied:

Finish what you have started, or go away. All other donors have abandoned us because of your presence here. Because we hosted the famous IRDP Project, we haven't got an NGO either. Now, you tell us that you might leave. You go away without even completing here. And in the last years of your stay here you want to concentrate on some little game with the population. Many villages [in the region] are not self sufficient [for food production]: you must complete your work. [...] The village chiefs come together with [me]: here are our villagers, they wait and wait ... Now, if you want to stay here doing some little activity, then go away directly, because you are just impeding others to come.

His speech, delivered publicly in front of his court stimulated a choir of agreement from the village chiefs, elders, and dignitaries present. There was no doubt that different categories of villagers in the Project intervention area not only wanted the Project to stay, but wanted it primarily to continue its standard 'land rehabilitation' interventions without, as they put it, 'losing time' adopting new approaches. As an old woman with a long standing

association to the Project for her participation on the working sites commented:

> what new approaches can there be? The people here always communicated with the Project! That's why you know what people want: we want dams, we want work, right? We want food for work!

In every village, people had a list of desiderata which they wanted the Project to assist them with. They consistently argued that the Project should have stayed as long as possible. In a few villages, the villagers, coordinated by village chiefs, had piled up heaps of stones. This was one of the first steps required for building hydraulic structures. The Project normally distributed food rations to workers who engaged in stone carrying. But some villages had done so spontaneously to demonstrate their willingness to cooperate, and as a way to attract the Project's attention to the acuteness of their problems.

VI. IMPOSING 'PARTICIPATION': THE MISSION'S CONCLUSION AND THE PROGRAMME'S COORDINATOR'S COMMENTS

The conclusion reached at the end of the mission was that the Project should focus on three main axes:

(a) Finalisation of interventions in the environmental domain according to defined criteria.
(b) Income generating activities mainly in the field of agriculture and horticulture.
(c) Other measures, which included the organisation of local resource management institutions responsible, inter alia, for the maintenance of hydraulic structures and for the supervision of reforestation sites.

In emphasising these objectives in their reports, the consultants believed they were reflecting the priorities of different categories of stakeholders, which had become evident in the course of their mission. Instead, they had found it difficult, in the light of the problems which had become evident during their stay, to introduce the changes required to make the Project fit into the New Programme. The mission's Report argued that adaptation to the New Programme should have taken place in a gradual way. However, the report's conclusions were not particularly welcomed by the official responsible for the organisation of the New Programme (Dr Clark). At the meeting organised to discuss the report's findings and recommendations, he told the consultants:

You say we have to keep building dams. Fine. [...] But *what do the people* want? [...] The Project has to be participatory. I don't care if IRDP stops making dams altogether.

His preconceived association of 'dams building' with 'hard', top-down development, and of other 'participatory approaches' with 'soft', 'pro-people' development, made it almost unconceivable to him that what local people in fact wanted were 'dams'. He was disappointed to see that AID's priority, transforming IRDP into an example of the New Programme, did not figure as an urgent measure in the consultants' report. He argued that the problem with sending experts who are familiar with a project is that they are conditioned by their previous knowledge of the project. A few months later, when the New Programme had reached a more advanced stage, the technical coordinator of the New Programme was sent to IRDP, to re-arrange Project approaches according to New Programme priorities.

VII. CONCLUSION

I have outlined in the Introduction how the Foucauldian notions of discourse and power/knowledge were originally developed to address different contexts from the ones examined in this article. In particular, the aim of Foucault's work has been to grasp the conditions which make certain practices acceptable (and sometimes unavoidable) at a given historical moment [*cf. Foucault, 1991a: 75 ff.*]. This approach has been usefully applied to the study of development by authors who have unravelled the regimes of rationality at work in specific development institutions and practices [*cf. Esteva, 1992; Ferguson, 1994; Escobar, 1995; Cooke and Kothari, 2001*]. However, Foucault's theory does not always provide a satisfactory explanation for two orders of questions which are central to the field of development: the relationship between different categories of actors and a particular kind of discourse; and the strategies and negotiations for the control of discourses conducted by differently positioned groups [*cf. Foucault, 1978: 15, quoted above*].

A concern with this order of questions has led a number of authors to integrate the notion of discourse in analytical frameworks aimed at understanding the relations between agency and hierarchy in development. Escobar talks of 'the production of discourse under conditions of unequal power' [*Escobar, 1995: 9*]. Shore and Wright, looking at discourses of policy, try to identify the types of resources which political actors bring to bear on policy processes to make their discourses prevail. They argue that contributions to their volume 'reveal how [discourses] are constantly contested and sometimes fractured' [*1997: 20*]. 'A key concern is ''who

has the power to define'': dominant discourses work by setting up the terms of reference and by disallowing and marginalizing alternatives' [*Shore and Wright, 1997: 18*].

In the field of development, discourses are stratified and the point of view of the dominant [what Bourdieu calls the doxa, cf. *Bourdieu, 1998: 75*] presents itself as a universal point of view and has effects on a greater scale than those of other discourses. One of the clearest examples of this is Fairhead and Leach's examination of the contrast between the formulation of problems in development environmental policy and the perspective of villagers 'whose views have been subjugated and everyday activities criminalized, within this formulation'. [*Fairhead and Leach, 1997: 35*]. The knowledge incorporated in policy models has consequences for reality, but it also reflects and supports the position of some actors more than others. Actors in unfavourable bargaining positions may apparently 'buy into' dominant discourses, because it is these discourses that offer criteria which can influence the configuration of the political field at any specific time. This is well documented in recent work on development brokers by Francophone anthropologists of development [*cf. Bierschenk, Chauveau, Olivier de Sardan, 2000*]. One has to conceive the possibility that dominant discourses may be strategically manipulated by different actors with different ends in mind. Hence, discursive conformity ('wearing the same uniform') should not be automatically taken as evidence of strategic convergence.

In the case discussed above, donor and recipient perceptions of IRDP differed. However, most parties wanted the Project to continue, and were aware that, by the late 1990s, IRDP's intervention had to be 'framed' along the lines of the dominant participatory and poverty-focused rhetoric [*cf. Apthorpe and Gasper, 1996*]. Hierarchy is recognised by less powerful actors who use (instrumentally or subversively) dominant definitions to pursue their own agendas [*cf. de Certeau, 1984: xiv; Scott, 1990: 5–6*]. In this light, strategies are often characterised by bargaining over meaning, or by an attempt to frame one's 'projects' in terms that are consistent with dominant discourses. Upfront confrontation over what should be done is rare, because actors in weaker bargaining positions are unlikely to be able to make their interpretations prevail. In the example discussed in this article, different categories of actors perceived Project intervention differently, and envisaged different trajectories for the Project. AID planners were anxious to make it conform to international discourses to gain international legitimacy; in the recipient country the Project occupied a special role in national environmental policy and its replication was used by politicians to achieve grassroots support; and, to the target population, IRDP offered goods and services which a resource-poor state failed to provide.

Despite these interpretative differences, the case presented above shows that the new development discourse managed to impose itself. The actions of all actors, even the most powerful, should be interpreted in the light of the structural conditions in which they are embedded. In this light, Dr Clark acted as a *deus in machina* more than a *deus ex machina*, in the sense that his institutional role required him to choose a course of action in conformity with dominant development paradigms.[13] For their decisions to be effective in the field of development, actors have to observe the 'forms and formalities' governing that field at a specific time [*cf. Bourdieu, 1991: 20*]. AID planners, national officials, Project staff, and, to some extent, different groups in the target population, tried to cast IRDP's intervention in the new forms of aid rationality integrated in the New Programme. Consultants failed to play by the rules of the game and faced irrelevance.

It may be argued that the degree of context-freedom available to social actors varies with their relative implication in particular discourses. In the case study presented above, planners, 'recipients' and consultants were differently positioned *vis-à-vis* development discourse. Planners reproduced and imposed a discourse they partook of insofar as their institutional role, as bureaucrats working for the donor agency, was entirely subsumed in it. Not only was it AID bureaucrats' mandate to apply these rationalities to programmes and projects, but their own performance would be evaluated against these same rationalities. So-called 'recipients' assessed Project intervention according to different criteria; while they were socially and culturally distant from international development discourses, they could not afford to dismiss them, as their relative powerlessness in the field of Project intervention entailed the *de facto* marginalisation of their perspectives. Recognising their own position within development hierarchies, they bargained to retain those Project components which mattered most to them. Local bargaining tactics varied across class and gender. Playing on the notion of participation ('people always participated in the project') and continuity ('continue what you have started') were attempts to turn dominant discourses to their own ends [*cf. de Certeau, 1984: 35–37*]. The position of consultants is more ambiguous. Differently from bureaucrats, their roles are not entirely implicated in the development field. They often simultaneously belong to other professional fields (academic, scientific, etc.) governed by different norms and values. They can interpret development policy and practice according to different criteria which, while falling outside dominant development paradigms, can effectively be applied within their respective professional fields. In the case discussed above, at least some of the consultants were disposed to oppose official development rationales and represent Project activities according to alternative criteria.[14] This was due to their institutional affiliations, in which the 'aid apparatus' played only a

secondary role; to their long-standing familiarity with the people living in the project area; and to their personal attitudes. Unlike the villagers, because they belonged to an international elite, their voices could be heard. But they dismissed or failed to realise that by rejecting the dominant development perspective they were cutting themselves out of a game which, as the villagers knew and cared to remember, is essentially political. Ultimately, only those courses of action which could be inscribed in dominant aid rationales would appear to be legitimate.

It has not been my aim here to highlight general weaknesses in Foucault's work, nor in its application in James Ferguson's study of the Thaba Tseka Project. Theoretical frameworks must be tested against the questions they set out to answer. Perhaps Foucault's principal contribution to the social sciences has been to illustrate how forms of rationality embedded in cultural wholes have totalising effects with regards to the patterns of conduct and forms of identity available to individuals and institutions. He has vividly illustrated that actors do not control the symbolic, but are constrained by the inexorable vocation of knowledge to cast meanings upon deeds, thoughts, and identities. Shedding light upon the operation of power/knowledge has potentially liberating effects for those actors who are marginalised in specific cultural settings. This approach is vital in any attempt to unravel the structures of meaning which sustain a global order that produces inequality, while claiming to deal with it. Ferguson's explicit aim was to show how the development apparatus reflected overarching structures of knowledge making possible specific forms of 'intervention' in Lesotho and upon its citizens, while failing to interpret the country's situation accurately. Undeniably, this is a valuable contribution to our understanding of how development works. However, the theoretical framework he adopted does not provide an entirely satisfactory explanation for the negotiations which take place between Project workers and various categories of beneficiaries in his own brilliant ethnography of the 'bovine mystique' (see especially Ch. 5 and Ch. 6). Here, we see men and women, elders and youth, envisaging different trajectories for the Thaba Tseka Project's livestock component, and trying to manipulate development rationales to their own advantage. For this type of context, a conceptual apparatus that unveils the relation between structure and agency within hierarchically stratified contexts is needed.

This article has argued that some of the theoretical tools developed by Michel Foucault can and should be usefully incorporated in the study of development. As Ferguson argues, today's North–South relations cannot be explained away by mere reference to the interests and strategies of different actors. These strategies are embedded in structures of knowledge which shape agency by projecting meanings and values upon it. But it is important to realise that actors continuously adjust their trajectories on the basis of what

may be called a 'positioned awareness' of how these structures work and what they entail for them [*cf. Bourdieu, 1991: 242*]. This is particularly evident in the field of development, where actors (especially the 'recipients' of policies and 'interventions') are faced with discourses to some degree external to their language, culture, and society. Relative 'distance' from the sources of development rationality increases the room for manoeuvre available to the actors involved. But negotiations do not take place between equals. While it is important not to characterise less powerful actors as passive, there is a difference between framing the terms of reference for discursive struggles and being at best able to manipulate dominant orders of discourse subversively.

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NOTES

1. A 'discursive formation' is a historically rooted system of knowledge in which particular statements and acts make sense. In this article, I sometimes use the term 'paradigm' to indicate a general conceptual framework and/or set of beliefs shared by practitioners of a certain discipline [*cf. Kuhn, 1970*]. It should be noted that, in Foucault's work, 'paradigm' is not interchangeable with 'discourse' [*cf. Foucault, 1983: 60*].
2. Here Foucault seems to address directly some of the issues raised by de Certeau in relation to Foucault's own work: 'How can we explain the *privileged development* of the particular series constituted by panoptic apparatuses? What is the status of so many other series which, pursuing their silent itineraries, have not given rise to a discursive configuration or to a technological systematisation? They could be considered as an *immense* reserve constituting either the beginnings or traces of *different developments'* [*de Certeau, 1984: 47–48; italics in original*].
3. Bourdieu distinguishes power (capital) from knowledge or culture (the habitus). Actors controlling greater stakes of capital influence the configuration of the field more than less powerful actors, who are nevertheless engaged in an ongoing struggle to improve their bargaining positions. Foucault's theory can only be 'stretched' to examine the strategies of actors belonging to a specific discursive formation as they attempt to manipulate the discourse they partake of and other discourses. Bourdieu's notion of 'field' is more flexible, as the structuring conditions for action (habitus) are incorporated in the actors' ad hoc practices, rather than being imposed on her/him by any particular field.
4. A number of recent anthropological contributions have drawn the discipline's attention to complex social formations which do not constitute geographically, socially, or culturally bounded and/or uniform objects of study [*Hannerz, 1987; Appadurai, 1991; Hannerz, 1991; Fardon, 1995; Marcus, 1995; Kearney, 1996; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997a; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997b; Shore and Wright, 1997; Keeley and Scoones, 1999; Marcus, 1999*].
5. All the names mentioned in the case study are pseudonyms.
6. In order to maintain the anonymity of the project I could not include references to my sources on data and figures relative to the project.
7. For the first three phases, the standard food for work ration had the following composition: millet, 2.250 Kg; sugar, 0.050 Kg; oil, 0.075 Kg; cow-peas, 0.200 Kg; tinned meat, one tin. The total cash value of the ration is US$ 0.86.
8. Women in Development (WID) is a set of approaches which informed the debate of the First UN Conference for Women in Mexico in 1975. The primary concern of the WID agenda was

the integration of women in project and programmes, not only as wives and mothers, but also as producers [*cf. Razavi and Miller, 1995*].

9. This is not Dr Baker, who was a donor country member, but the recipient country agronomist who replaced him after his retirement. To avoid confusion, I shall refer to him as 'National Project Manager'.

10. One of the most common tasks carried out on project worksites is the displacement and piling-up of stones for filling gabion weirs and dikes, or for reinforcing earthfill structures.

11. The 'machines' (such as bulldozers and tractors) and tools (axes and shovels) are not left in the villages after a work has been completed at a site.

12. This figure is recognised as a moral and spiritual authority by modern political institutions. Officially, regional chiefs exercise a mostly nominal power over a number of villages falling within their area of influence. However, depending on personal characteristics and socio-historical contexts, traditional authorities can exert considerable power through their leverage on village chiefs and local power networks.

13. Robert Wade's discussion of Stiglitz's and Kanbur's 'resignations' from their positions at the World Bank can be seen as an example of how powerful actors who do not conform to dominant discourses are rejected by institutional structures partaking of these discourses [see *Wade, 2002*].

14. It should be noted that consultants do not frequently choose to contradict the donor's agenda, partly because they maintain a realistic understanding of the 'rules of the game', but also because this would decrease their chances of being offered new consultancies in the future.

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