



Fieldwork Relations in the context of Development or Emergency Access, risks, knowledge, restitutions

*International conference of the Euro-African Association
for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development (APAD)
Montpellier, 13th - 15th of June 2013*

Call for papers

New deadline for abstracts : October the 31th

Fieldwork relations at the centre of the anthropological approach

Fieldwork relations – i.e., the manner in which relationships between multiple actors encountered in the course of research are managed – is at the center of the anthropological approach. Fieldwork relations are based on an important personal investment in the production of data and the search of a “qualitative rigor”. The emergence of new anthropological research objects has displaced and at the same time renewed this question. The classical scenario of the anthropologist studying cultures of distant peoples installing herself or himself in a village without necessarily asking its inhabitants of their views has been replaced by that of researchers studying stakes which are at the heart of current events, situated in varying relationships of otherness with the social groups being studied, and confronted by diverse institutional, political or media actors operating or researching in the same fields. Negotiating long-term access to the field, the legitimacy of anthropological knowledge, the reflexivity of local actors to their own situation, their expectations vis-à-vis the researcher, and relationships with dominant institutions, have now become necessary questions in ethnographic research. These questions are also more and more shared with other social science disciplines which practice research on the field (qualitative sociology, social geography etc). With the reflexive turn of anthropology and other social sciences in general, comes the awareness of relativity in anthropological knowledge and its expression to other knowledgeable experts (and politicians). This further poses the question of restitution and debate on research results and how the studied actors use these results.

The reflexive turn and new objects of anthropology of development

In the last decade, a number of works and meetings have explored the mutations of research politics. They have been notably interested in the implications of “sensitive” fields or even the question of “the anthropologist in danger”. In the field of development and humanitarian aid, the reflexive turn has also been distinguished by the renewal of ancient reflection on the different types of relationships between research and action. A more systematic exploration of the heuristic range of the various possible postures an anthropologist may assume vis-à-vis aid

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institutions as well as populations which can be termed as "vulnerable" is being witnessed. The anthropology of development has for a long time been polarized between a radical critic of the developmentalist enterprise and implication in action without reflexivity. Innovative works, however, adopt postures which have more shades. This can be in the form of a reflexive return to experiences of implication at the centre of projected devices or by taking as objects of study the internal logics of aid institutions. The production of experts and the frames of action at the centre of these institutions or even the daily work and professional identities of the experts who constitute them are also studied more and more.

This reflexive renewal is even more necessary as new fields are being explored by development anthropologists today. These fields include conflict zones and zones of lawlessness, refugee camps and "emergency" situations, situations of daily violence as well as development cooperation institutions as seen from the inside. With these new fields, it is clear that the anthropologist is in constant interaction with a wide range of actors involved in the field of development cooperation, and that she/he has to negotiate her/his place and relationships, or indeed negotiate her/his research objects. Anthropological production is modeled by these interactions in varying degrees and is, after all, partly co-produced by these actors.

In particular, this has been the case in recent experiences of collaborative multi-disciplinary research, as well as research conducted within the framework of expert work, which more and more attempts to structure and institutionalize relationships between researchers, institutions and research, or to explore different forms of "epistemological partnerships" with aid experts. Recent works by researchers who have worked in aid institutions have opened up new perspectives on the production of knowledge on the practice of development in these institutions.

Questions related to confidentiality, anonymity, risks to which the researcher exposes her/his informants, and citizen involvement are also posed in a new way. Getting consent from the actors is not sufficient, as there is a need to also anticipate consequences of the research in order to protect them from potentially compromising or even dangerous repercussions due to their participation.

Themes

For its 2013 conference, the Euro-African Association for the Anthropology of Social Change and Development (APAD¹) proposes to deepen the methodological, epistemological and ethical questions which are inherent to the relationships of research in humanitarian or development aid situations. These situations are characterized by contexts of poverty, distress or violence and by intervention by national or international institutions which are trying to manage them. The actors

¹APAD is a network promoting dialogue between African and European researchers in the social sciences as well as with development agents. Initially devoted to the empirical studies of interactions brought about by development, APAD's approach has evolved towards research regarding social change on the African continent in its broadest sense. Website: <http://www.association-apid.org/>

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are multiple (local strategic groups, administration, NGOs, projects, consultants, etc.). Access to the field or to information can be more or less dangerous, particularly in conflict zones or refugee camps, more so when institutions and local political actors produce their own discourses on the realities being studied and present themselves as "guardians of the truth". Furthermore, the relationship with aid institutions, which sometimes finance the studies, is more ambivalent than ever. Particularly problematic is the relationship of the anthropologist – and for that matter the researcher in social sciences in general – towards labels, intervention categories and cognitive frameworks produced by these aid institutions.

The papers can therefore explore the ethical and epistemological stakes posed by fieldwork relations in the development field, and the diverse postures which the anthropologist can adopt in different situations (more or less conflicting or subject to external intervention). These postures can range from the distant observer to the participating observer, from external research to research in collaboration with aid institutions or from distancing to implication. Experiences from collaborative research with aid institutions or from aid practitioners will be of particular interest.

The papers could analyze the research context in a reflexive approach; how to negotiate access to the field, difficulties in accessing information or strategies for avoiding bias and instrumentalisation, the question of protecting informants and the ownership of data, confrontations of discourses and knowledge on the object, the ways in which the anthropologist influences her/his object and is in return influenced by her/his particular position, the way in which fieldwork relationships influence writing and publishing strategies in terms of confidentiality, protection of sources, etc.

The papers could also come from actors of development or humanitarian aid, and could describe the manner in which anthropological research, whether independent or under the diverse forms of contracting or negotiation, in their institutions or the fields in which they have intervened has taken place or how they have experienced it. This would provide analysis to the question of research practice and confrontation of knowledge from the point of view of practitioners.

In other words, the focus will be on presenting and explaining the influence of fieldwork relationships and the type of adopted posture on the nature of data produced and the strategies of restitution and publication in the field of development, humanitarian or emergency aid. Furthermore, it will be a question of showing how knowledge in the field of Development Anthropology is co-produced by the relationships maintained with a number of other actors, and to pose the question of possible instrumentalisations of this knowledge and *in fine* of the responsibility of the anthropologist.

By exploring the way in which one has done her/his work, in a way which is more or less structured and well-thought out, her/his relationship to others and her/his methodology vis-à-vis what is at stake in her/his research, the ethical and epistemological problems that are posed, and the constraints and difficulties encountered, the contributions could concern one or more of the following thought axes or situations:

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- *Daily violence or extreme poverty*, where confrontation with the other's suffering is sometimes coupled with risk taking for the anthropologist and her/his informants.
- *Humanitarian emergencies, civil war or post-conflict*, where present or past violence is sometimes coupled with military or humanitarian intervention
- *Research inside aid institutions* whether centered on said institutions, their staff, or their interventions, whether this research has been done autonomously or on the institutions' demand.

Practical information

- The **working languages** of the conference are English and French. There will be no simultaneous translation.
- **Abstracts** of a maximum length of 500 words must be sent to the e-mail address apad@antro.uu.se, **before the 31th of October 2012**. Please write **"APAD Colloque 2013"** in the e-mail subject and **your full name, affiliation and contact information** in the e-mail text.
- Authors whose abstracts have been retained will be **notified before the end of December 2012**.
- The **complete texts** of the papers (maximum of 7000 words or 40 000 letters including spaces) **must be sent in before the 31st of March 2013**, in order to allow the organizing of the sessions.
- A very limited amount of **financial coverage of participants' travel and accomodation** will be possible. Participants are encouraged to look for the necessary means to cover the costs of their participation to the conference by themselves.
- Foreign participants, particularly African ones, are encouraged to start the process of **getting a visa** in advance. APAD will provide certificates to those participants whose papers will have been accepted.
- All participants presenting a paper **must be members of APAD**. The contributions to become members can be paid to the presidency of APAD in Sweden or to the general secretariat based at LASDEL in Niger. Members are entitled to information letters and to bulletins.

The **annual contributions** are as follows:

- monthly income of more than 800e : 39€.
- monthly income of less than 800e : 19€.

Registration fees to the conference are fixed at **40 €**.

Payments will be done by bank transfer only to the account of APAD:

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