

Anthropology and Participatory Research: Ethical Considerations in International Development

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Abstract

Anthropologists working in the field of development may encounter a number of difficult ethical issues, although there is comparatively little literature that directly addresses such dilemmas. Potential concerns include questions of access to development and participation in projects and plans; questions about how research is used; issues of power differentials in the field; and the problem of ownership of knowledge. Participatory development research rhetoric and practice has in part arisen out of recognition of these ethical concerns. Through an examination of the history of international development research, and the bases upon which participation lies, it is argued that the concept of participation is not without its own ethical dilemmas and assumptions. A discussion of the history and interpretation of development and participation in parts of rural Nepal is used to illustrate this argument.

Keywords: development, ethics, participatory research

In this paper I examine some of the ethical issues that anthropologists doing applied development research may encounter. I ask what issues might arise, and how they are negotiated, addressed and shaped by the institutional and bureaucratic development structures such as aid agencies, with which development anthropologists may be affiliated. I then argue that participatory research methods have in part arisen as a response to two key ethical dilemmas in development research: power differentials in the field and related issues of knowledge generation, and the ownership of this data. Participatory research, however, leads to different ethical concerns, which must be considered.

Although we might assume that ethical considerations are crucial in anthropological research of any kind, Morales-Gomez correctly points out that there is comparatively little writing on development research and ethics, particularly in the context of specific projects (1992). Ethics may be presented as peripheral and relatively fixed, rather than central and in flux. While this does not necessarily mean that ethics are not continuously being considered during and after the research process, there is a comparative gap in the literature, which could be filled to the benefit of students, aid agencies, researchers and those who are the targets of development. I will begin to fill some of these gaps.

The structure of this paper reflects the perspective that past and current ethical concerns must be placed in a historical context. I first offer a brief discussion of the history of development paradigms and related ethical questions. Participatory research approaches and their philosophies are critically examined in terms of their ethical implications. Finally, a brief case illustration of development projects in rural Nepal demonstrates some past and on-going ethical issues and the implications of participation in anthropological development research.

Development: History and Critiques

Bourgeois' statement that ethical issues in cultural anthropology must be understood in the context of the history of our discipline (1991: 110) is directly applicable to ethical issues in development anthropology. That is, to fully grasp the ethics of development, they must be framed in the history of development paradigms and practice. Similarly, the ethical conduct of development researchers must be placed in the context of relationships between industrial societies and developing nations (Morales-Gomez 1992: 199). Thus, it is important to recognise ethics are not being confronted in isolation by researchers. Funding agencies and organisations also have roles in development research ethics norms and debates.

Although it may be tempting to discuss development as though it were an unchanging monolith, such a perspective does not allow for an in-depth analysis of the multiple practices and policies of the agencies, states, organisations and individuals doing development. Moreover, trends in international development cannot be easily divided into ‘then-and-now’ categories. Development paradigms from the past are still in use today. Nevertheless, there are some key points that can be discussed. These include early framings of development as salvation, a focus on economic growth, the categorisation of diverse cultures and communities, and the professionalisation of international development studies. These issues overlap and intertwine with one another.

Loosely, development refers to a process of intervention aimed at bettering the lives of those living outside of Western, industrialised countries. Areas historically targeted for development include Latin America, Africa and much of Asia. The idea of development arose during the post-WWII period. The Truman doctrine, aimed at providing a ‘fair deal’ to the world, worked to effectively divide nations into ‘developed’ and ‘underdeveloped’ categories. Science, technology and economic growth were identified as the best ways in which to improve the lives of those living in underdeveloped locales (Porter 1999: 6; Escobar 1995). Economics and economic growth was, and in some cases still is (Pigg 1992; Kurian 2000; Mukta 1995), the primary focus of development. Moreover, modernization was perceived as implicit and inevitable in the process of development, providing a certain image of what was best for the developing world.

Early on, terms and expressions such as development as “salvation” and as “bringing the light” (Escobar 1995: 25) lent a missionary air to project goals. Linking this perspective with certain political and economic practices, such as capitalism and the free market, has been characterized by some as an attempt to control the Third World such that it was no longer a threat to Western notions of prosperity (Porter 1999: 6). This has also been called a more subtle and indirect continuation of colonial

practices (Escobar 1984; Pigg 1992; Nustad 2001). In international development circles, the citizens of developing countries were generally discussed as problems or objects (Ingham 1993: 1813) for which interventions were planned for their own good.

Porter (1999) has argued that international development paradigms tend to be based upon two axioms, although they are less entrenched now than in the past. First, outsiders are generally considered to be able to identify and correct problems through externally developed interventions. Second, economic growth is often discussed as inevitable, unproblematic, and necessary for the improvement of the lives of individuals in underdeveloped areas (3).

These axioms interact with three aspects of development identified by Escobar: the forms of knowledge that are used in the process of developing interventions, the system of power that structures the practice of creating and implementing institutions, and the ways in which subjects of development are constructed by these policies and practices (1995: 10). More specifically, this refers to an ethos of Western expertise, the professionalisation and bureaucratization of development, and the creation of certain categories with which to identify groups and communities within development discourse (Escobar 1995). These trends are intimately related to Nustad's (2001: 482) qualification of development as trusteeship, where only outsiders are perceived as capable of creating life-improving interventions.

Earlier development paradigms, those conceived during the 1950s to early 1970s, tended to be technocratic, centralized and contemptuous or dismissive of local knowledge (Pottier 1993: 13; Escobar 1995: 43). A rational perspective, in which peoples in developing nations would naturally accept superior knowledge and technology (Stone 1992: 409), went hand-in-hand with the dismissal of local cultures.

This encouraged the professionalisation of development, evidenced by the rapid creation of development studies programs in universities (Escobar 1984: 387), entrenching beliefs that expert and scientifically based knowledge was best suited for

interventions. This was demonstrated by the identification of problems, the determination of research agendas, and the implementation of interventions by outsiders (Chambers 1994b: 1255), largely without consideration of local knowledge. Knowledge, therefore, was controlled and shaped by Western experts in an attempt to “produce a regime of trust and norms” (Escobar 1984: 387) about development and its practice.

The professionalisation of development and the regulation of certain kinds of knowledge can be linked with institutionalization. Structures and agencies were developed at the international, state and local levels to allow the process of development to take place (Escobar 1984: 388). With institutionalization tends to come regulation and centralization. This makes it difficult to incorporate the knowledge and practices that do not fit into the institutional mould. Thus, not only was Western knowledge valorized and local knowledge discounted, but also the structure of development institutions made it difficult to offer alternatives.

This has implications for the ways in which the subjects of development were constructed and categorised. The initial categorizing of large portions of the world’s population as ‘underdeveloped’ was refined and added to with various other labels, including ‘the poor’, ‘the illiterate’ and ‘the hungry’ (Escobar 1995: 54), which allowed institutions and researchers to overlook the differences between and among groups of people in the Third World. Indeed, Third World citizens were often socially constructed prior to any contact with development agency representatives and researchers (Escobar 1995: 107). This had the effect of reducing the lives of people to a single, universal case (Escobar 1995: 110, 196). The creation of universal categories, without a deeper understanding of the multiple and variable structures that allow for persistent restricted access to resources, resulted in issues such as poverty and malnutrition becoming depoliticised (Nustad 2001: 482). Poverty and hunger were therefore often constructed as technologically and scientifically manageable (Escobar 1995) as local situations were subsumed under professional discourses.

If the 1950s to the early 1970s were characterized by universals and hierarchical ideas of knowledge, Pottier (1993) has called the 1980s a “soul-searching” decade in development. This “soul-searching” came out of a burgeoning recognition that the human factor in development contexts needed to be considered and worked with (13-14). People were gradually recognised as key to development, and there was a move away from a development paradigm, which focused on economic growth and technology alone, to one, which increasingly considered the capacities, power, and capabilities of people. During this period, anthropologists were more and more likely to become involved in development research, as a result of the recognition that project ethnography could play a major role in the creation of more effective interventions (Pottier 1993: 32). The growing inclusion of anthropologists in development work has implications for the ethical issues of researchers on the ground.

Development Research: Some Ethical Issues and Implications

Development anthropologists face similar ethical responsibilities to all anthropologists, particularly applied anthropologists (see Fluehr-Lobban 1998). These encompass avoiding harm and exploitation in the generation of knowledge, to respect human wellbeing, dignity and privacy, and to disseminate research results to the public (American Anthropological Association 1998). In the development research context, these responsibilities are embedded in a larger ethical context of doing development research that leads to beneficial and workable interventions.

Chatwin's (1988) three degrees of anthropological research ethics provide a useful frame in which to discuss development ethics issues, both currently and past. I will first discuss questions of which we work for while doing research. This is followed by a deeper concern with rigid codes of ethical conduct that can ignore “the moral and human dimensions of the political and economic structures” in which we do research

(Bourgois 1991: 112), and a critique of universal ethical norms in general (Morales-Gomez 1992). Finally, and most importantly, two major ethical themes have shaped research methodologies. These concern 1) the power differentials in the research interaction and how this shapes the data gathered; and 2) issues of who owns the knowledge generated. Although I will briefly address each of these concerns, the last two themes will be the focus of my discussion. It is these themes, which have directly contributed to a search for alternative research methodologies.

In the First Degree: Researcher Concerns with Employers

Chatwin's first degree of anthropological ethics is related to a focus on the researcher's perceptions of the problems of others, but which truly reflects our own preoccupations (1988: 178). Ethical concerns about competing interests and whom exactly the researcher is working for (Cheater 1985; Morales-Gomez 1992) correspond to this degree.

Porter argues that feminists working in development find themselves in a web of structural contradictions within development agencies that tend towards an economic understanding of development (1999: 11). Feminist development researchers may therefore find the ability to act within research communities constrained by the policies, practices, and perspectives of the agencies with which they are affiliated. The problem of which researchers are working for is not new nor is it limited to development work (see Fluehr-Lobban 1998). There may be conflicting interests between whom the researcher works for or is affiliated with, and what he or she perceives to be ethical practice.

Development research often takes place as part of a policy creation process. In this case, researchers are often commissioned to support one policy initiative against another (Hintjens 1999:387). Hintjens thus argues that the real danger is that academics working as consultants will tend to produce the kind of research that is asked of them. This often means a focus on key topics that do not leave much opportunity to examine wider political and ethical issues (1999: 387). In other words, the

policies of development agencies may put pressures on a researcher. These policies can lack a context-specific understanding of research problems and ethics, and the sociopolitical environment (Morales-Gomez 1992: 212). A generalization of ethical practice in the context of development reflects the previously discussed tendency towards the universalization of problems, communities and interventions.

Cheater (1985) has discussed the issue of anthropological researchers being linked with government development policy research, and the question of where our anthropological responsibilities lie when governments as advisors or researchers hire us. Although few anthropologists are likely to affiliate themselves with questionable government schemes such as the proposed and discarded Project Camelot (see Fluehr-Lobban 1991; Nader 1997), they may feel a sense of ethical unease at some of the potential uses of the research being done in the name of development policy.

In addition, anthropologists working in development may find themselves in situations of conflict with state governments. Cheater (1985) offers the example of working with aid agencies whose policies come into direct conflict with the policies of national governments. Ultimately, anthropologists working on behalf of external development agencies or internal government development projects are likely to come into conflict with groups of people who feel they should have the right to manage their own affairs and resources without external influence (Cheater 1985: 68). The position and actions of the researcher in these situations are likely to lead to ethical questions about our functions and research goals.

The Second Degree: Ethical Codes of Conduct

Chatwin's second degree of anthropological ethics considers what the researcher thinks and experiences while doing research (1988: 178). This is a deeper level of ethical reflection, although it continues to centre around the researcher. Critiques of ethical normative codes correspond to this degree.

Rigid codes of ethical conduct and arguments about universal ethical practices are discussed in the context of anthropological research ethics. Bourgois' (1991) consideration of the ethics of ethnography, although not directly about development and somewhat dated, is relevant to development research. In a discussion of his graduate research during a civil war in El Salvador in the early 1980s, Bourgois argues that when we allow our ethical problems to become subject to rigid interpretations and codes of conduct, we may be placing ourselves in opposition to human rights concerns (1991: 112). Ethical codes may be premised on a logic that ignores or diminishes the reality of power relations in our research settings (1991: 120).

Bourgois' (1991) concerns with codes of conduct are directly applicable to the development research context. There is a need for a complex understanding of development ethics similar to his call for a more complex ethics of ethnography. However, Morales-Gomez (1992) argues that the risks of development research are often reduced to a few normative procedures that minimise complexity. These norms are based on an assumption that procedures, including a by-rote gathering of informed consent, and standard privacy and confidentiality assurances, can be meaningfully applied independently of the cultures in which research is being done, and regardless of the research methodologies being employed (1992: 199). In addition, normative procedures too often place the researcher at the centre of ethical concern, rather than those who are the subjects of development research (Morales-Gomez 1992: 203). Both of these points can be connected to a development paradigm that places the researcher-expert at the centre of development interventions, and which privileges expert knowledge above local knowledge. Similarly, ethical norms and considerations centre around Western, rather than local concerns and practices. This can work to minimise discussion about ethical concerns.

When agencies set their ideological practices and goals, when they allow the use of universal categories in developing interventions, and when development research adheres to notions

of poverty and hunger as technical, rather than political issues, a kind of deception in research may be the outcome (Morales-Gomez 1992: 211-213). Since issues of deception are related to judgments about potential risks and benefits (Morales-Gomez 1992: 213), lumping communities and individuals into undifferentiated categories such as the 'the poor' and 'the underdeveloped' has potentially negative effects on specific communities. Deception on the part of researchers and development agencies may not be intentional, but it may be a result of a misguided perception of what apparently undifferentiated individuals and communities need in order to become 'developed'.

The Third Degree: Power Differentials in the Field, Knowledge Generation & Ownership

The third degree of anthropological ethics represents a recognition that our roles in research may be multiple and conflicting, along with a consideration of how those we are researching perceive us and our projects (Chatwin 1988: 179). This deeper degree of ethics leads to the primary issues that arise out of development research. These are 1) the problem of power differentials in the field and their relationship to data generation; and 2) the use and ownership of knowledge and data. Confronting these issues can lead to a questioning of our roles and methodologies in the field. These factors are interrelated, and as will be discussed, have contributed significantly to the development of radical participatory research methodologies.

Discussions of power differentials come from the realisation that all too often, development research interactions are inherently shaped by imbalances of power, authority and the control over resources of various kinds (Norton 1998: 179). Generally, it is the researcher who determines the research agenda, who has the ability to decide whose voices get listened to and included in research, and who determines what is valuable knowledge. This can in part be a reflection of the policies of the agencies with which researchers are affiliated, and may also be a manifestation of how divorced anthropologists may be from

policy-making power within agencies and nations (Morales-Gomez 1992: 212; Pottier 1993: 22).

Gordon (1991) has argued that anthropology as a formal discipline in the West was developed by elites for elites. This refers to an argument that anthropological research, including development research, can be used to empower elites through the dissemination of information that reinforces patterns of domination. Similarly, the professionalisation of development, and the depoliticization of problems such as malnutrition, can mean the generation of knowledge that reinforces the positions of elites.

Previously discussed tendencies in development paradigms illustrate power differentials. For example, speaking of diverse communities, cultures, and situations in terms of universals such as 'the poor' can be interpreted as one demonstration of power. Persisting in categorisation reflects an ability to create labels, which then may shape interventions that influence the lives of individuals. Another manifestation of an inequitable distribution of power is the reliance on certain kinds of knowledge. Specifically, the valuing of Western technical and scientific knowledge and the devaluing of indigenous and local knowledge demonstrates a clear hierarchy within the development research and intervention contexts. This relegates villagers to the position of problem, in which their ignorance is blamed for their lack of development (Pigg 1992: 505). Finally, perhaps the ultimate demonstration of power differences is the planning and implementation of interventions from above. Interventions undertaken in the best interests of others without local input and participation are more likely to fail and have negative impacts on those who were intended to be helped (Escobar 1995).

The question of power differentials is closely related with the generation and ownership of knowledge. Researchers, including Spittal et al. (1997) and Aftab (1999) have noted feelings of embarrassment and guilt at undertaking research which may be used towards our own academic and career benefits, but which is not necessarily linked with the

improvement of dire community circumstances. This reflects a concern with the traditional research stance of information being gathered, taken away, analysed and disseminated outside of the community. Researchers and agencies, rather than the individuals from which it came own this data. This reinforces a positioning of 'the underdeveloped' as objects for development, rather than as subjects in the development process, and leads to questions about the good that development is doing, and for whom. In addition, when researchers are confronted with extreme poverty, illness, and inequality (see Spittal et al. 1997; Aftab 1999), a questioning of our roles may occur. This may lead to attempts to reconcile our research, the position of the agencies with which we are affiliated, and the extreme desperation of the people who are the targets of development.

In their discussion of power differentials and knowledge generation in development fieldwork, Scheyvens and Leslie (2000) raise two scenarios: men doing research with Third World women, and First World researchers undertaking research with Third World communities. They ask whether power differentials are so large in these situations that research should be avoided altogether and then argue that a narrow focus on these issues leaves us with only the possibility of doing research on our own communities. This is an unpalatable option, since it encourages ethnocentrism and undermines our abilities to add to a complex understanding of development issues and problems, and to examine important, but perhaps overlooked, situations (Scheyvens & Leslie 2000: 128). They are similarly unhappy with adopting an extreme relativist position which privileges indigenous or local knowledge. This is not a viable option to deal with ethical concerns with power differentials, as it allows researchers to ignore our responsibilities to others, as well as undermining our knowledge and capabilities (2000: 121-122). Dwelling on the potential negative effects of our presence may lead us to ignore the benefits of doing research on situations and questions which may otherwise be ignored (Scheyvens & Leslie 2000: 123).

If we are to reject a proposal to stop doing development research altogether, what other options are available to deal with problems of power differentials and the ownership of knowledge? One possibility has been an attempt to incorporate the voices of the marginalized, particularly those in research communities. Radical participatory research methodologies have been discussed, developed and utilised as one way to include multiple voices, reduce power differentials, and allow for multiple-ownership of the knowledge generated by research.

Participatory Research - History, Philosophy and Critiques

Participatory practices come under several names, with differing specific goals and methodologies. These include participatory action-research (Smith 1997), participatory rural appraisal (Chambers 1994a & 1994b), participatory policy research (Norton 1998), community development, and farmer participatory research (Selener 1997). Despite the various names and specific goals, these share similar underlying philosophies and general goals. I first discuss the history and philosophy of participatory research, and how these address ethical concerns with knowledge generation and ownership and power differentials. This is followed by a critical examination of some of the underlying assumptions of participatory methods, which can lead to ethical dilemmas for researchers.

Much like development as a whole, participatory development and research perspectives are not monolithic or necessarily new. While participation can be enacted in a paternalistic way, more radical participatory research refers to methods that seek to reverse and equalize traditional power relationships and address issues of oppression and ownership. These can be differentiated from earlier perspectives, which concentrated on passive kinds of participation that centred around and someone else's research. It is the more recent and action-oriented participatory methodologies, which are addressed here.

In general, participatory research confronts those who want to monopolize the ownership, definition (Smith 1997: 176),

and generation of knowledge. The term evokes a basically ethical premise of desirable moral goals for the betterment of everyday lives (Rahnema 1997: 116). There is a basic recognition that knowledge is power (Selener 1997: 24), and that the historical exclusion of people from the development research process of knowledge generation and ownership is an act of domination. It has been argued that participatory approaches are more successful in developing interventions, which work for the good of the target community (Selener 1997; Smith 1997; Norton 1998). Participation has been referred to as a “cornerstone of good development” (Ngunjiri 1998:470), highlighting a perspective that older development was bad or ineffective.

Although participation first appeared in development literature in the 1950s (Rahnema 1997:117), the history of radical participatory perspectives can be traced to Latin America in the 1960s, and was first characterized by concepts inspired by the work of Paulo Friere, in particular critical thinking, critical consciousness and empowerment (Selener 1997: 7-8). Participatory research methodologies that began to flourish in the 1980s and 1990s (Smith et al. 1997) are in part the result of social scientists, local people and activists looking for ways to undertake research for social change (Selener 1997:11). This came from an increasing recognition that development research in its earlier forms was unable to alleviate poverty or adequately address problems of oppression (Selener 1997:11).

Selener has also linked participatory movements to three major trends of the late 1960s and early 1970s. These were, 1) the growth of radical and reformist approaches to economic development initiatives, including the recognition that people need to be central to development; 2) the belief that adult education is empowering and necessary; and 3) an ongoing debate in the social sciences about what should shape our dominant paradigm, including a movement towards a political-economic perspective of social issues (Selener 1997: 13). Although it is not my purpose to discuss in detail the development of participatory approaches, it should be noted that the 1960s and 1970s were a period when more radical stances in

social science research (see Peet & Watts 1996), including development anthropology, were taking hold and flourishing, leading to critical analytical perspectives in many disciplines.

Participatory methodologies are based on the philosophical stances of idealism, pragmatism, and historical materialism. Thus, a focus on human action and ability connect with the belief that there should be a democratic interaction between the researcher and the marginalized (Selener 1997: 14-15). Instead of the researcher deciding what local problems are, and how to fix them, participatory research stresses that the problem to be investigated and addressed be defined, analysed and solved by the community (Selener 1997: 18). Diverse writings on participatory research therefore highlight a “do it yourself” philosophy (Chambers 1994a: 960); a principle of reciprocal giving and taking, where the researcher learns from and with internal participants (Ngunjiri 1998: 466); the generation of popular power, not just development infrastructure (Escobar 1984: 391); the researcher as catalyst, rather than director (Chambers 1994a: 954); and the principles of shared credit and shared goals (Ngunjiri 1998: 467). Finally, Norton discusses the unpredictable nature of participatory research (1998: 84). Involving different groups and individuals in research and intervention processes has the potential to be chaotic and surprising. Although this is time- consuming and often extremely difficult to manage, it also means confronting questions that might otherwise go unasked or unanswered. This is implicitly and fundamentally ethical practice.

Participatory methodologies such as participatory action-research (PAR) are simultaneously about education and action (Smith 1997: 177), and are intended to reverse domination and empower participants (Chambers 1994b). Participatory research alters the researcher-community relationship from subject-object to subject-subject (Smith 1997: 178). This is demonstrated by the positioning of the researcher as catalyst and learner, rather than director and expert. These methods therefore address some of the ethical dilemmas in development research. If participation is voluntary, the issues of deception and informed consent are

directly addressed. Since a participatory approach to research stresses that questions, agendas and goals ideally are set and addressed by the research community, then individuals are theoretically fully informed by the nature of their participation. More importantly, participatory research offers the possibility of subverting the tendency to subsume differences under universal categories. Local situations are not glossed over, but are rather an integral part of research questions and goals.

Through the positioning of researchers as learners and catalysts, participatory research explicitly confronts power differentials in the development context. This entails a recognition and valuing of indigenous and local knowledge, incorporating it with relevant Western knowledge. Similarly, since there is an emphasis on sharing the research process and the final outcome, or knowledge generated, the risks of data being mined or extracted are minimised. Participants theoretically are able to retain control of the research project and its goals. They can also disseminate information as widely as they choose.

While it is tempting to see participatory research as the answer to ethical questions in development, particularly when it comes to questions of power, ownership, and efficacy, participation is not without its own problems and ethical concerns. Participation is based upon several assumptions that must be critically examined. These assumptions are related to ethical and methodological practices.

Assumptions and Ethical Implications

One major assumption attached to participation is that it is necessarily good and effective. Hintjens (1999) calls this belief as “quasi-mystical” in some circles (388). Spittal, et al. (1997:19) point out one aspect of this assumption, the belief that participation is wanted and eagerly taken up by targeted communities and individuals. They demonstrate that community numbness to the devastation of local circumstances, a fatalistic attitude about the future, and economic circumstances can make it difficult to engender participation and a belief in local abilities.

Moreover, a participatory community does not necessarily mean a cohesive community. Gender inequality, ethnic strife and other social differences can lead to difficulties in building solidarity (Spittal et al 1997: 101). White (1996: 11) adds to this critique, arguing that individuals may participate in research and interventions simply because they believe they have no other options.

Another assumption is that participatory research incorporates action-oriented perspectives, rather than older ideas of passive participation. Although inclusion may be couched in terms of giving over control to villagers or communities, this may be a more effective method of control than exclusion (White 1996: 7). Participatory rhetoric may be used in research, but this does not necessarily mean that communities and individuals will actually have active control of the research and intervention processes. Instead, researchers may understand participation as local inclusion in an outsider's project (Chambers 1994a: 959).

Participation, which initially arose out of political and ethical concerns, has increasingly been incorporated into mainstream development. This had led to a community participation component being increasingly necessary to receive project funding (Hintjens 1999: 384). While participation has numerous benefits, as discussed above, the incorporation of participation philosophies by development agencies has the potential to move participation from a political position to a technical or mechanical position (White 1996: 7). Participation may therefore lose its political "bite" (Hintjens 1999: 384) as it loses its empowerment capabilities. For example, Rahnema links state and agency interest in participation to several factors, including its political attractiveness and economic appeal (1997: 118-119), factors that have little to do with the potential benefits for community empowerment. White (1996) has linked the depoliticization of participatory methodologies with earlier strategies to include women and environmental concerns in development paradigms. A by-rote use of participation is similar to a standard inclusion of women, although it does not

necessarily mean that women are directly benefiting from research and intervention processes.

An additional critique of participation comes from the problem approach, one, which asks participant communities to identify the problems they see. The use of this approach can be interpreted by people as an identification of their weaknesses, uselessness, powerlessness, and worthlessness in order to gain aid in improving their everyday lives (Ngunjiri 1998: 467-468). This can reinforce power imbalances, contradicting a main premise of participatory approaches. Through a process of identifying community weaknesses rather than strengths, the outside researcher may be positioned as the expert with the answers, which does little to foster a sense of empowerment.

Each of these critiques is in some ways related to two primary ethical issues in development anthropology. First is a concern with who is empowered in the participatory development research process. This is related to the second concern, that of how shared information and knowledge is used. These build upon the above questions of power differentials and the ownership of knowledge. Participatory research does not necessarily mean that all power differentials are equalized, particularly those within the participant community. Empowerment for all is not a given. Similarly, even when knowledge is shared, this does not ensure that it is used for the benefits of all.

The issue of empowerment is a vague one and is rarely considered in depth (see Scheyvens 1999). Although empowerment is an ultimate goal in most participatory approaches, particularly action-research approaches (Selener 1997; Smith 1997), it may be based upon some assumptions that overlap with the above critiques. Assumptions such as communities as cohesive, homogeneous, and working together to achieve common goals underlie much of the participatory literature. The assumption of homogeneity overlooks internal hierarchical differences. Chambers (1994b) notes that elites are often more able to access participation possibilities and maintain control over the research agenda (see also Belsky 1999). Those

already marginalized within a community may find themselves worse off, even as elite sectors are empowered by the research process (Chambers 1994b: 1266). There will be competing goals within any research setting, and if true participation is to take place, one which includes different groups and which works to balance power differentials, then external researchers and internal participants must work to ensure that local and personal biases are not reinforced.

When participation becomes a technical rather than a political issue, empowerment may also be minimized. Participation quotas, for example, may be instituted in research projects as an attempt to include different groups. However, this does not necessarily mean that there is active input on the part of those included in quotas. For example, women, those who do not own land, and lower castes may be nominally included in the development process, but may not speak or be listened to in the process of designing research agendas and goals (White 1996:7). In other words, the rhetoric of participation may actually continue a practice of skimming the surface of community culture, needs, strengths, and politics.

Rahnema points out a more fundamental problem with the notion of empowerment. He states, "When A considers it essential for B to be empowered, A assumes not only that B has no power - or does not have the right kind of power- but also that A has the secret formula of a power to which B has to be initiated" (1997: 123). Much like the above critique of the problem approach in participatory research, this empowerment perspective highlights power differentials and has the potential to reinforce them, rather than minimise them. There is an implicit assumption that Western research methodologies are able to guide people towards our ideas of what is important in the development process. This assumption overlooks the reality that people are rarely fully disempowered, and that they may have their own types of empowerment processes (Rahnema 1997: 123; see also White 1996).

Empowerment questions are linked with the ways in which generated and shared knowledge are used. Participatory

research methods stress that knowledge and the research community should own outcomes. In addition, ideally all participants should be able to access and disseminate knowledge and outcomes. This may be done to aid the research community and other communities dealing with similar issues and concerns. However, it is unreasonable to assume that knowledge will unflinchingly be used towards just and equitable goals. This concern exists on two levels: within a community by community members, and upon a community by external individuals.

As noted above, community elites can be more able to access participatory opportunities and may be more able to control the direction of the research. The external researcher must therefore be as aware as possible of local hierarchies and differences in goals. Hierarchical differences within a community are also important when deciding how generated knowledge is used. If elites are able to control the research process and outcomes, they may do so at the expense of other groups. Communities that come together to solve common problems may fragment when the research process is completed. White, for example, argues that former allies are sometimes easier targets than common enemies (1996: 13). Although this militaristic language is not necessarily appropriate, it does demonstrate that the sharing of knowledge does not always mean equitable relationships, nor is community empowerment always benign.

Chambers (1994b) expresses concern that shared and accessible knowledge has the potential to be exploited by outsiders. Local sharing which is undertaken in an attempt to equalize power relationships may result in abuse by outsiders. Moreover, participatory methodologies may be used to lure individuals into projects that are ultimately not to their benefit. This incorporates a concern that participation can lead to people parting with their knowledge (Chambers 1994b: 1266) with few returns. Chambers is unable to give any examples of this occurring, although it is important to recognise that methods may be misappropriated. However, it is also inappropriate to assume that local people are unable to thoroughly question research proposals.

Finally, Hintjens argues that ultimately, anthropologists and community participants doing development research may have little control over how recommendations are interpreted by policy-making agencies. What researchers are saying may be less important than how research and knowledge is being put to use by policy makers (1999: 388). This mirrors larger anthropological concerns with what published materials may be used for by agencies and individuals with vested interests in relations of domination (Bourgois 1991). If participatory research results in knowledge that is being used to the detriment of communities, then this methodological and ethical perspective is no better than development paradigms which ignore local abilities and knowledge. Even worse, the use of participatory and democratic rhetoric in projects may make it harder to critique research that misuses the knowledge generated.

Although participatory development research has multiple potential benefits, including a more equitable distribution of power and data, and a recognition of the importance and value of different kinds of knowledge, it is not without its own problems. This is not to say that participatory methods should be abandoned or perceived as lacking in value. On the contrary, participation is more likely to lead to better interventions. The trick is to incorporate others in ways, which do not recreate historical patterns of domination. Researchers and internal participants must be aware of the assumptions upon which participatory methods are built. Participatory rhetoric does not necessarily lead to true participation in the sense of shared ownership and goals, equitable distribution of power, and benefits for diverse groups in a research community.

Case Illustration: Development and Participation in Nepal

Development and development research in rural Nepal offers an illustration of many of the ethical themes discussed above. This

brief case illustration considers development paradigms and rhetoric in Nepal, followed by a critical examination of participation in anthropological development research.

One of the key tropes in development research in Nepal has historically been the village. Pigg's (1992) analysis of the Nepalese village in development literature illustrates donor agency and researcher tendencies to create general categories that are universally applied. Villages have come to represent a universal position in Nepal's national image. The village is identified as backwards and non-modern (1992: 493, 504). The considerable ecological, religious, ethnic and economic differences across the country have come to be subsumed under the language of the village as in need of development (1992: 504). Accompanying the generic village is the image of the generic villager (1992: 505). This overlooks the heterogeneity within villages. The generic villager is often described as ignorant and the problem to be solved by development (1992: 505). This carries with it an implicit assumption that what villagers need is education and knowledge from outsiders.

Development in Nepali is *bikas*. Not unexpectedly, *bikas* refers to more than simply the process of delivering development projects. It also plays key roles in defining national identities and relationships. Thus, Pigg argues that *bikas*, like the image of the village, transcends differences of language, caste, region and ethnicity (1992: 499), combining together to create a national image of Nepalis as working together towards a national need for development. *Bikas* connotes modernization, and given Nepal's reliance on international development aid, it also defines the country's relationship to the rest of the world (Pigg 1992: 497, 499). *Bikas* therefore is seen as coming from the outside, not from local efforts (Pigg 1992: 499). This leaves villages and villagers in an awkward position. Villagers are constructed as the problem slowing down development. This simultaneously positions them as peripheral to development, since they cannot undertake it on their own; and central to it, since the goal is deliver basic needs and put people first in development projects (Pigg 1992: 503, 511).

Although this is a very brief discussion of development and the village in Nepal, it clearly demonstrates the possibility of power differentials and the privileging of external knowledge. It reflects the nature of development bureaucracies, which are best suited to creating generalizable frameworks in which to do research and implement projects (Pigg 1992: 504). Research, which incorporates participatory methods, must negotiate within a history of development in Nepal that has created and maintained ideas about the value of external and internal knowledge, and hierarchies between outside researcher and villagers.

Participatory research methods, Stone suggests, are simply another example of Western philosophies and needs being imposed on others (1989: 207). She argues that international development trends reflect Western concerns of the day. For example, she links movements to meet basic nutritional needs around the world with American concerns with poor nutrition and the consumption of junk food, and suggests that the Women in Development paradigm reflects Western feminist movements and issues (206). This recalls White's (1996) argument that international development is often less about the wants, needs, and abilities of people in the Third World, than about Western crises. These crises and international development responses may be seen as cross-culturally applicable.

When participation draws upon a philosophy of rugged individualism and self-reliance, this may lead to conflicting beliefs about what development means. In her research on Nepal's Tinau Watershed Project, Stone has confronted some of the methodological and philosophical bases of participatory development research. Among her research team, development was primarily seen as a behavioural change (1989: 209). This perspective placed villages as the problem, which could be corrected through some kind of individual change. Contexts, including caste hierarchies, gender relations, geographical location and related patterns of resource access and distribution were largely ignored.

In contrast to the research team, villagers viewed development in terms of concrete objects such as schools, health posts, roads and electricity schemes. This demonstrated experiences with older styles of development, which concentrated on material objects. It also illustrated issues villagers identify as important to their everyday lives. Moreover, Stone argues that villagers were well aware that access to resources is closely intertwined with interpersonal interdependencies (1989: 210). In this case, an individualistic perspective associated with participation was not culturally appropriate.

Although Stone does not address ethical issues explicitly, her concerns and experiences are related to ethics. What are the ethical implications of doing research in this context? First, a research position, which promotes individual empowerment and overlooks internal hierarchies and interdependencies may mean overlooking key factors that shape the success of development projects and goals. Second, this perspective demonstrates and reinforces researcher-villager power differentials. It also may work to place limits on what are considered legitimate development goals held by community members. For example, through a discussion of the Primary Health Care (PHC) program in Nepal, Stone (1992) has pointed to out the contradictions that may occur when participatory methods collide with relatively rigid policy goals. The PHC program is intended to foster community participation in identifying health problems and solutions. However, the wider policy of PHC stresses behavioural change in the form of health education, with little provision for curative services (Stone 1992: 409-411). Even when villagers participate and identify health care services as the key community need, the PHC program has little ability to deliver concrete needs. The policy direction of PHC therefore places limits on what villagers can achieve through participation in research projects.

This example demonstrates that different kinds of participation exist. Participation can be passive and minimal when shaped by external projects and policies. It may refer to the

implementation of research and projects, which is more active. This may or may not extend to community members monitoring and evaluating projects. However, the most active and shared type of participation is one in which villagers plan and direct research (Stone 1992: 412). A participatory perspective that is token and reflects Western attitudes about self-reliance leads to ethical dilemmas concerning cultural appropriateness, power sharing and domination, and the generation of knowledge. It does little to address these concerns in anything more than a cursory way. This is one potential danger when participation is mechanically incorporated into research projects. The Nepali example demonstrates that development researchers must be aware of the assumptions upon which participation is based and enacted, the cultural appropriateness of individualistic participatory models, and the ways in which policy goals may actually circumvent true participation and ownership of research projects. In this context, meaningful and effective research means learning other perceptions of how development research might work within our research communities. Ultimately, asking these questions and being aware of ambiguities leads to a more ethical research practice.

Conclusion

Development research ethics are messy, complex, and overlapping. The development researcher does not encounter ethical dilemmas in isolation of larger development contexts or histories, nor are ethical issues static in the short or long term. Addressing potential ethical questions a researcher may encounter requires an understanding of the historical basis of development, both globally and in local contexts. This includes an analysis of development institutions and agencies. The complexities of development research ethics may be in part why there is so little writing on ethics at the project level. However, students, researchers, agencies, and local participants will benefit from an increased body of literature that frankly addresses ethical dilemmas that have been encountered in the development field. Discussions of specific problems in specific contexts, and

how they have been negotiated, are useful and crucial to ongoing research.

Participatory methods are a response to some of the ethical problems of development work. Power differentials and problems with the generation and ownership of knowledge can be minimised when incorporating participatory research methods. However, when participatory methods are used as a simple set of universally applied procedures, they can become as ethically meaningless as ethical codes of conduct can become when they are taken as rigid and mechanical. Morales-Gomez (1992) argues that ethics in development research should not be relegated to a set of standard procedures, which are mechanically followed and given little thought. Instead, ethics must be central throughout research steps. Similarly, participatory development research should not be reduced to standard procedures. This depoliticises participation and has the potential to universally categorize people and problems. Participation then does little to address ethical questions of domination, power, hierarchies, and the ownership of knowledge. Finally, participatory research in its politicised form has its own ethical issues, which must be considered and confronted before, during, and after the research process.

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