

TECHNOLOGIES OF IMPROVEMENT, LOCATIONS OF CULTURE: AMERICAN DISCOURSES OF DEMOCRACY AND 'COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT' IN NEPAL

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“Exploring the history of the U.S. economic assistance program in Nepal is like being in a development laboratory,” writes Kelly Kammerer, Director of the USAID’s Mission to Nepal (Kammerer 1992:i). This remark evokes a series of questions, foremost among them: What does it mean to call *a place*—a country—a “laboratory”? and Why did *Nepal*, in particular, become a development laboratory?

To be sure, in the 1950s and 1960s, most developing countries appeared to many American social scientists, economists and administrators as potential laboratories for the ideas and agencies of the project of ‘development’.¹ However, Nepal seems to have entered the imaginations of some foreigners as a *particularly* desirable place for their experiments. In Kammerer’s words, “Few, if any, developing countries were as unexposed to the modern world as Nepal” at the beginning of the 1950s (Kammerer 1992:i). Nepal was a “blank slate” (Skerry et al. 1992:36). Hugh Wood, an Oregon educator who was in Nepal from 1953 to 1962 as an advisor for national educational planning, writes that “Nepal was a textbook opportunity.” Specifically, for him, it was an opportunity to test the answers he wrote to a hypothetical question on his final doctoral examination—the question that asked him to state the steps he would take to develop a complete educational system “suited to the twentieth century” in “a small state ... where for some reason there are no educational facilities” (Wood 1987:344). “It was extremely satisfying,” says Wood, “to have been present during that awakening period in Nepal and to have been associated with one of the modernizing activities” (1987:345). Carter Ide, the Director of USAID/Nepal from 1969 to 1970, recalls:

1 For example, Marshall Clinard, who had worked for city planning in Delhi, wrote in 1962: “By not being concerned with social action in such situations as those provided in underdeveloped countries, sociologists miss an important scientific opportunity: the opportunity to test their points of view and knowledge through immediate application to programs of social control” (quoted in Hull 1995:116-7). Cf. Rosen 1985.

I had never worked in a political environment as free of U.S. self-interest. After serving in Latin America, India, and Pakistan before coming to Nepal, I felt liberated from the military, trade, and business constraints, and from Presidents and Secretaries of State given to “tilting” in some direction or other. Our program in Nepal was “objective” and “disinterested” We may not have achieved perfection, but we could try to follow the textbooks on selecting priorities of genuine development impact (Skerry et al. 1992:179).

To summarize the views just cited, Nepal was seen as a small, pure, non-modern country at the beginning of 1950s. One might add to these views, as a Swiss observer stated at the beginning of the 1960s, that Nepal’s ‘independent’ status during the age of colonialism meant that it was deprived of the ‘fruit of modernity’, but also that it was free from the complications that are typically caused by colonial history (Wahlen 1961). Nepal remained, in the following decades, relatively insignificant in terms of international politics. These conditions, foreign experts believed, would enable them to put into practice what they thought were the best approaches to planned development.

However, as Kammerer goes on to note, after forty years of development assistance, “on just anybody’s list, Nepal shows up as one of the least developed countries in the world” (Kammerer 1992:i). To use her own metaphor of a ‘laboratory’ this would suggest that most of the ‘experiments’ in Nepal have failed. Towards the end of this paper, I will argue against the use of the metaphor ‘laboratory’, to the extent that it conjures the image of applied experiments conducted in a closed, controlled environment. At the same time, I agree with another tradition of thought with which the notions of ‘laboratory’ and ‘experiment’ are also connected, namely, the pragmatist tradition which holds that important understandings are gained from experience. Some of the documents that I will analyze in this paper purport to present lessons from experience, by describing the relationship between intentions and outcomes of particular development programs. The aim of this paper, in part, is to critically examine the claims that are presented in those documents as ‘lessons from the past’.

The major portion of this paper is devoted to an attempt to interpret the intentions, or to reconstruct the ‘textbook’, that was being followed in one of the earliest U.S. development projects in Nepal, namely the “Village Development Project.” For this purpose, I analyze a document

entitled “What is Community Development?”, dated 1962 and produced by Paul Rose, the first director of the United States Operation Mission (hereafter USOM), who designed the Village Development Project in the early 1950s. The document elaborates the idea of Community Development, which was central to the Village Development Project in Nepal. I also discuss the accounts of processes of implementation and outcomes of the project in Nepal, as we find them in the pages of *Four Decades of Development*, a book first published by the Nepal office of the United States Agency for International Development (hereafter USAID) in 1991, and the analysis of the Village Development Project in Eugene Mihaly’s *Foreign Aid and Politics in Nepal* (1965).

As Stacy Pigg has argued “Inquiry into the role of development in Nepal should not be limited to asking the questions development institutions themselves ask.” What is left out, for the most part, in the discussion of development within the framework of development discourse, “is analysis of the ways the *activities* of development themselves *shape* Nepalese society as a whole.” Hence, she calls for “a holistic, historically grounded social analysis of development” (1993:45).

While I share her perspective, what I shall attempt here is much more modest than a holistic account of development. I deal primarily with one form of development project, and even then, only at the level of discourse. What I shall attempt is to reconstruct the ‘intention’ of the project as embedded in the discourses about it. Such a reconstruction can, I believe, help us to re-read, critically, conventional accounts of the ‘failure’ or ‘partial success’ of a development project. In what sense is a project seen as a ‘failure’? To what extent are those explanations of failure conditioned by the intentions and assumptions that are built into the design of the project itself? What are the likely consequences of the project, as well as the discourses about the ‘outcomes’ of the project, on the society it was intended to ‘improve’?

I regard this exercise as a necessary step towards more ‘holistic’ socio-historical analysis. This is so because the notion of ‘development’, like the notion of ‘society’ or ‘culture’, is a highly heterogeneous construct. Hence, I shall focus on a rather limited field of discourse, and try to understand the particular vision of ‘development’ that it embodies, its modes of coherence, plausibility and functionality. I believe such analysis will provide a firmer ground on which to trace specific translations, mutations, and effects of the notion of ‘development’ in practice.

The Village Development Project

According to *Four Decades of Development*, “the first USOM team of technical experts believed only a few years of concentrated technical assistance were needed to set the development process in motion” (Skerry et al. 1992:6-7). The early projects had focused mainly on rural areas. President Truman’s Point IV Program, which led to the creation of USOM, viewed the people in the ‘underdeveloped’ areas at the time as being “stirred by a growing awareness of the possibilities of human advancement” (quoted in Mihaly 1965:29) resulting in rising expectations that had to be quickly met if political stability was to be maintained. The political threat was mainly conceived as the possible rise of communism, and the ‘peasantry’ was regarded as particularly vulnerable (Mihaly 1965:28-9).

The first director of USOM in Nepal, Paul Rose, is described by Mihaly as a former “agricultural extension officer under the New Deal.”² He adds that, “Though the programme he represented in Nepal had strategic and political goals, Rose’s own outlook and concern were of a humanitarian nature” (1965:30). Hence, in Mihaly’s account, anxiety about ‘communism’ and the ‘humanitarian’ impulse were simultaneously at work in the early U.S. development operations in Nepal. The specific functions of ‘political’ and ‘humanitarian’ intentions will be considered more closely later in this paper.

In addition to Rose’s own experiences in the agricultural extension programs under the New Deal, another important influence on his thinking was an experimental village development project in the Etawah district in India, launched in 1948 and led by Albert Mayer, “a New York social worker, architect, and near genius” (Rose 1962:94), which was apparently achieving tremendous success in creating democratic village institutions and increasing agricultural output (cf. Rosen 1985:50; Mayer et al. 1973). Based on these precedents, Rose, in consultation with the Prime Minister and other government officials of Nepal, designed the Village Development Project. Central to the program was an institution called Village Development Service. The institution was intended to:

2 According to *Four Decades of Development*, not only Rose but all of the first members of USOM had experience serving “in the U.S. as county extension agents and Department of Agriculture administrators” (Skerry et al. 1992:37). ‘New Deal’ refers to the U.S. government’s social policy of the 1930s including a legislative package and large scale public-works projects aimed at poverty-alleviation and the welfare of disadvantaged groups.

contact village people, to find out their needs, and then to get assistance from various departments which would channel programs through this service. The goal was to establish a nationwide system which would distribute increased services to villages, while providing a channel of communications through which people could express their wants to the government (Skerry et al. 1992:36).

Four thousand Village Development Workers (*Gram Sevak*, or VDW) were to be trained over a five-year period. To this end, a Training School for Village Development Workers was opened in Kathmandu in July 1952. "VDWs were trained in community motivation and self-help programs, receiving basic technical information on agriculture, health, malaria control, sanitation, and literacy." The second school was opened in Parwanipur in May 1955, and the third in Nepalganj in October 1956. As a collaborative effort with USOM, the Ford Foundation started a Women's School in Kathmandu for Women Development Workers (*Gram Sevika*) where they learned, among other things, home economics (Skerry et al. 1992:37-40).

After training, VDWs were assigned to Village Development Centers, established, by 1958, in ten locations.³ Each Center served about 100 villages and 60-80,000 people. "Each VDW was to serve as 'stimulator, catalyst, and spark plug' for ten to twelve villages or about 500 families." VDWs "organized Village Improvement Committees of local leaders and Four-Leaf Youth Clubs for young men. They performed agricultural and health demonstrations and helped villagers organize self-help activities in the villages, passing on requests for budgetary or technical support to the District Development Officer or Program Specialists" (Skerry et al. 1992:41).

According to *Four Decades*, "The Village Development Project was never fully evaluated." After a long delay, the Himalayan Studies Centre carried out a study of the outcomes of the project in 1981, through interviews with villagers and the village-level workers and administrators who worked for the project (Skerry et al. 1992:44; Himalayan Studies Centre 1981). But by then, almost twenty years after its conclusion, it was very difficult to reconstruct specific impacts of the project (Skerry et al. 1992:44-5). However, *Four Decades* identifies many "implementation problems" that the project encountered. "First was the extreme instability

³ The locations of the Village Development Centers were: Kathmandu, Biratnagar, Pokhara, Hetauda, Butwal, Ilam, Rapti Valley, Nepalganj, Gaur and Janakpur (Skerry et al. 1992:40).

of HMG [His Majesty's Government of Nepal]." There were eight changes in government during 1950s, each time resulting in disruptions and paralysis of administration. Second was the U.S. Congress's directive in 1958, which resulted in the shift of USOM staff's status from 'co-managers' of the project to mere 'advisors' to the project, now managed solely by HMG officials. This meant "less control and ability to maintain momentum" especially during the time of Government's paralyzes (Skerry et al. 1992:44). Third, it was very difficult to recruit and train Nepalis for the program. It was especially difficult to find adequately educated persons who were at the same time willing to work in rural areas. Due to the administrative inefficiencies and the difficulty of recruitment, the Village Development Service only had 1,400 trained staff—far fewer than the 4,000 projected in the original plan (Skerry et al. 1992:44-46). Lastly, *Four Decades* states that the Village Development Project was based on "some fundamentally flawed assumptions.... The idea that all that villagers needed to change was the technical knowledge and organizational assistance provided by a VDW ignored the complex of constraints affecting villagers' decision-making, and the need for other incentives, particularly grants-in-aid and technical supervision for self-help projects" (Skerry et al. 1992:44).

Eugene Mihaly, in his study published in 1965, states that the Village Development Project as envisaged by Paul Rose "was in conflict with the facts of Nepalese village life" (1965:33). Unlike the above list from *Four Decades*, which consists mostly of what one can call pragmatic, institutional and logistical problems, Mihaly deploys a 'cultural' explanation. Mihaly disagrees with the observation made by Rose in 1952 that people in the rural areas "were aching for change" (Rose in Mihaly 1956:30). Mihaly asserts that "the villagers of Nepal - in common with those throughout the underdeveloped world - were not receptive to change." Mihaly adds that "this phenomenon [i.e., conservatism in the villages] is ... too well documented to warrant a detailed elaboration." He goes on to state that particularly in Nepal, there is "the widespread fatalism often found in Hindu society - a view that not only would life always be as it had been, but that attempts to interfere with the unchanging cycle of life were sacrilegious." Another reason for this presumed conservatism, according to Mihaly, was the power structure in the villages: "the land-tenure and ownership system in large segments of

Nepal [generate] a strong conservative force - that of landlords who [hold] their tenants in near slavery" (1965:33).⁴

I do not here attempt to argue against Mihaly's sweeping portrait of 'the Nepali village' and 'Nepali villagers' or to analyze where his apparent conviction about the accuracy of the portrait comes from. I will, however, try to indicate later in this paper why such statements occur in the discourse of rural development.

Despite their different analyses of the sources of problems, both *Four Decades* and Mihaly tell us that, by the late 1950s, it was realized by the members of USOM that the Village Development Project was not having "nationwide impacts" as was intended. "Late in the 1950s, USOM decided to phase out village development assistance" (Skerry et al. 1992:43). In their histories of development activities in Nepal (1951-91 for *Four Decades*, 1951-62 for Mihaly) the Village Development Program figures primarily as an episode that shows the naïveté of the early foreign aid projects, an early failed experiment in the development laboratory.

Paul Rose left Nepal in 1958.⁵ A document compiled by him in Washington D.C., entitled "What is Community Development?" and dated August 1962, suggests that Rose thought the basic ideas of the Village Development Project, and the theories and methods of "Community Development" that were central to the Project, were not in any fundamental sense flawed or misguided. I shall discuss this document in some detail, in order to understand how the Project was *supposed* to work. I pay particular attention to the kinds of problems the Project was addressed to, what types of agencies were to be mobilized, and what was the nature of the 'development' it was meant to realize.

4 One of the most recent instances of the repetition of this set of claims can be found in Dammann (1995). She writes: "Nepal's fatalistic Hindu religion made the villagers resistant to change. The traditional joint family system was highly paternalistic, offering no opportunity for the young to take over leadership positions. *All obvious* one might say, but these were the pioneer U.S. aid days before Washington ... knew much about the underdeveloped countries" (1995:110; emphasis added). Elsewhere she writes, "Educated landowners and high-level government officials had a vested interest in the status quo, so opposed the changes Paul [Rose] recommended. It's no surprise that his program never got off the ground" (1995:108).

5 See Wood (1987:310-1) for his account of the situation surrounding Rose's transfer from Kathmandu to Washington D.C.

“What is Community Development?”

“What is Community Development?” is a compilation of materials, organized and commentated by Paul Rose, described as belonging to “Technical Assistance Study Group, Agency for International Development, Washington D. C.” (Rose 1962). The 162-page type-script contains numerous definitions and descriptions of Community Development (hereafter CD) gathered from sources including the *Community Development Journal*, published by the International Cooperation Agency in Washington D. C., the journal, *Rural Sociology*, pamphlets published by Her Majesty’s Stationary Office in London, a publication by the Community Project Administration of the Government of India, theoretical and descriptive monographs on CD and social change, and Rose’s interviews with professionals working in overseas development.

The document contains quotes from these diverse materials with Rose’s own comments and observations, as well as accounts and recommendations that seem to derive directly from Rose’s own experiences in community development. The document is not a presentation simply of Rose’s *personal* opinion on what community development ought to be. Rather, for the large part, Rose’s effort is to reconstruct, from the materials that already exist and are available to him, the essential features of community development. Hence, in reading “What is Community Development?” we are, as it were, looking over Rose’s shoulder at an archive of the materials through which an American project in Nepal and those in other ‘developing countries’ were conceived.

As is the case for most writings on CD, Rose begins by discussing the difficulty of defining exactly what Community Development means. Significantly, Rose quotes the political scientist, Lucian Pye who argues that the very ambiguity of the term, its ability to mean different things to different people, is the reason for the usefulness and popularity of CD (Rose 1962:3). However, Rose insists on the need to have a clear definition. “The problem of translating accurately the term [CD] ... is a tough one,” writes Rose, because both words combined to form the term “are charged with ambiguity. They have many and subtle meanings.” As a result, “some of its vital meanings are often lost in translation.” However, the difficulty is not confined to the process of translation. There is “misunderstanding and confusion” about the term even “within the U.S. AID organization.” This confusion has practical consequences for the implementation of USAID programs. This situation is identified as the

“primary reason” that Rose is preparing a document to answer the question: “What is Community Development?” (1962:2).

Aside from the problems listed by *Four Decades* and by Mihaly, from Rose’s perspective, there is a problem of comprehension and communication that stands in the way of successful CD projects. Rose’s task then, is to recover and clarify the “vital meanings” of CD. The assumption here is that despite problems one might encounter in concrete instances of implementation, the idea of CD is basically sound and desirable. An accurate understanding of the idea of CD is, however, essential for its successful implementation.

In “What is Community Development?” there is a sense of struggle on the part of Rose to delimit the scope of CD, in order to avoid the situation in which CD means everything and nothing. For example, it is stated that land reform is “not, in and of [itself], community development” but rather one of the external, “conditioning factors” of CD (Carl Taylor in Rose 1962:2). However, this effort for delimitation is countered by enormous promises that are made in the name of CD. Time and again in the document, CD is described as the single most effective strategy that brings optimal social, economic, and political development of the people and the nation in its wake. Fundamental to the document, is a belief in CD as the quintessential technology for designing environments in which human groups can ‘grow’ in a way that is natural and just. As such, as will be shown in the following discussion, the discourse of CD attempts to articulate in its distinctive way the notions of change, sociality, economy and modes of governance, to produce a discursive field with which people who hold diverse, and even conflicting and contradictory interests and concerns can engage.

I will also try to indicate what types of human agencies are presupposed, and what happens to the notion of culture in this scheme of development. It is important to examine the notions of agency and culture in the discourse of CD since, as we shall see, CD claims to enable a kind of agency that is natural and universal. This naturalism also has serious implications for thinking about democracy. CD presents itself as a democratic technique for societal improvement. Yet, by claiming itself as based on universal human nature, CD naturalizes democracy as well.

Scenario

At one point in the document, in the middle of a conceptual discussion of the CD process, Rose introduces “a practical example” of how one worker mobilized a community in accordance with CD principles. I

introduce this story here, at the beginning, since one can read the rest of “What is Community Development?” (hereafter WCD) as an elaboration of the desirability and soundness of the techniques involved in the process exemplified in the story. Rose quotes the tale of a community development worker assigned to a village in West Bengal:

He was inexperienced and young, but persistent, and he wanted to get the people to improve their village. He talked and talked about this one idea -- improve the village.... He ... after many weeks got a village meeting planned and implemented by some of the leading villagers. The main topic of discussion in the village meeting was “What can we do to improve our village?” The decision was made -- after eight such meetings -- to build a primary school. The government inspector of school was contacted for his approval and promise of a teacher for the school, and then action started (Jack Douglas Gray in Rose 1962:19).

The villagers built a mud and straw thatch school without outside help. They “were very happy and held a gay and festive opening of the school” (Gray in Rose 1962:19). The next year the villagers constructed a dirt road. The following year, the villagers added brick and concrete culverts and small bridges to the road. The year after that, a sufficient amount of bricks were donated within the village to pave the road for its entire one and a half mile length. The brick road,

was a kind of yeast that set off the other developments, most unusual of which was a club for housewives, where sewing, diet, health and sanitation were ‘taught’ by a lady community development worker. The club house was donated by an elderly lady who made the donation because she ‘liked the development worker’ (Gray in Rose 1962:20).

Rose immediately goes on to quote Carl Taylor’s⁶ words to highlight “an important principle of community development” illustrated in this story:

Once community groups carry a project through to accomplishment on their own, with their leadership, they seldom stop there. A road follows a school, then a well for drinking water, then something else. A new pattern of all interaction has been developed. New roles have

6 Carl C. Taylor was “an eminent sociologist from the United States with a life time experience in Community Development in all parts of the world [who also] worked in India as a Consultant to Ford Foundation” (S. K. Dey’s “Preface” in Taylor 1956).

been created. There are new norms of behavior established. And, thus, the second village project is easier to start, plan and implement than the first; the third is easier than the second, and so on (Taylor in Rose 1962:20).

As I have said, Rose provides many reasons why this type of process is desirable and elucidates many techniques through which such process could be induced. But at this juncture, I want to highlight the fact that in this scenario the protagonist, the 'agent of change', is a 'young' and 'inexperienced' man who, simply through with his persistence, persuades village leaders and others. Later, we will encounter descriptions of planned change, an experiment in the United States, where characters and roles are significantly different from the one we just saw. In the experiment in the U.S., which was concerned with identifying the variables that foster 'democratic personality', it was the 'adult' who arranged the 'atmosphere' in which the character of a group of children was to be transformed. As we shall see, the latter experiment was aimed at finding techniques to *conserve* what was thought to be the core of American culture in light of the threats posed by totalitarianism. In contrast, the story from Bengal is about the introduction of *discontinuity* to be brought forth by the 'young' and 'inexperienced' man, who is an embodiment of the ideal of development in that 'underdeveloped' land.

People in Need

Who are the people in need of Community Development? They are among the "seventy-five percent or more of all the people in underdeveloped countries who live in local village communities" who "are ... poverty stricken, ... in need of more food, of better housing, health and sanitation" (Carl C. Taylor in Rose 1962:1). Those villages tend to be economically, socially and culturally isolated from the rest of the world and many inhabitants suffer from "fear of change" (Rose 1962:22). What emerges is a very generalized view of 'underdeveloped villages'. The lessons found in WCD are taken from a wide range of places, from India to Jamaica, which is consonant with the presumption that all such villages share key features that make them suitable objects for the application of CD intervention.

But this is not merely the familiar concatenation of poor places in the "Third World" into an undifferentiated mass. Indeed the issues that require CD interventions are not at all confined to the rural areas of the developing nations. CD principles are equally applicable to situations of

rural areas of the United States (cf. Rose 1962:27), and to the problems of “criminality, alcoholism, prejudice” found in urban as well as rural areas of the developed countries (cf. Rose 1962:38). In one account cited by Rose, CD “is by no means a new activity.” “Whenever people banded together to undertake on their own initiative an activity for social and economic progress, there was community development” (Antonio Perpetua in Rose 1962:91). There had been CD in ancient Egypt, ancient China and in the modern Philippines. According to another account, in the United States, there were “numerous small self-help efforts of the people in early settlements days, the Town Hall meeting tradition of New England, and the mutual aid practices that characterized the frontier development” (Arthur F. Raper in Rose 1962:92). CD was incorporated in the governmental structure, with the institution of Agricultural Extension Service in the twentieth century (Raper in Rose 1962:92). In sum, CD type activities can be found throughout history and from all over the world. This also suggests that CD programs are, in principle, universally applicable.

Reading WCD, we find two general motifs existing simultaneously within the CD discourse. I shall call one ‘scientific’, the other ‘humanistic’. The scientific motif is represented by Kurt Lewin, who had immense influence on the discourse and practice of planned social change between the two World Wars and in the post-World War II period (Hull 1995:33-36; cf. Lewin 1948, 1951; Cartwright and Zander 1960:9). Lewin’s and his students’ works, as we shall see below, are quoted in WCD several times. As Matthew Hull has summarized recently:

The theoretical and empirical research of Lewin and his students was designed to illuminate how relatively small groups, the basic structure of society, created different kinds of “atmospheres” that shape individual psychology, behavior, and values... [Lewin] argued that the “unity of sociological wholes can be defined operationally” and put on an “empirical and testable basis” [Lewin 1948:73].... Lewin’s conviction that a society’s basic process was interaction in small “face-to-face” groups was ... closely related to the main requirements of an empirical and experimental research program. Lewin’s main achievement was a methodological framework for *experimental* studies of complex social phenomena which showed not only how groups function but how they could be made to function in different ways (Hull 1995:35-6; emphasis in original).

The humanistic motif can be exemplified by Richard Poston, an energetic practitioner and advocate of community development (cf. Hull 1995:52-7; Voth and Brewster 1989:284-5; Poston 1950, 1962). The following is a passage from his *Democracy Speaks Many Tongues*, a book which advocates adoption of the CD approach by American governmental and private international aid organizations:

[I]n the final analysis [community development] is deeply personal, and if it is to thrive it must be kept that way. For example, India's greatest community development worker was Mahatma Gandhi, who went into the villages and infused into the people a quality of greatness they had not known before he came. Without that element of personality, or spirit, or soul, or feeling, or what Elisa Molina de Stahl in Guatemala calls "social emotion," true community development will not take place.

In this age of emphasis on efficiency, specialization, business-like procedures, and material values it is not easy to preserve the elements of "social emotion" and personal touch Yet it is precisely what must be done (Poston 1962:193).

Poston's work is not quoted in WCD. But Rose echoes Poston's emphasis when he writes that the CD approach is important because "PEOPLE are more important than PROGRAMS" (Rose 1962:79; capitals in original) and that CD works through "the minds and hearts" as well as "the hands" of "the people" (1962:78). I shall consider the relation between scientific and humanistic motifs within CD discourse later in this paper. Here, my concern is with the relation of both motifs to universalism, and their implication for the notion of historical and cultural difference.

Both humanistic and scientific advocates see 'personality', 'spirit' and the 'feeling' of individuals as formed most importantly through interaction with others, and most significantly through 'face-to-face' interactions. This holds true for individuals everywhere, irrespective of the particular histories and cultures they are located within. Poston's quote above builds on the belief in the universal human potential to respond to a good development worker. Scientific advocates such as Lewin sought to demonstrate the vital importance of interpersonal relations and 'group dynamics' through a series of socio-psychological experiments (as we shall see in the next section).

Lewin has further elaborated, in his own manner, conceptual and practical justifications for the lack of attention to history on the part of

CD discourse. He argued that causes that affect behavior are always simultaneously present with such behavior: “past events do not exist now and therefore cannot have effect now. The effect of the past on behavior can be only an indirect one” (Lewin 1951:64). “[T]echnical advice for bringing about changes cannot, as a rule, be based on the study of historical trends” (1951:171). For example:

A long duration of a group habit does not necessarily mean that habit is rigid. It may mean merely that the related conditions happen not to have changed during that period. It may well be that food habits which remained rigidly upheld for a long time can be changed more easily than habits which in the past have shown a fair amount of flexibility (1951:171).

Hence, “No amount of descriptive data will settle the question of what techniques are efficient in bringing about desired changes” (1951:171). Lewin therefore conceived his project as aimed at scientific measurement of the multitude of forces within a given ‘field’ in a given time, regarding any behavior as result of the balance of those contemporaneous forces 1951:173-4; cf. Hull 1995:41-2).⁷

To be sure, we do encounter such words as ‘culture’ and ‘tradition’ in WCD. For example in CD, there should be “Appropriate consideration of the traditions and sentiments of the community” (Rose 1962:17). In another place it is said “Apparently all cultures have a traditional set of beliefs which may be used when activating people in a program defined for the common good of the community” (Rose 1962:18). In the first case, ‘tradition’ is listed as one of many factors to be considered in the process of effecting ‘convergence of interests’ in a community. In the latter case, ‘tradition’ is one of many potential resources that can be utilized for a program. In both cases, it seems that ‘tradition’ is seen as a relatively uncomplicated feature in a given community, relatively easily accessible to development workers for their consideration and use. Discussion of tradition and culture is limited to such instances. As we shall see in the following section, such words as ‘attitudes’, ‘sentiment’, ‘belief’ and ‘honor’ are more frequently used in WCD. The contents of

7 “The process is but the epiphenomenon, the real object of study is the constellation of forces” (Lewin 1951:174). Dorwin Cartwright, a student of Lewin, recalls their conversation shortly before the latter’s death, wherein Lewin “interrupted himself with great enthusiasm to say, ‘Within the next year we’ll be able really to measure psychological forces’” (Cartwright 1951:xv).

those categories are considered only with regard to their (positive or negative) functionality in relation to desired forms of change. As categories, they are treated as universally valid labels for describing human psychology and behavior. There is no room in the design of the discourse itself to consider whether notions of ‘sentiment’, ‘belief’ and ‘honor’ themselves are fundamentally mediated by particular histories, or by cultures considered as emergent from such histories.

Techniques of Change

As many critics have observed, much of the slippage and confusion in the discourse of development is related to the duality of the verb ‘develop’—namely, that it can be used both intransitively and transitively (‘A develops’, ‘B develops A’). This leads to confusion about the agency, as well as confusion between the means and ends of ‘development’ (cf. Cowen and Shenton 1996).⁸ In the discussion of CD, this difficulty or tension manifests itself in an explicit form in such phrases as “aided self-help” (Rose 1962:7).⁹ However, we can observe this tension almost always present, in less explicit forms, throughout the theoretical and practical discussions in WCD.

In organizing WCD, Rose utilizes Irwin Sanders’ famous four-fold definition of CD—CD viewed as ‘process’, ‘method’, ‘program’, and ‘movement’ (Sanders 1958; cf. Wilkinson 1989:337). Of these four aspects of CD, Rose devotes the most space to delineating CD as ‘process’ and ‘method’.

CD as a process moves by stages from one condition or state to the next. It involves progression of changes in terms of specified criteria. It is a neutral, scientific term, subject to fairly precise definition and measurement expressed chiefly in social relations (Sanders in Rose 1962:33).

Those “specified criteria” include changes from:

- i) a state where elites make decisions for the people to the one in which people themselves make decisions

⁸ See also Paulo Freire’s discussion on presuppositions about agency implied in the notion of ‘extension’ (Freire 1973).

⁹ As I will argue later in this paper, the confusion about agency persists in contemporary discourses where interventionist programs are often described as building on the wishes and knowledges of the ‘target population’.

- ii) a state of minimum to one of maximum cooperation
- iii) a state where few participate to one where many participate
- iv) a state where all resources come from outside to one where local people make most use of their own resources (Sanders in Rose 1962:33).

Put more metaphorically, “Communities are, or can become, living organisms. Only by being permitted and encouraged to live and grow like organisms will they develop local dynamics” (Taylor 1956:19 quoted in Rose 1962:37-8). CD as ‘method’, then, is a set of scientific techniques designed to stimulate and assist in this process of organic growth. One sees here, one of the reasons that the ‘laboratory’ metaphor was compelling.

The CD process illustrated in the story of the development worker in West Bengal recounted above is restated by Carl Taylor in more schematic terms. The process can be divided into four steps:

- a) systematic discussion of common felt needs by members of the community
- b) systematic planning to carry out the first self-help undertaking that has been selected by the community
- c) the almost complete mobilization and harnessing of the physical, economic, and social potentialities of local community groups
- d) the creation of aspirations and the determination to undertake additional projects (Taylor in Rose 1962:34-5).

More abstractly, in Kurt Lewin’s terms, a “planned social change” is “composed of unfreezing, change of levels, and freezing on the new level” (Lewin 1951:231 quoted in Rose 1962:40). It is the task of the Community Development Worker, of whom the young man in West Bengal was exemplary, to assist in all these steps.

The first step, organizing the meeting, is not in itself expected to be very difficult. This is so because “Man is a gregarious animal and it is natural for him to meet with his neighbors especially in the underdeveloped countries.... The people love to meet. The problem may be that they meet too often, too long and have rambling unguided or misdirected meetings” (Daniel Russel in Rose 1962:9).¹⁰ The development worker’s task, then, is to keep the discussion systematic and

¹⁰ Dr. David Russell is described as “Chairman of the Rural Sociology Section, Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas” (Rose 1962:9).

focused on the 'commonly felt problem'. There is a sense of optimism with regard to the congruence between what the development worker will observe as the community's need, and what the people in the community will think of as their need:

College professors and service workers in Washington need not think they have a corner on ability to discuss, reason, [and] reach definite conclusions Illiterate peasants in the isolated mountain regions or jungles have been seen to go through this process quite successfully.... The writer has had experience of traveling through peasant communities and making mental notes of his ideas of their needs. Later, after he has been in a two-hour meeting of peasants discussing their needs, the two lists were very much the same" (Russell in Rose 1962:11).

Here, the assumption of the unity of psychic processes mentioned above is clear as is the lack of importance given to historical experience and cultural location. However, it is recognized that there may be minor discrepancies between what the outside specialist thinks and what the peasants' think, since there "are 'native' needs and cultivated needs." In such cases, "The outside community worker ... can help in cultivating interests in not so evident fields of need" (Russell in Rose 1962:11).

In Rose's discussion of 'innovation', the traditional ways of doing and thinking of a given group are foregrounded and emerge as problematic. Rose writes "The process of innovation is critically important in [CD] because the creation of change is its central function" (Rose 1962:21). After all, CD is "[a]n instrument for speeding up the process of change from the traditional economy to a more productive economy" (Dr. Ernest E. Neal in Rose 1962:100). In this context, familiar 'habits and attitudes' enter the discussion as elements which have to be replaced by new ones.

The process of innovation is said to involve five stages, which are: "awareness, interest, decision, period of trial, and acceptance" (North Central Region, Agricultural Extension Service, *How Farm People Accept New Ideas* quoted in Rose 1962:22-5). In addition to such conceptual expositions of the process of innovation (Rose 1962:22-29), Rose also provides detailed advice on the practical techniques for inducing and sustaining such processes, under the title of "Extension Method" (1962:41-77):

The community developer ... must understand that the villager is operating within his experience world and his experiences are ...

largely limited to his village ways of doing and thinking. The district staff on the other hand is concerned about how to change the villager's traditional ways of doing and thinking (1962:43).

In this context, the community developer must proceed "very carefully to guide the villager" so that the villager's "experience with the new will be so satisfying that it will result in his taking on the new way and discarding the traditional way" (1962:43). With regard to agriculture, the change is described as that from a traditional way to a scientific method of cultivation (1962:44). In emotional and attitudinal terms, the process of innovation, ultimately ought to "create a sufficient dislike or disrespect for the familiar pattern" to induce change (North Central Region, Agricultural Extension Service in Rose 1962:25).

To achieve these ends, the CD worker ought first of all to have skills for establishing good rapport with the villagers. The CD worker is advised to: "Develop the art of listening [to the villagers]" and "When new and significant ideas develop out of the conversations, develop the skill of letting the individual or group *feel that the idea has come from* a person or persons in the group"(Rose 1962:43; emphasis added). Rose tells the CD worker to "Never condemn existing practices; suggest there is another way too, which may be explained and discussed" (1962:54). When concluding the conversation the worker should "feel and express a genuine friendliness and appreciation. Strive to create a desire on the part of the people to want you to return soon and often" (Rose 1962:43).

In addition to standard verbal communications, the use of 'visual aids' is "a highly useful and essential method" of attracting attention of the villagers, and "putting across a point" (Rose 1962:56). Rose discusses ways of using such media as photographs, posters, blackboards, bulletin boards, films, slides, and puppets, giving very detailed advice about the recommended materials (e.g., yellow chalk for writing things on blackboard at night, cardboard for the neck of the puppet, crumpled newspaper as stuffing for the puppet's head) and about modes of presentation (e.g., a poster should contain dramatic pictures, tell the story in a single glance, have simple words, have one idea, have bold letters, and should be at least 20 by 30 inches in size).

Songs and dramas also can be used to attract attention and disseminate messages (Rose 1962:73-5). "The village people generally do not have a means of entertaining themselves. Here is an opportunity for the village worker to provide entertainment to the people and show that all is not work with him" (Rose 1962:74). "You can use [song and drama] to get

people together. Then talk to them of the ... program in your mind” - but “Remember: The talk should not be long. The villagers will feel tricked and clamor for the continuation of the show.” Rose recommends the village worker to “say a few words before the curtain goes up about the purpose of the drama.” Further, Rose recommends: “At the end of the show speak well of the principal people who are taking part and others who have helped” (1962:75).

As examples of concrete projects through which villagers can gain experience working together as community, Rose suggests: building schools; building and maintaining village approach roads; digging and cleaning village ponds; organizing credit co-operatives; and building village community halls. What is expected to emerge among the villagers through these undertakings is nothing less than ‘a new pattern of all interaction’ involving creation of ‘new roles’ and ‘new norms of behavior’ (Rose 1962:20). Once this ‘change of level’, in Lewin’s terms, is effected, the remaining task of CD is to ensure, again in Lewin’s terms, ‘freezing on the new level’ (Rose 1962:40).

The successful and complete transition to the new, more ‘developed’ stage will manifest itself in the “creation of aspiration and determination” among the villagers to undertake additional community improvement projects (Carl Taylor in Rose 1962:8). If the villagers have gone through the stages of discussion, planning, and complete mobilization for the initial community projects successfully, CD predicts a high probability that this final step will be taken. As Carl Taylor put it, “every human group that has successfully accomplished worthwhile undertakings is proud of itself and tends to seek out and do other things to justify and feed its group pride” (quoted in Rose 1962:8). Among the practical techniques that Rose cites for reinforcing this pride, and thus for ensuring the ‘freezing’ at the improved level include, (drawing examples from CD programs in Jamaica), the holding of ‘achievement days’ and ‘climaxes’ at the completion of each project:

- (1) The completion of the project is celebrated by a festival, where samples of work done or skills learned are displayed;
- (2) Prizes are distributed;
- (3) Villagers participate in plays, dances and songs (John B. Howley in Rose 1962:30).

It should be noted that WCD does not necessarily regard villagers as an undifferentiated group. Hence there are discussions about how “convergence of interests” among the villagers can be realized (Rose

1962:17). However, as noted at the beginning of this section, equally if not more problematic is the question of convergence of judgments, interests, and desires between the villagers and the development worker. As Rose writes, the outside development worker typically assumes that he ‘knows better’ than the villagers what is good for them. Presumably, this superiority on the part of the worker has its basis in the fact that he has access to a wider world of knowledge, including the fruits of science and technology, while the villagers are confined to their local experience. Yet CD, as ‘grassroots mobilization’ has to be firmly based on the ‘felt-needs’, ‘desires’ and ‘aspirations’ of the villagers themselves.

What makes this apparently contradictory project of ‘aided self-help’ seem plausible and feasible from the perspective of WCD—that is from the perspective of the outside developer—is, I would suggest, the strong faith in shared rationality, combined with faith in the efficacy and desirability of scientific technology. A universal rationality is shared by both the development worker and the villagers—or can be shared through calculated pedagogy embedded in discussions and demonstrations—to the extent that both can eventually reach consensus on what the ‘common problems’ are and the best ways of solving them. The development worker is assigned the role of the pedagogue because he has better knowledge—in larger quantity and in advance of the ‘awakening’ of the villagers—of how communities ought to operate, and what technologies can be deployed. Thus CD can at once advocate development based on local ‘felt-needs’ and maintain that when villagers do not feel the ‘right’ needs, then it is sufficient that they simply be made to feel ‘as if’ ideas have emanated from them, so as to further the process of awakening and moving to the next ‘level’.

Lewin, for one, explicitly acknowledged this tension. He admitted that some “manipulations” by an external leader are needed. He added that such manipulations should be limited to the “transitional period” before the community begins its course of healthy growth on its own (Lewin 1948:39; cf. Hull 1995:43).¹¹ Rose, on the other hand, does not describe any part of CD process as ‘manipulation’. I suggest that Rose (at least implicitly) put his hope on the function of time, especially on the time that passes during ‘communication’ and ‘discussions’. Rose’s hope seemed to be that through those processes, consensus could be achieved in

¹¹ Not by accident, this contradiction or paradox of the discourse of CD partially replicates the central paradox of democratic education at large (cf. Harari 1987; Connolly 1995; Macpherson 1977).

ways that need not be called ‘manipulation’—at some point in time, villagers would ‘realize’ what they ‘really wanted’ all-along. However, I would submit that, in practice, often the passage of time in itself (spent for ‘village-wide discussions’, demonstrations, and puppet shows) may serve as a substitute for consensus, or ‘realization’.

I have noted earlier the coexistence of the humanistic and scientific impulses in the discourse of CD. To the plausibility of the CD project, the humanistic vision offers notions of the universal faculties of the human being to suffer and to desire improvement. Familiar humanistic tropes that support this vision are the movement from darkness to light, and from alienation to realization. More importantly, there is also a claim that people everywhere are capable of having communal, or ‘societal’, sentiment. This implies the ability to ‘sympathize’ with others. Presumably, the development worker is also endowed with this ability to sympathize, which in turn enables him to engage with the villagers ‘sincerely’. The development worker, like Mahatma Gandhi and Elisa Molina de Stahl, who were earlier mentioned by Richard Poston (1962:193), is endowed with the ability to let villagers ‘recover’ the societal sentiments from which they are alienated. The scientific advocates of CD seek to redescribe these processes in vocabulary simulating the physical sciences, in order to make them susceptible to conscious and systematic manipulation. In so doing, they naturalize both psychology and society.

These universalisms (humanistic and scientific), I submit, tend to lessen the sense of tension or contradiction inherent in the construct ‘aided self-help’. However, it remains to be seen how CD relates to the notion of democracy, since many would argue that democracy, principally and critically, has to do with politics. Indeed, in reading WCD, one is almost naturally led to ask the question of democracy, because the words ‘democracy’ and ‘democratic’ are ubiquitous in the document. What is the content of the ‘democracy’ that has been invoked in this document? What is its place in the overall discourse of community development?

Functionalists’ Democracy

Rose insists throughout WCD that CD is a means of democratic education and that CD is achieved democratically (cf. Rose 1962:108). But CD is not *simply* a democratic education:

The community development process can be distinguished from other processes primarily by the way it couples specific education that will

strengthen democracy with community action that will solve recognized common problems (Rose 1962:12).

CD 'strengthens democracy' *and* 'solves problems'. What is the relationship between these two aims? Rose acknowledges that, on occasion, there may appear to be conflicts between the two aims. Efforts to organize the villagers into effective groups may be time consuming. A development worker may be tempted "to decide what should be done and start ordering the villagers into action to carry out the jobs [he] takes out for village action." However, such an approach is ultimately ineffective. Unless the program emerges from village-wide discussion and is carried out by the villagers' group, then the program "results in little or no gain" and "can set people against progress" (Rose 1962:53).

The "absolute necessity" of organizing and working with village-wide groups, Rose writes, has been made "unmistakably clear" through the "years of experience with the [CD] program" (Rose 1962:52). Rose cites the work of Kurt Lewin and his students to support this claim:

[E]xperience in leadership training, in changing food habits, work production, criminality, alcoholism, prejudices - all seem to indicate that it is usually easier to change individuals formed into a group than to change one of them separately. As long as group values are unchanged the individual will resist changes more strongly the further he is to depart from group standards. If the group standard itself is changed, the resistance which is due to the relation between the individual and group standard is eliminated (Lewin 1951:228 quoted in Rose 1962:38).

Rose goes on to cite a series of findings by Lewin and his students, Cartwright and Zander, including an "experiment involving an attempt to promote the use of unpopular cuts of meat such as sweetbreads, beef hearts, and kidneys by housewives" where it was observed that "thirty-two percent of the women involved in a group decision served one of these meats to their families whereas only three percent of the women 'lectured to' served one of them" (Cartwright and Zander in Rose 1962:39).

Elsewhere, 'democratic' is used to denote *a type of society* as distinguished from 'static' and 'autocratic' societies. CD as a movement only arises in democratic societies, since:

Movements arise only in societies that permit and encourage change.... In some static societies discontent is ignored, and in

autocratic societies discontent finds no mode of expression except revolution (Taylor in Rose 1962:87).

This passage appear to refer to large scale social formations, such as nation-states. Yet I think it is important to note that the modifier, 'democratic', defines the *character* of a society, and not simply the basic institutional arrangement of a nation-state.

Although not cited by Rose, there was a psychological experiment made famous by Lewin and his students that provided a microscopic representation of democracy as a type of 'social climate' and its implications (Lewin 1948; Lippitt 1940; Cartwright and Zander 1960; cf. Hull 1995:37-41).¹² They studied two groups of children both engaged in making theatrical masks. Each group was led by an adult, one in a 'democratic manner', the other in an 'authoritarian manner'. The authoritarian 'dictated' what was to be done by the group, and "tended to be 'personal' in his praise and criticism of the work." The democratic leader, on the other hand, made all policies a matter of group discussion which he encouraged and assisted, suggested two or three alternatives when technical advice was needed, and was "objective" or "fact-minded" in his praise and criticism of the work.¹³

Expectedly, the researchers found more dependency on the leader and less individuality among the children under autocratic leadership, more

12 Matthew Hull argues the experiment signified for Lewin that complex social phenomena can be studied through carefully controlled experiments in ways that leads to discovery of methods necessary for inducing desirable functioning of society (1995:39). Hull also points out that the experiment was designed to confirm preconceived notions about the difference between Nazi Germany and democratic America (1995:38).

13 Describing this experiment, Hull has stated "The significance of modeling the relation between a democratic leader and citizens on that between an adult and young children hardly needs comment" (1995:38). However, there is an interesting difference between this experiment in the inter-War U.S. and the scenario of CD in the post-World War II era, exemplified by the account of a Bengali development worker, described earlier. In the latter case, it is the 'young' and 'inexperienced' CD worker who transforms the villagers, including well established village leaders. According to the Himalayan Studies Centre: "The participation of the Youth, emphasized at the early stage of the [Village Development] programme, was later replaced by the support of the Bhajan Mandal (a voluntary group of elderly people meeting in the evening for religious prayers), with the entry of India in the programme" (1981:70-1).

‘group-mindedness’ and more friendliness under democratic leadership.¹⁴ A greater amount of creativity and ‘genuine work-interest’ was shown in democracy. Most significantly, while there was high productivity in autocracy, the productivity sharply dropped when the leader left the room. The children in democracy remained productive in the absence of the leader.

As is clear, in these discussions, democracy is defined in terms of how a person relates to others, principally in ‘face-to-face’ interactions. As is also clear, a juristic or contractual notion of democracy—that which is concerned with the definition of the rights and relations of citizens and the state—is not the concern for the CD discourse under discussion. Democracy, rather, is a matter of attitude and behavior. It involves a particular manner of speech, and is also related to ‘fact-mindedness’. It produces friendliness. Democracy is also about inventiveness and ‘receptivity to change’ and positively related to consistent productivity.

Rose’s principal concern is with CD programs to be implemented by governments receiving U.S. foreign aid. As such WCD necessarily involves presuppositions about particular relations between the government and its people. In this regard, Rose notes, CD “programs in most countries are *peaceful* revolutions led by national ... leaders” (Rose 1962:111; emphasis added). In other words, CD is an alternative to social transformation via violent revolution. The CD approach is a logical choice for national leaders (or foreign donors) who recognize that “revolutionary change” in the countryside is “desired, and probably needed” but want to accomplish that change “by evolutionary methods” (Taylor in Rose 1962:112). CD, then, is presented as a means for revolutionary change without revolt (or communism).

Yet, the relation between the government and people is not described in terms of rights and contracts, nor does it include any explicit vision of the appropriate state-level political formation. CD, rather, is a “two-way channel of *communication* between the government and village people” (Rose 1962:111; emphasis added). Through CD, villagers are able to articulate their particular needs, communicate those needs to government, and the government can provide necessary assistance to the villagers. Thus, CD “brings the local community and the central government into

14 The relative frequency of ‘I-centered’ remarks and ‘We-centered’ remarks was used as an indicator of the degree of group-mindedness.

active partnership” (Rose 1962:109). The form of that central government is not discussed, nor is it a target of CD.¹⁵

However, as is clear from the foregoing discussion, CD involves much more than simple communication, and material and technical assistance. This ‘partnership’ “requires” of villagers “not only physical involvement but also great mental and emotional involvement” (Rose 1952:112). The villagers are expected to develop new patterns of interaction and association (Rose 1952:20). In many of the projects they will be mobilized to build schools and ‘village community halls’ and to organize and participate in festivals—all of which are to symbolize and reinforce the idea of community that they supposedly were not previously fully aware of. And through the process, the villagers are to transform themselves mentally and emotionally, discarding “such attitudes and practices as are obstacles to social and economic improvements” (Rose 1962:112).

Paul Rose, after over a hundred pages of discussion of the question, “What is Community Development?” declares that “the final conclusion of this study concerning [a] definition is not being given ... at this time.” He instead provides an “interim definition” which is summarized by him as “Joint efforts to solve, democratically and scientifically, common problems on a community basis” (1962:114).

But as Rose states at the outset of the study, and as we have learned by now, CD cannot be “compressed into a short definition” (Rose 1962:1). I would return to Pye’s statement that CD’s distinctive characteristic resides in its ability to mean different things to different people. To cite yet another definition, CD is described as “A process of releasing, through effective leadership, the enormous potential that resides in people who discover that through their own efforts they can improve the usefulness of

15 Rose writes, paraphrasing Coolie Verner, that CD “can occur on the community level only, for it is there only that the condition exist which are essential to the effective education for democratic participation” (Rose 1962:13). Charles Horton Cooley, a student of John Dewey and “the most eminent figure of American sociology of the first decades of the twentieth century” (Hull 1995:7), thought that “the aspirations of ideal democracy ... are those naturally springing from the playground or the local community” (Cooley in Hull 1995:11). According to Hull, “Cooley saw formal democratic political institutions as an attempt to extend the moral-political ideals of the primary group to groups too large to have face-to-face interactions.... It is perhaps only a slight exaggeration to say that Cooley saw formal democratic institutions as simply social mechanisms for the extension of sympathy - and weak mechanisms at that. For this task, he had more faith in modern forms of communication such as the newspapers and the telegraph than in formal political structures” (1995:12).

their own lives” (Rose 1962:100). The discourse can attract persons concerned with the moral well-being or political empowerment of rural people by promising the realization of the potential of the people *for themselves*. Government leaders can interpret that sentence to mean that ‘people’ would ‘improve the usefulness of their lives’ for national growth. People and interest groups with very different ideas of what constitutes “realization of the potential of the people” can all agree with that statement. The discourse creates particular links between psychology, morality, culture, economy and political formations. It promises somehow to establish a positive feedback, or loop, among those diverse elements. As a system of feedback, those elements—culture, psychology, economy, politics—tend to appear as being locked in a web of functional relations. In such a system, ‘blame’ can be directed in different directions, depending on the inclination of the speaker. Symptoms of ‘alienation’ found among the villagers may be blamed on the economy, or on national politics. Alternatively, stagnation of the national economy may be blamed on the villagers’ culture or psychology. It is not necessary to point out that, outside such discourse, villagers’ cultural practices may have a very different or no significant relation to national or international policies.

Nepal as Development Laboratory

We now return to Nepal, and to the discussion of what became of the Village Development Project and, more generally, of Nepal as a ‘development laboratory’. In December 1961 John Cool arrived as USAID’s new Chief of Village Development, unaware of USAID’s plans to terminate the Village Development Project (Skerry et al. 1992:122). Indeed by the 1960s the constitution of USAID’s mission and prevailing philosophy of development had changed substantially from the 1950s. So too, of course, had the situation in which it worked, with the dismissal of the elected government and the institution of the Panchayat system in 1962. There was now an economist, William Thweatt, on the USAID staff reflecting the rise in popularity of Development Economics, a discipline that was still very much in the making in the early 1950s.

Development economists at the time provided a simple and powerful model of development through capital investment, which would allow a nation to ‘take-off’ towards the path of continual growth (Skerry et al. 1992:94-5). In the realm of agricultural development, the publication of *Transforming Traditional Agriculture* by a University of Chicago economist, Theodore Schultz, in 1964, captured the imaginations of many

foreign aid experts and affected policies. The main thesis of the book, often called ‘iconoclastic’ at the time, was that “farmers were rational” (Skerry et al. 1992:112). The key to rural development, then, is to provide “necessary inputs such as affordable credit, improved seed, fertilizer, tools and water on the one hand and accessible, profitable markets and storage for surplus production on the other” (Skerry et al. 1992:112). Around the same time, “the remarkable production potential of new High Yielding Variety (HYV) cereals was beginning to be realized ... in India, Mexico and the Philippines” (Skerry et al. 1992:113).

Reflecting the new trend, an assessment team sent by USAID to Nepal in 1964 criticized the existing agricultural extension programs as based on “a simplistic model ‘in which farmers were being exhorted to work harder and to do better almost exclusively within the framework of their existing technology’” (Skerry et al. 1992:110). John Cool was initially instructed to terminate the Village Development Project before the end of 1962. However, the responsibility of Cool, and also that of the 1,400 trained development workers attached to the Village Development, altered “abruptly” when it was decided that they would assist HMG in developing the Panchayat system as a vehicle of development at the local level (Skerry et al. 1992:122-3). This collaborative effort was ultimately terminated by the end of the 1960s after USAID officials judged that the central government was not seriously interested in decentralization (Skerry et al. 1992:126-33).

According to *Four Decades*, in the agricultural sector during the 1960s, USAID worked on the assumption that the “Green Revolution model of agricultural development in India would be duplicated in Nepal” (Skerry et al. 1992:197). However, “By the beginning of the 1970s, USAID and HMG had realized there would be no ‘green revolution’ in Nepal” (Skerry et al. 1992:207).¹⁶ On the other hand, *Four Decades* further notes that a USAID document from 1975 stated that “the previous ‘prime emphasis on growth regardless of distributive justice has led to a situation full of imbalances’” particularly between the Tarai and the Kathmandu Valley on the one hand, and the Hills on the other (Skerry et al. 1992:182).

As in evaluations of many other development strategies, the criticism of the growth model and the concern for equity in the statement just quoted, may reflect not so much the particular situation of Nepal as more widespread, shifting trends in international development discourse. I shall

¹⁶ For the reasons given during the 1970s for the failure of the Green Revolution model in Nepal, see Skerry et al. 1992:197, 202-3.

refer to three ‘events’ commonly cited in the conventional history of international development which are thought to mark a general shift that took place around the early 1970s: First, in his presidential speech at the annual meeting of the Society for International Development in New Delhi in 1969, Dudley Seers argued for a shift in the focus of development economics away from a simple growth model measured by increase in GNP towards incorporation of concerns for ‘equity’ by asking questions about levels of poverty, unemployment and inequality (Seers 1969:3). Second, in 1973, the then President of the World Bank, Robert S. McNamara in his “Nairobi Speech” (an address to the Board of Governors of the World Bank) announced the change in the Bank’s policy orientation away from industrial growth and towards poverty-alleviation and rural development programs (cf. Ayers 1983). Third, the U.S. Congress’s 1973 “New Direction” legislation mandated development aid operations based on the principle of “growth with equity,” which was to be translated into practice through “maximizing employment via labor-intensive economic activities, and insuring access of the poor, usually small rural producers, to the means of production, the market, the financial systems, and technical knowledge” (Skerry et al. 1992:178). Irma Adelman and Cynthia Morris’s 1973 book has often been cited as an empirical work clearly showing the failure of the first two decades of development, in that in most developing countries economic inequality sharpened, with the income of the bottom 40% falling in absolute terms in many places.

As Arturo Escobar points out, economists tend to narrate this shift as an adjustment in their theories prompted by “painful realizations” taking place around 1970, of the “undesirable consequences” of the growth model (1995:80).¹⁷ Against this conventional narrative John Cohen emphasizes the political imaginary of ‘the West’ at the time:

it was the politicians who pressed for rural development strategy.
... [The politicians] were more sensitive than development analysts to

17 For retrospective accounts of the evolution (and involution) of development economics by some of its practitioners, see Meier and Seers (1984) and Sen (1983). For genealogies of development discourse more generally, see Escobar (1995), Robertson (1984), and Cowen and Shenton (1996). While Escobar begins his discussion of development discourse from the immediate post-World War II period, Robertson traces the evolution of ‘national planning’ since the early decades of the 20th century. Cowen and Shenton locate the origin of the ‘doctrines of development’ in Western Europe during the early decades of the 19th century.

events in China, Cuba, Vietnam and elsewhere 'Containing the green uprising' added a counter-insurgency pressure for increased poverty-focused ... rural development projects" (1987:24).

Thus, we see a repetition of the theme of the 'vulnerability of the rural population' to left political ideologies, that had been identified by Mihaly as motivating the U.S. investment in the Third World rural development in the 1950s.

The 'growth with equity' and 'basic needs' discourses resulted in the emergence, in many developing countries including Nepal, of 'Integrated Rural Development Programs (IRDPs)' (cf. Skerry et al. 1992:179, 181-2).¹⁸ Reflecting some striking similarities between this supposedly 'new' discourse on rural development with that of the 1950s, the Himalayan Studies Centre, in their 1981 *Evaluation of USAID-Village Development Project in Nepal (1954-1962)*, claimed:

The present integrated rural development projects and the Integrated Panchayat Development Programmes ... are nothing more and nothing less than the replicas of the VDP in different names with slight modifications in contents and nature (1981:15).

Devendra Raj Panday, in his 1983 paper, also refers to the similarity between IRDP and the Village Development Project.¹⁹ However, while the Himalayan Studies Centre pointed to the continuities between the Village Development Project and the IRDP as vindication of the former, for Panday, the popularity of IRDP in the early 1980s was a symptom of functional amnesia on the part of development professionals in Nepal:

It is in the production front where we ... failed miserably [after thirty years of development activities]; and it is on this front that we have been rationalizing, if for no other reason than to keep ourselves professionally alive so that we can keep trying. So, forgetting all that we tried to do for rural development in the 1950's and the 1960's ... we have to convince ourselves that it is only recently that we started working on 'integrated' rural development ... and that we have to give

18 Skerry et al. note a slight time lag in the adoption by USAID/Nepal of incorporating New Directions legislation. According to Skerry et al., while the legislation was passed in the U.S. in 1973, the incorporation of its directives in Nepal "started only after Samuel Butterfield arrived to head the [USAID/Nepal] in 1976" (1991:179).

19 See also Foster (1982) for similarities between the discourse of the 1950s and the early 1980s.

ourselves some more time. And the 'cavalcade of concepts' comes in handy in this rationalization (1983:290-1).

Panday proceeds to argue that the premise that gave rise to the 'growth with equity' and 'basic needs' strategy was never valid for Nepal. According to Panday, one of the main authors of the new strategies, Mahbub ul Haq, carried with him the experience of Pakistan where "GDP increased at an average rate of 6.7 percent ... throughout the 1960's" but where "the major portion of ... growing wealth [was] concentrated in the hands of ... 22 families" (1983:294-5). But in Nepal, Panday points out, "by and large, there has been no economic growth to speak of" (1983:295).²⁰

One of the conditions that enabled this incompatible model to be imported in Nepal, according to Panday, is the "presumed homogeneity" of the Third World which leads to a notion that what is good for one Third World country is good for another.²¹ Panday also suggests various reasons that make Nepal particularly vulnerable to being affected by international development trends. Among others, he points to the very high dependency of government expenditure on foreign aid, compared to other countries in South Asia (1983:277-80). As Panday also notes, there was a particular historical conjuncture in which entrance of foreign aid *preceded* the building up of Nepal's own capabilities for national economic planning (1983: 270). Ludwig Stiller and Ram Prakash Yadav (1979) have also argued that development planning in Nepal seems to generally follow the various, and often contradictory, initiatives of foreign donors (cf. Justice 1986).²²

20 This is not to deny that a disproportionate share of whatever economic development is taking place in Nepal has gone to the more privileged" writes Panday. However, with its extremely low rate of growth in Gross Domestic Production (GDP), he asks, "How on earth was Nepal expected to cater to the basic needs of all its people on a sustained basis under existing conditions without going for a permanent dependence on external subsidy[?]" (Panday 1983:295).

21 For a discussion of the 'Three World' division as an instance of 'primitive classification' structuring American social science, see Pletsch (1981).

22 Stiller and Yadav write: "The mere suggestion that foreign aid was an input into Nepal's own development effort was ridiculous. So little control did the administration have over foreign aid that when Upadhyaya and Beenhakker began to piece together their directory of development projects in Nepal in 1970, they were obliged to go to the United Nations' office and to the US/AID to gather the data they needed. The individual administrative departments did not even have the records of the programmes and projects that had supposedly been executed under their own supervision" (1979:74). The inability on the part of the Nepali government to

As described at the beginning of this paper, Nepal in the 1950s and 1960s appeared to foreign aid administrators and social scientists as providing an ideal laboratory for the ideas and agencies of the project of development. Its 'isolation' from the world, lack of colonial history, and insignificance in terms of certain military, trade and business interests, enabled those foreigners to try to follow the 'textbooks' of development interventions. It seems as though the isolationist policy under the Ranas (1846 - 1951) and the absence of a colonial history were transformed in those foreigners' minds into lack of history as such, presenting an unrealistic vision of Nepal as a pure and isolated space.²³

In this context, Paul Rose, for one, presented his Village Development Project in the following manner:

The whole approach and philosophy ... is one of helping individuals and communities help themselves on a continuing cumulative basis. The contributions of the project ... are calculated to bring about increased production, higher incomes and an improved standard of living to hundreds of thousands of families thereby enhancing the economic status and general well-being of the entire nation (USOM, *Proforma of Overall Project in Agriculture*, in Mihaly 1965:116-7).

This was a 'bottom-up' imaginary. The real Nepal is in those thousands of villages. Targets for direct engagement, thus, are those 'individuals' and 'communities' on 'the ground'. Transformation at the national level is simply a result of changes occurring at the local level. One sees an interesting homology of this imaginary with that of certain British views towards India during the colonial era. After the initial period of conquest and into the period of rule of India, the British developed a theory of the essence of India as made up of 'village communities'. Charles Metcalfe for one, wrote:

The Village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they want within themselves They seem to last where nothing else lasts. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds revolution; ... but the village communities remain the same (quoted in Cohn 1987:213).

coordinate foreign aid is a theme constantly repeated in the present (cf. Bongartz et al. 1992).

23 As a related matter, see Onta (1996) for a discussion of the history textbooks during the Panchayat era where the Rana period is presented as a time in which 'nothing happened' (cf. Des Chene 1995).

As Bernard Cohn has argued, this theory was important for the British,

in that it shifted the British view of India away from the rulers to the peasants; the real India was in the village and the real Indians were not the despotic rulers - Muslim or Hindu - Mughal or Maratha or Sikh; these could be deposed or controlled through indirect rule, without disturbing the mass of the Indian population. The social theory of the village republic which gave primacy in society to the peasants over against rulers had many uses in explaining to the British themselves their rule in India (1987:213).

According to Cohn, this theory helped the British avoid the question of the constitutional legitimacy of their presence in India, by constructing the issue of the 'rulers' as inessential to the real India. While the colonizing British constructed a theory that contrasts ephemeral large-scale political formations with villages (and caste and family) that are enduring, Paul Rose operated within a vision that saw Nepal as a place where nothing had happened before 1950. We can say that the early community development project in Nepal was doubly blind to history since, in addition to the general view that saw Nepal as a 'fossilized' land, the project was, as we have seen, based on ahistorical and apolitical notions of human community and democracy. Communities endure outside history, democracy is a matter of character, not polity. They are both, at base, elements in a social experiment that either do or do not 'function' in an isolated environment—as in a laboratory.

Some would argue that this double blindness had much to do with the failure of early development projects. If the use of the word 'laboratory' is meant to invite us to 'learn from experience' then one of the principal lessons we should learn from the early history of community development may be the need to attend to the blindness that the very metaphor, 'laboratory', simultaneously expresses and encourages.

After Community Development?

In 1962, John Cool had the following to say about the Village Development Service:

as a non-taxing, non-repressive, non-punitive manifestation of the national government ... the Village Development Service has been modestly successful. The impact of Village Development Worker upon the rural people has been much greater than is generally recognized.

Ten years ago no one in the village had ever considered that their government had any interest in their development and welfare. Through Village Development they first learned that their government 'cared' Not only have the concepts of self-help and community cooperation been introduced; more important, a large number of rural people have become receptive to the idea of change. Thus ... a sound foundation has been laid ... (quoted in Skerry et al. 1992:46).

Is the work of development in the present in fact building on the 'foundation' laid by Community Development? Or is today's labor entirely different from CD? More generally, how, in the present, do we imagine 'democracy', 'local cultures', or 'cooperation'? Have we developed political and sociological imaginations that transcend the community development discourse? Or are we still working in the space provided by that discourse?

There is no simple answer to this set of questions. On the one hand, especially since the 1980s, we are witnessing a proliferation of slogans like 'community empowerment' and 'participation' that deploy notions that appear strikingly similar to what we have seen in the CD of the 1950s. On the other hand, the four decades that divide us from the early interventions seem to have substantially transformed the socio-political landscape of Nepal.

First, the apparent continuity. In a book entitled *Community Development*, published in 1994, we find a succinct statement that repeats one of the basic features of CD described by Rose in 1962:

Identification of the *community felt need should be made by the community itself* with as little a coercion as possible from outside. *The change agent should meticulously plan the facilitating process to that end with the creation of a feeling in the community* that the identification is made by the community itself (Roka 1994:74; emphasis added).

CD of 1994, just like the CD of the 1950s, claims to build its entire project on the authentic wishes of the people. At the same time it continues to incorporate detailed procedures that aim to guarantee that the people will wish what they ought. Of course, this strategy is based on the assumption that divides society into 'those who know' (i.e., the

developers) and ‘those who don’t’ (i.e., those who ought to be developed).²⁴

Another sign of continuity between the CD of the 1950s and the more recent ones can be found in a paper by an anthropologist, Linda Stone (1989). The main purpose of that paper was to question “the cross-cultural viability of the concept of participatory development” (Stone 1989:206). After describing differences and incompatibilities between the notions of ‘development’ and ‘participation’ held by the outside developers and the target villagers in a development project, she states:

Most descriptions of [community participation] reflect *cultural values* of Western individualism and equality. By contrast, rural Nepalese society *operates* through principles of hierarchy, human interdependence, and action through personal relationship and social networks.... In these small-scale, face-to-face communities ... persons manipulate their multiple “connections” for access to resources The problem is that “development” is perceived to stem from “outside”.... The vast majority of villagers, and particularly those lower in caste ... perceive that they lack the ability to establish meaningful connections with this external world (Stone 1989:212; emphasis added).

Notice how, in this summary of the difference between the ‘West’ and the rural Nepal, the ‘cultural values’ (ideology) of the former are contrasted with the ‘operations’ (social practices) of the latter. Notice also the repetition of the claim that villagers live in ‘small-scale, face-to-face communities’. Here, ‘culture’ is a critical issue for development. However, culture is defined as an unchanging ‘thing’, which should be either conserved or changed in light of the objectives of development.²⁵ Stone enters the field of development discourse as an expert on culture and explicates the relevant features of Nepali rural culture. However, the contours of the problem-field that she enters are such that ‘culture’ is defined in a way that forecloses the complicated questions of historical

24 Implications of this dichotomy for social imaginations in Nepal—particularly for the forms of identifications that people in rural areas adopt—have been explored by Stacy Pigg (1992, 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1996).

25 For a criticism of the anthropological notion of ‘culture’ which is particularly relevant to South Asia, see Appadurai (1988).

change, including questions of complex relations between ideology and practice in Nepal, in the 'West', and in their encounters.²⁶

Now the apparent difference between the CD of the 1950s and that of the 1990s. These discourses on 'community' and 'participation' are deployed in a socio-political terrain that seems to have changed substantially from that of the 1950s. In the Nepal of the 1950s as seen by Rose, there were thousands of villages with 'enormous potentials' full of villagers 'aching for change'. At Rose's disposal was a set of techniques called community development, that would help the villagers help themselves. In addition to being a compilation of micro-sociological techniques for change CD, for Rose, represented a particular and hitherto 'missing' relation between the Nepali state and its subjects -- the relation of cooperation and partnership.

In practice, Rose's Village Development Project, modeled on supposedly successful experiences in rural America and elsewhere, failed to realize its promised effect in Nepal. As we have seen, even after leaving Nepal, Rose seems to have believed that community development at its core was based on a valid scientific understanding of human nature, and thus was universally applicable. Sources of failure, then, had to be something 'external' to the idea of CD as such. While Eugene Mihaly (1965), as we saw, blamed this failure on the village institutions and the peculiar psychology of the Nepali villagers, the U.S. Mission seems to have put their blame more on the side of Nepali state. In other words, according to various analyses of the U.S. experts, the Nepali state lacked the administrative apparatus necessary to enter into the 'relation' with the villagers as envisioned by Rose's program. Thus we see repeatedly in the pages of *Four Decades of Development*, how USAID and other donors put their energy into 'human resource development' and 'institution building' (Skerry et al. 1992:91-103, 188-93).

Indeed, one of the most tangible effects of the past four decades of development in Nepal, despite the emphasis on local communities, seems

26 As with other documents that I have discussed in this paper, my purpose has not been to judge their practical utility in their own terms, but rather to examine the constraints imposed by the problem-field in which they operate. Stone's sensible arguments include that villagers' notion of development had to do with 'things' and that it comes from 'outside' reflecting their previous experiences with 'development'. Stone's criticism is rather aimed at naïveté of the outside developers limited by the ideology of individualism in their understanding of social complexity. Stone calls on 'outside developers' to realize that they are indeed *dependent* on the villagers if they wish to accomplish anything.

to have been the growth and expansion of the state. The *Four Decades* tells us:

In 1951, HMG administration was staffed by approximately 7,000 officials. By 1973, the civil service had expanded to 50,000, with additional 30,000 employed in various public enterprises. Including teachers, the police, and army, there were nearly 200,000 civil servants, representing roughly half of all wage and salary employment outside agriculture. The growth in numbers of civil servants was accompanied by the proliferation of government agencies and parastatal enterprises (Skerry et al. 1992:188).²⁷

Returning to Kelly Kammerer's "Foreword" to *Four Decades of Development* with which I began this paper, we encounter the following statement about Nepal in the 1990s:

With the changed political circumstances of the past few years [referring to the restoration of multi-party democracy], and an increased understanding of the need to follow market principles and to rely more on the private sector to stimulate economic growth, we are hopeful that by the year 2001, the 50th anniversary of Nepal's entry into the modern era, we will see Nepal graduate from the ranks of the world's relatively least developing countries (Kammerer 1992:ii).

After decades of expansion, now the call is for 'retrenchment' of the state. Since the mid-1980s, in "concurrency with the guidelines of the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and World Bank Structural Adjustment Program" USAID has been calling on HMG to reduce "the government's role in the economy and increas[e] the role of private enterprise" (Skerry et al. 1992:265, 269).

We encounter calls for "community self-reliance" and "local management" in the descriptions of the latest projects (Skerry et al. 1992:359; Purdey et al. 1994). Indeed, the process described in Rose's 1962 document—"a process of releasing ... the enormous potential that resides in people who discover that through their own efforts they can improve the usefulness of their own lives" (1962:100)—seems to be

27 Misra and Sharma (1983:9) argue that foreign aid serves the interest of the Nepali 'upperclass' by helping to extend the reach of administrative apparatus into the lives of 'underclass'. James Ferguson (1990), in his study of the 'development industry' in the Lesotho, identifies the expansion of bureaucratic power as one of the principal 'instrumental effects' of development.

regarded as an urgent need in the present battle for 'poverty eradication'. However, the task of micro-sociological engineering that Rose saw as a crucial element in modern governance, is now increasingly relegated to the so-called Non-Governmental Organizations (cf. Skerry et al. 1992:270-74; Bongartz et al. 1992).²⁸ Some in the present may define their aims and practices to be qualitatively different from the earlier programs described by Rose. Yet most present day efforts of NGOs and others to create 'community empowerment' appear to find it necessary to operate, just as John Cool predicted, on 'the foundation' provided by the development discourses of past decades. If this is so, then efforts to create 'different' projects ought to involve a conscious struggle within and against the existing discursive field, in order not to be merely a repetition of the same assumptions, embedded in the ever-new slogans and acronyms. That conscious struggle ought to involve serious reflections on the significance of community based projects within the wider institutional and political context in the present, especially in light of the fact that the early CD discourse entailed the expansion of the state while failing to articulate a complex vision of the large-scale political formation and its transformations.

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²⁸ Arellano-Lopez and Petras (1994) argue that large-scale international NGOs involved in poverty-alleviation projects are increasingly supplanting the space for 'alternative' grassroots social mobilizations.

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