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A DISCIPLINE ASSERTING ITS IDENTITY AND PLACE DISPLACEMENT, AID AND ANTHROPOLOGY IN SUDAN

Munzoul Abdalla M. Assal*

Abstract: The relationship between anthropology and development is very much contested. While the debate about such relationship is not new (it began during the early 1970s and continued up to the present), it started to be heated during the closing decade of the last century with the ascendance of the post-modern critique in anthropology. Arguments of the debate are, generally, either for or against involvement of anthropology, whose dubious history is often cited by those who are sceptic about its role. It is unfortunate that most current heated debates on the relationship between anthropology and development are a reflection of anthropological elitism preoccupied with general dilemmas of anthropology while the real dilemma, that of those who are brutally subjected to misguided development and mass displacement, is compromised. This paper is against such muted anthropological elitism and while it endeavours to make the case for a positive role of anthropology in development, it does not distance anthropologists from the failures of development industry or portray them as an innocent part in that industry. It argues that while revealing the realities of the powerless is still needed, anthropologists need also to focus on the powerful, and probably be part of the power apparatus. The case of the displaced persons in Sudan and the author's own experience with NGOs are used to substantiate the paper's arguments and avert the muted elitism characterising much of the current debates on anthropology and development.

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to contribute to an old but currently heated debate: the relationship between anthropology and development. Recent discussions on the relationship between anthropology and development are resuscitated at a time when the involvement of anthropologists in the aid and development industry became very much pronounced with the present post-modernist calls for reflexivity, and despite many suggestions to the contrary anthropology appears to assert its identity and place within the plethora of social sciences (Eyben 2000).

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This paper¹ attempts to contribute to the debate through a discussion of an empirical social and sociological problem that faces not only anthropologists but also social scientists and development practitioners in Sudan. This problem is the displacement of millions of people from their original homelands to other areas in Sudan and notably to the national capital. Four interrelated issues will be brought together in the paper. These are displacement, NGOs, aid and the role and place of anthropology. I am aware that by taking these different problems together the paper may end up without doing justice to any of them. But the point is that these issues or problems are very much interrelated and, hence, none of them can be taken in isolation from the others. The objective of putting these seemingly different issues together is, partly, to bring to the fore the sorts of dilemmas and predicaments that haunt anthropologists or equally other social scientists dealing with research in developing countries, at a time when applied research is mostly funded by the development industry² (NGOs, development oriented institutions, etc.). Highlighting such dilemmas or predicaments is hoped to be a step toward alternative paths or improved existing ways of anthropological contribution to development.

Endorsing the important role that is to be played by anthropologists in development endeavours, the basic contention of this paper is that while trying to assert itself anthropology cannot and must not continue to confine itself to the study of the powerless alone (Keesing and Strathern 1998; Rabinow 1986) even when those powerless people are the main target of the so-called development projects or humanitarian aid interventions. The arguments in this paper are to be read as critical but positive comments at a time when some anthropologists, ironically, reject right away any role for anthropology in development (Mafeje 1996). It is tempting to engage in a review that would historically contextualise anthropology's role in development, to see how it responded to development initiatives or succeeded/failed to that effect. However, the debate is not about whether anthropology succeeded/failed (that would not have amounted to a debate; it would have been a verdict) but it is on how it contributes to the development processes. Thus, I would rather focus on my own work and experience from Sudan.

2. BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

The relationship between anthropology and development³ has been a very contested issue. Anthropologists are divided as to whether they should consider "development anthropology" a sub-discipline within the craft of anthropology or not. On the one hand, there are those who are unequivocally emphatic in rejecting any notion of development anthropology, viewing it as a ploy for devising mechanisms for soft-landing of projects which local bureaucratic elite would otherwise not be able to manage on their own. This position is best represented by Arturo Escobar (1991; 1995) and Archie Mafeje (1996), who seem to be disappointed not

only with regard to development anthropology, but also with regard to anthropology in general, which for them is an anti-Third World discipline. For Mafeje (1996, 21):

...development anthropology is a quick-fix for the unemployed and unemployable anthropologists, and that it is no more than a surrender on terms by anthropologists who have lost faith in their own intellectual and academic enterprise in a world which has been transformed in such a way that there can no longer be any self-imposing anthropological truths and meanings.

On the other hand, Grillo (1985) and Scudder (1988) are leading the group that is in favour of development anthropology. They make the case that anthropologists' role is central in development and that the opportunity cost of non-involvement is very high. They argue that non-involvement would entail a greater detriment to the people and that those who decide not to involve or participate do nothing but stand in the sideline. Grillo (1985) did not forget to point out to the moral dilemma anthropologists face: by staying out anthropologists may help to perpetuate the costs and non-benefits; by coming in, anthropologists may ease the burden of rapid change but nevertheless further the loss of cultural integrity. I am not one of those who lost faith in the anthropological enterprise and, while I try to make the case for a role of anthropology, I do not espouse any naive notion of conserving "cultural integrity", if such a thing exists at all. I shall plainly argue that the contribution of anthropology is to be judged by the essence and extent to which it contributes to a better understanding of the people it studies. Understanding is of course something normative or relative, and it is also positioned. I am using it here to mean representation.

Ahmed (1979, 179-80), while not forgetting to remind us about the links anthropology had with colonialism, expresses his enthusiasm about the involvement of anthropology in development in the newly independent countries. He is in favour of creating what he calls "the government anthropologist post" which:

If it is held by someone who is genuinely interested in the development of the region he studies, in the life of the people with whom he lives, and is able to identify with them and their issues *ideologically*, he can be of help to these people and can help in contributing to the right development of the region.

For Ahmed, involving anthropology in development and planning is not only a question of relevance but also of responsibility, and in connection with such issues the anthropologist in developing countries has to render his knowledge to help the people he studies and the country as a whole. Ahmed's ideas about the relevance of anthropology in development planning were applied in his studies on pastoral nomadism in Sudan (cf. Ahmed 1976; 1982, 38-54). It may be relevant to note here that historically anthropology in Sudan developed through its engagement with studying pastoral nomadism. Anthropology's history in Sudan is very rich and

complex. But that history cannot be discussed in the limited space of this paper. El-Hassan (1998) provided a succinct account on the history of anthropology in Sudan, as well as the themes covered by both foreign and Sudanese anthropologists.⁵

Escobar's recent contributions to the debates on the anthropology of development (1991; 1995; and 1997) are important and cannot be glossed over. While a full review of Escobar's position cannot be undertaken here, I will critically consider some of his salient arguments. Escobar adopted a Foucauldian discourse analysis to discuss development and he succeeded in raising fundamental questions about the ways in which knowledge and power are linked in the work of development agencies and projects around the world. He cogently argued that since the Second World War, development has become a specific field of knowledge and expertise which constructs and orders the world and different groups within it in ways which always advantage states and power holders in the developed North (Escobar 1995). Furthermore, the idea of development, argues Escobar, has been instrumentalised not only for geo-political purposes but also in a framework of expert hegemony in which the poor of the world are turned into laboratory specimens. His alternative approach is leaving the initiative to the local people and their grassroots organisations and social movements.

While Escobar's position in his earlier contributions (1991; 1995) was radical in the way he conceptualises the role of anthropology in development (favouring distancing or disengagement of anthropology), in one of his recent contributions (Escobar 1997) he appears to be moving beyond the impasse of the two opposing paradigms: development anthropology and anthropology of development. Escobar attacks "development anthropology" because it does not question the overall need for development, but accepts it as a fact of life and as a true descriptor of reality. In contrast, the "anthropology of development", argues Escobar (1997, 502):

...starts by questioning the very notion of development by arguing, in a post-structuralist fashion, that if we want to understand development, we need to examine how development has been understood historically, according to what perspectives, with which principles of authority, and with what consequences for what groups of people.

Furthermore, Escobar observes:

For the anthropology of development, then, is not so much a question of providing new grounds for doing better development, but of examining the very grounds on which development emerged as an object of thought and practice (ibid.).

Yet, Escobar's discussion of development as discourse is very problematic and it is not clear how his approach will put an end to development simply because issues of poverty and lack of development are

not issues of language or discourse but are real problems haunting ordinary people, and they are of political, social and economic nature. A major problem with Escobar's handling of development as discourse is that it falls into a trap of contradiction. Escobar's attempt to suggest solutions to the global problems of inequality, poverty and exploitation is an indication of self-contradiction: he contradicts his deconstructionist stand by his implicit admission that there are problems out there which need to be addressed. Such contradiction manifests itself even more brutally when he tries to move beyond his critique and suggest alternative paths. One suggested path, as stated above, is leaving the initiative to social movements and grassroots organisations. But according to Lehmann (1997, 575) Escobar undertakes "no assessment of either the discourse or the achievements of the grassroots movements whose cause he so enthusiastically embraces and whose virtues he is so eager to accept". Another problem is that Escobar takes the "developed North" and by extension the "development industry" to be monolithic and homogeneous. Such a stand betrays the very post-modern approach Escobar is adopting. Indeed, if we are to take a post-modern approach to development and reveal it as a discourse, argued Gardner and Lewis (2000, 18), "we have to show how it involves multiple and ever changing realities and narratives, for to construct it as bounded and internally homogeneous is theoretically contradictory".

While I agree with both Mafeje and Escobar about the mishaps and general problems plaguing anthropology, I would not endorse their seemingly rhetorical approach, which in some instances is a series of claims and critiques framed in the language of unbridled certainty. I would not enter into the fallacy of inquiring whether in the first place development is a historical necessity or not, neither will I slip into another fallacy of arguing that the lack of it is yet another historical necessity. It is unfortunate that some current heated debates on the relationship between anthropology and development are a reflection of muted anthropological elitism preoccupied with general dilemmas of anthropology while the real dilemma, that of those who are brutally subjected to misguided development and mass displacement, is neglected. Providing a lengthy discussion in this paper about the predicaments of displaced persons is precisely a response to such muted elitism and an endeavour to direct attention to the suffering of ordinary people by the very efforts that are often thought to rectify such suffering. Thus, while I discuss problems of anthropology, I also emphasise revealing the realities of the powerless. But revealing such realities is not an aim in itself. It is rather an attempt to point a finger to the powerful groups whose interests and actions impinge on those very realities of the powerless; the displaced persons in this case. In essence, my concern is the usefulness of what, and how, we do for the people being studied.

In Sudan, there were some attempts to discuss the role of anthropology in development. Prominent among such attempts were those of Ahmed (1976; 1979; 1982 and 1983) and Haaland (1982). These studies attempt to show

how and in what sense anthropology can aid development processes. While Ahmed and Haaland were concerned with anthropology and development in general, in this paper, I will basically be concerned with anthropology and aid, even though the distinction between the two is often blurry. In areas where anthropology is traditionally rooted (e.g., Sudan), humanitarian aid is becoming one important aspect of the life of people. It is an interesting and intriguing coincidence that these areas, to which anthropology owes a special debt of gratitude for its own development, are currently a scene of episodes of calamities and catastrophes.⁶ Among such calamities, civil wars, ethnic cleansing, famines and a concomitant ecological degradation figure prominent. Thus, it does not seem out of proportion to argue that these areas constituted, and may continue to constitute, prime receivers of the so-called humanitarian aid. Such aid is channelled through a variety of agencies that are vaguely labelled as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).⁷ In the African context, the operations of NGOs came to be conspicuous during the early 1980s, as a result of the massive drought and the consequent severe food shortages and famines that struck the Horn of Africa. This was particularly the case in Sudan where initially the operations of NGOs primarily focused on relief distribution. Subsequent to the 1984/85 drought, and after a slight recovery in Sudan, the activities of many NGOs were directed towards a highly rhetorical yet promising objective: community development. Such an objective, however, is as vague and difficult to gauge, as it is the case with agencies that are supposed to implement it.⁸ Despite many suggestions to the contrary, the relief component of humanitarian aid continues to be central in the work of NGOs in many parts of the Sudan because hunger always hangs there, no matter how it comes or what actually causes it.

The NGOs' activities caught the attention of a variety of researchers. Notwithstanding that such attention had primarily focused on assessing the viability of NGOs' operations and/or figuring out their pros and cons (cf. Abdel Ati 1988; 1993 and 2000; Tvedt 1994; 1995; 1998a; Marcussen 1996). It should be mentioned that all the above three researchers whose contributions dealt with NGOs' activities are not anthropologists. Their studies provided insightful analysis about the activities, successes and drawbacks of NGOs, but the anthropological depth that is very much needed is lacking in their analysis. This is not a criticism but a plea for interdisciplinary collaboration in an era in which the boundaries between the disciplines of social sciences are rapidly changing (not disappearing, as some postmodernists would like to argue). Thus, while what I advocate in this paper may be specifically anthropological, its relevance can extend to include other disciplines.

Social anthropology has a great potential and "anthropology deals with issues of immediate importance, and its practitioners have a greater role than they may realise" (de Waal 1994: 28; Kjerland 1999; Eyben 2000). Thus, it could offer a service by way of providing agencies concerned with

humanitarian aid with solid studies on which they could base those rhetorical, yet promising, community development projects. It remains an open question if those agencies *really* need such solid studies, though. Anthropologists have the potential to play an important role in baseline studies that map and document the relevant structures in the society (Manger 1985). Such potential, however, sinks deep in a rooted predicament and current challenges. The past predicaments and present challenges of the discipline have also been the subject of a heated debate. Three decades ago anthropology was severely attacked and anthropologists were cursed and dismissed as “hand maiden” and “agents” of colonialism (Asad 1972; 1973; Ahmed 1973; Magubane 1971; 1979; Mafeje 1996). Interestingly, the attack was from within the discipline itself and all the above scholars are for the moment well-known anthropologists.

During the 1970s anthropologists were the target for vituperative attacks and, to nobody’s surprise, those attacks greatly influenced the subsequent paths and developments in the discipline. However, the echo of those vituperative attacks and counter-attacks seems to have fallen out of favour or continued in a different style with the increasing numbers of contemporary indigenous anthropologists who cannot be described as colonial agents in any meaningful way. It is important to note that all social scientists who work with NGOs or international organisations tend to be described, at best and at worst, as allies and spies of imperialism, respectively. Thus, nothing is really unique to anthropologists. But then the historical legacy of anthropology and its close association with colonialism must not be underestimated, nor the effects of that legacy on anthropologists. I would argue that indigenous anthropologists are agents for their own people and should be development catalysts for those whom they (mis) represent. But then the discipline itself seems to be in turmoil and facing many challenges for the moment, challenges emanating from the very legacy of the discipline. The current challenges facing anthropology relate to the domain of anthropological “field” or “locations” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) or the shifting contexts of such domains. Such challenges put anthropologists in a formidable predicament, especially when the anthropologist is dealing with powerful development agencies, reluctant bureaucrats and planners and, generally, unfavourable research conditions.

My arguments in this paper should not be understood as either defending or favouring anthropology over other social science disciplines. On the contrary, my arguments in this paper should be understood as general and critical comments from an insider who is disenchanted with some anthropological ways of representation. The relevance of this paper stems not just from its endeavour to reveal the realities of powerless people as they unfold - a classical anthropological objective - but from its endeavour to show how it is important for anthropological inquiry to be directed towards powerful groups as well. It should be emphasised here that I am not offering a solution to the problems faced by those who are involved in aid

or development projects. What I am offering here is a sort of explorative arguments, but importantly I am offering my own experience that I hope would contribute to a better understanding of the phenomena under discussion. When it comes to agencies implementing those aid projects, the stand in this paper is against a convention of either implicitly praising NGOs (viewing them as “angels of mercy or development diplomats”- to borrow Tvedt’s perceptive 1998a title) or explicitly criticising their ventures and weak or unsolicited interventions (Abdel Ati 1993; 2000). Thus, in this paper I look into NGOs as constituting an important part of a larger development industry apparatus that include many players, ranging from donor institutions, government bureaucrats, NGO staff and researchers, to the displaced at the bottom as aid receivers. I use the term “aid” here to mean humanitarian assistance and not the macro-economic and technical aid that is related to the IMF and the World Bank or other funding institutions.⁹ The material on which this paper is based relates to the displaced people in the peripheries of Khartoum, the national capital of Sudan. I shall also draw on my experience of being a member of a team hired by an NGO to study urban problems and formulate a strategy for the support of the urban poor in Khartoum. I will not be dealing with the activities of NGOs *per se*, though comments on such activities will be made whenever that is deemed necessary.

In what follows, I shall start with a note on the phenomenon of displacement. Then a short description about the displaced persons in Khartoum will be presented. A section that will critically discuss the interlocking relationships between research, bureaucracy and NGOs will follow this. Then I will point to the broader implications of anthropology and aid. A concluding note will sum up the basic arguments presented in the paper and envision the prospects of a future relationship between anthropology and development.

3. DISPLACEMENT IN SUDAN: CONCEPTUAL CONSIDERATIONS

It has become common to observe that the spatial and social displacement of people has been accelerating around the world at a fast pace and that these movements include enormous numbers of people who are legally classified as displaced. Legally, the displaced are those people who are involuntarily driven from their original domicile to other areas. The UN provides a definition that differentiates between displaced persons in general (which can include refugees) and those who are internally displaced (IDPs). Internally displaced persons are:

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of, or in order to avoid, in particular, the effect of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural and human-made disasters, and who

have not crossed an internationally recognised border (UN, quoted in Hampton 1998, xv).

Though it appears inclusive, this definition can serve pragmatic purposes only but it cannot be hoped to be the basis for a better and well-informed research on displacement. This is because adopting such definition leads social scientists to see the displaced as an objectively self-delimiting field of study. But this is simply not the case. Forced population movements have extraordinarily diverse historical and political causes and involve people, who, while all displaced, find themselves in qualitatively different life situations and predicaments. Thus, it would seem that the term displacement has analytical usefulness not as a label for generalisable type or kind of person or situation, but only as a broad legal or descriptive rubric that includes within it a world of different socio-economic statuses, personal histories and many other aspects (Malkki 1995). Displacement and forced movements of people are always only one aspect of much larger constellations of political, economic and cultural processes and practices. State practices of violence, war, ethnic conflicts, hunger, cultural or religious tensions and humanitarian interventions are just some of the practices that generate a relevant context for human displacement.¹⁰

All the above factors led to a massive human displacement in Sudan. While any of the above factors exerts its unique effects on the displaced, in the Sudanese context, the tendency, as it is generally the case in studies of displacement, is to lump up all categories of people under the rubric of displacement. This is one of the grave mistakes, shared by many of those involved, that helped to perpetuate the distorted understanding of the phenomenon of displacement and to a greater extent misguided policy formulations. Moreover, the misunderstanding of the phenomenon is equally the result of the fact that research on displacement is carried out as part and parcel of a “disastrous situation”. Suffice it to say here that this kind of research is stimulated by *ad hoc* imperatives and in response to agencies concerned with aid (relief or otherwise). Coupled with shallow fieldwork that usually depends on statistical methods,¹¹ the results of such studies would certainly be a fascinating brew and the end product is a pool of reports that hardly see light. By not revealing the different forms of displacement and their differential impacts, researchers run the risk of providing the wrong data for governments and NGOs who will not know or recognise the legitimate rights or claims of the displaced persons.

However, it would equally be another grave mistake and an oversimplification to claim that all anthropological or other studies of displacement are of this sort. I am not arguing that *all* research that is initiated or funded by aid agencies is of poor quality or not *value free*. There are many commendable efforts in the studies of displacement in Sudan (cf. Haaland 1990; Ibrahim 1995; El Nagar 1993; Osman and Sahl 2000). All these studies were done for, or in collaboration with, NGOs

concerned with humanitarian assistance. While El Nagar (1993) investigated the effects of displacement on vulnerable groups, i.e., women and children, Ibrahim (1995) was concerned with the distinction between *spatial* and *socio-economic* displacements and how each one of them exerts different impacts and corroborates unique manifestations. Haaland (1990) investigated the social and cultural traits of one of the notoriously drought-prone communities in the eastern part of Sudan. He underscored the importance of understanding such traits for any action aimed at sustainable development. Importantly, however, Haaland's account, while providing a clear description and analysis about the studied community (the Hadendowa of Derudeib in Eastern Sudan¹²), highlighted many crucial yet often neglected aspects that directly impinge on development projects or aid endeavours. These included research ethics, development agencies, political power, the role of the elite and the political economy of development in Sudan. He succinctly highlighted the difficulties involved in aid and development projects:

Aid projects attempting to break this vicious circle have to confront a multifaceted problem involving not only techno-economic and socio-cultural conditions, but also fundamental ethical dilemmas. It is easy to say that one must take poverty and environmental degradation into consideration in planning development projects; it is notoriously difficult to design a practical course of action which promotes economic growth and at the same time leads to a distribution of benefits which reach the poor (or other crosscutting target groups like women, children, minorities) without having the effects which undermine the ecological basis for viable adaptation (Haaland 1990, 105).

Viewed within the larger context of the political economy of Sudan, displacement is part of the problems in which the country is reeling since the late 1970s. For some scholars, phenomena such as displacement and forced migration are nothing but a crystallisation and manifestation of the configuration of processes rooted in the political economy of the country, specifically, as a manifestation of proletarianisation processes operating in the traditional sector of the economy. Such processes alienate the inhabitants of the countryside from their means of subsistence and ultimately transform them into wage seekers (Ahmed 1992; Ibrahim 1995; Daly 1993). This line of thinking, while not underestimating the role of war and other violent practices, views wars and violent practices (rampant tribal animosities and armed robbery) as results of a lopsided development that served to perpetuate inequalities since Sudan got its flag independence. In other words, historical continuity is invoked to understand recurrent calamities (Harir 1994).

The early waves of displaced persons to the Greater Khartoum conurbation were drought victims who fled their original areas in Western Sudan in 1984/85 (notably the Kababish, Hamar, Maganin and other Dar Hamid tribes). They were resettled in the western part of Omdurman (the

third twin city of the national capital). While many of these early drought-displaced returned home after the slight recovery of 1988, others settled permanently and engaged in the urban informal sector, a sector that in itself is saturated and stagnant and its absorptive capacity is decreasing at an increasing rate (Awad 1995). Those who are affected by the vagaries of war in the south also followed, reaching the peak during mid-1990s when military engagement between the government and the rebels was at its highest. Statistically, there are conflicting figures on the displaced. In 1989, the Commission for Relief and Rehabilitation (CRR) gave an estimate of 4.1 million for the total number of the displaced. Out of this figure, 1.8 million persons were located in Khartoum. This figure seems to be obviously inflated if we consider the fact that by then the war (which is the main cause) was confined to a few localities in southern Sudan. In the same year, the National Dialogue Conference on Peace Issues (NDCP) gave an estimate of 3.5 million persons, 80 per cent of whom were in Khartoum, while the United Nation's Population Fund (UNFPA) and the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) provided a figure of 2.2 millions. On the other hand, the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) provides a figure of 0.26 millions for those who are living in the various camps. It is important to note that the overwhelming majority of displaced persons actually live outside the camps (see table 1). The total number of the displaced persons in Sudan represents 25 per cent of the world's internally displaced persons, and puts Sudan at the top of the list of countries suffering from the problem. The following table summarises the above figures.

Table 1. Estimates of internally displaced persons in Sudan (IDPs)

Source	IDPs inside camps	IDPs outside camps	Total IDPs in Sudan
CRR	N/A	1,800,000	4,104,000
ND Conference	N/A	2,800,000	3,500,000
UNFPA/CBS	250,000	N/A	2,250,000
HAC	266,000	1,733,500	N/A

SOURCE: Osman and Sahl 2000, 22.

Putting aside such conflicting estimates or figures, a well-informed and dedicated anthropological research should lend itself capable of clearly figuring out the differential impact of forced movements on various groups of people subsumed under the umbrella of displacement. But before this, research should theoretically contest and delineate the concept of displacement itself. Basic to such an effort in the first place is the indispensable distinction between displacement as spatial/geographical movement and as a socio-economic process. Viewing displacement as a

spatial/geographical movement is simply misleading because the whole experience will be collapsed into a simple movement from one place to another. Such a view mystifies the extent of impoverishment and destitution to which the displaced are subjected in the course of the crisis, or otherwise glosses over the fact that some of the self-reliant spatially displaced persons (merchants and civil servants, who have as well been displaced) are not subjected to impoverishment. Indeed, a good research should be able to show how and in what sense those self-reliant persons might have otherwise benefited from the experience of displacement.

For instance, some individuals were displaced from southern Sudan, but they did not experience the kind of apathy that haunted ordinary displaced persons, nor were they included in the so-called displaced camps. The delineation of such intricacies necessitates viewing displacement largely as a socio-economic process in which case it is the alienation or dispossession of the displaced persons from their former means of subsistence and the uprooting of their cherished values. This is another interesting research area that can be designated as socio-cultural displacement and social disarticulation. But researchers should resist the tendency to embrace a naive anthropological romanticisation that takes as its basic concern an endeavour to preserve the so-called traditional way of life or *indigenous cultures*. This is one of the aspects that are challenging theory in anthropology today, at a time when things and people are moving very fast and many things are becoming uncertain as to how anthropological theory ought to be, or in what sense it can respond to the changing realities (Moore 1999, 1-23). In the following section, I shall reflect on my field experience in displaced camps in Khartoum.

4. THE LIFE-WORLDS OF THE DISPLACED: LIVING IN THE MARGINS OF KHARTOUM'S URBAN SYSTEM

My engagement with the internally displaced persons in Khartoum started in 1995 when I submitted a proposal to the Development Studies and Research Centre (DSRC) of the University of Khartoum to conduct a study on the impact of displacement on gender roles.¹³ The findings of that study were presented in the centre's series of discussion papers (Assal 1997). I went back to the camps in 1998 as a member of a team entrusted with studying urban problems and coming up with a strategy for urban poverty alleviation (Al-Battahani et al. 1998). A brief ethnographic account of El-Salam displaced camp in Omdurman is presented as follows.

The camp is located 30 kilometres west of Omdurman. It is one of the four major provisional camps erected to accommodate the displaced who were otherwise scattered all over the national capital. It accommodates 30,000 displaced persons that have different regional backgrounds and belong to different ethnic/tribal groups. Prominent ethnic groups in the camp include Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Bari, Fur, Dar Hamid, Nuba and

Azande. The inhabitants of this camp, like those of other camps, were put together after being forcefully evacuated from various slums and squatter settlements around the national capital. Ethnic clustering and segregation are noticeable features in the camp. Segregation and clustering are contrived to avoid conflict in a community that is abruptly formed from ethnically and culturally diverse groups. But it could be said that these camps are potential areas for ethnic confrontations. Amid tin cans, plastic bags and general urban refuse, families scratch small patches, build shelters and crowd together. There is no running water, no latrine facilities, minimal health services and no electricity.¹⁴ Water is provided by donkey-carts at very high prices. This makes it difficult for displaced families to procure sufficient water. Most people in the camp live on the verge of absolute destitution, with no legal right to settlement and, in most cases, with no identification papers from authorities. Apart from providing the campsite, the government seems to be helpless when it comes to services. Entrance to the camp is very much restricted for outsiders and a prior permission must be obtained from COD (Commission of the Displaced), and lately HAC (Humanitarian Assistance Commission), for any visit, especially visits for research purposes. Even after such permission is obtained, a researcher may encounter many inconveniences, from camp authorities or those who are supposed to keep *order* there, while doing his work. In a sense, the camp is a place of incarceration for the displaced, but paradoxically restriction is imposed on those who intend to enter and not on those who leave.

Income generating opportunities for the displaced are bleak. The capacity of the small market located at the centre of the camp to provide opportunities for the displaced is very much limited. Accordingly, the displaced had to compete with the urbanites for the meagre opportunities in the urban informal sector which itself is stagnant, contingent on the economic situation of the country. The selective and competitive nature of the informal sector severely disqualifies previous skills of the displaced. Such skills are either rooted in traditional subsistence agriculture or animal husbandry. Displaced males are mostly engaged in the construction sector as daily wage labourers, while females engage in selling tea, food items or work as maids for middle and upper strata urbanites. Here, I would like to emphasise that the informal sector itself is not homogeneous, and certainly it is not only the poor's sanatorium. Inasmuch as the term "displaced" is a contested term, so is the informal sector, too. Not all displaced persons have equal or similar access to the informal sector. Those displaced persons that are involved in one way or another with the government, or with NGOs, are certainly in a better position to appropriate the otherwise minor opportunities of the sector.

The realities of the displaced in Khartoum are part of a ravaging urban poverty in Sudan. I will neither discuss in detail poverty in Khartoum, nor present mathematical illustrations about how it is defined, measured or quantified. Ali (1994) and Sahl (1999, 19-25) have, in my opinion,

successfully dealt with that. Moreover, Ahmed and El Battahani (1995) have provided a succinct qualitative account on urban poverty in Khartoum. So, I will simply refer to some features and symptoms of its vagaries. Generically, it is possible to divide the urban poor into three categories. These include the usual or chronic urban poor that are found among the less educated and semi-skilled workers in the public and private sectors, the displaced persons, and the new poor (pauperised middle class members) who emerged recently as a result of economic liberalisation and adjustment policies. This last category is composed mainly of middle class urbanites. It has been found that 93.8 per cent of the middle class in the public sector are below the poverty line (Sahl 1999, 34). It has also been found that “69 per cent of households in Khartoum are served by pit latrines while only 3 per cent have public sewerage systems and 15 per cent have no toilet facility of any sort” (Ahmed and El Battahani 1995, 197). It is clear, then, that urban poverty is overwhelming Khartoum, and not limited only to the displaced camps or peripheral areas. The difference is qualitative only and the situation in the displaced camps is even more telling with regard to the extent of the poverty crisis.

With regard to livelihood sources, with the exception of El-Baraka camp in Haj Yusuf, residents in all other camps (El-Salam, Jebel Awlia and Wad El-Bashir) almost completely depend on relief items provided by NGOs. Work opportunities are constrained firstly by the incapacity of the urban informal sector and secondly by the inadequate or irrelevant skills of the displaced persons. While a full coverage of the activities undertaken by the displaced is not possible here, below are four cases of displaced women who are engaged in the marginal urban economy. The emphasis was laid on women because NGOs’ so-called income-generating and empowering programmes are mainly directed towards women. Moreover, the displaced women are increasingly becoming caterers and breadwinners for their families. By presenting these four cases, however, I am neither valorising micro realities, nor claiming that they represent the displaced persons. To view them as representative would be utterly naive and uncalled for. Rather, by presenting these four micro cases my aim is to elicit the effect of macro-level processes on the daily life of individuals living their particular lives. In fact, throughout this paper, I am arguing for a form of *representation* that might better convey the lived experiences of people. These spectacular four cases are simply meant to elicit the realities of the displaced as they unfold in their daily life, and to help conceptualise what type of aid is deemed appropriate and what mechanisms are to be adopted for sustainability.

Case 1

Halima, a Kababish woman in her late thirties, migrated to Khartoum with the waves of the drought-displaced in 1984/85. At the time she arrived, she was not married. Her family, which is composed of three sisters, one brother and her parents, arrived during the same period. Three years later she got married to a

displaced Kabashi fellow. Halima began work as a tea seller in Sheikh Abu Zeid market, a few meters from home. What was provided for them by the then operating NGOs was insufficient in a situation where both her father and brother had no permanent or dependable work. At the outset, she suffered a lot before she was able to persuade her father and brother to let her go for work. From a typical Kababish perspective or point of view, it is ignoble or “*aib*” for a woman to earn money through involvement in the market. For many of them, such involvement brings disgrace and shame to the family. She met her current husband in the workplace and they decided to marry on condition that he accepts her status quo. Later on Halima shifted to grilling meat in *Suq el-Naga*¹⁵ (lit. camels’ market). Currently she is employing two girls to assist her. Her mother takes care of the children during the day. Halima is content with her work and she believes that she is so far successful in securing the basic needs of her family.

Case 2

Asha, 31 years old, is from Gabra, Northern Kordofan. She arrived with her husband and five children in 1991. They settled in Zagalona squatter settlement. A year later, Zagalona was demolished and the family was removed, with others, to El Salam camp. The husband is a construction worker who spends most of his time in work sites; sometimes he spends a whole week outside home. Asha is currently selling tea at Sheikh Abu Zeid market. Her daughter, who is 10 years old and not attending school, accompanies her to the work place. Asha prepares meals for her children early in the morning before leaving to work. She argues that Gabra is more secure than *El Asima* (the capital, Khartoum) but life there is uncertain.

Case 3

Noura came with her family and other relatives to Khartoum from Kajmar, Northern Kordofan. They lost their livestock on which they formerly depended. She got married soon after arrival. But the marriage could not survive because the husband insisted that Noura should not go to work, at a time when his income is insufficient to cover the requirements of the family. She is not willing to marry again because “marriage is a constraint for me”, she argued. Comparing her previous situation with the current one, she argued that previously they suffered from uncertainty and insecurity, while here the future is unknown. She does not intend to go back.

Case 4

Amna, 32 years old, is from the White Nile. Her family came to Omdurman in 1984. Four years later, the family returned to the previous home area. However, they were unable to continue there and as a result of the 1990/91 drought, they were compelled to migrate again to Omdurman. The husband is a regular soldier who is currently serving in the South. The half salary of the husband, which she is entitled to receive, is insufficient for her and her three children. Intermittently she receives help from her expatriate brother. Amna sells tea¹⁶ in *Zaribat el-*

mawashi (livestock market). She has no license and occasionally she encounters difficulties during the course of her daily work. Her elder son (14 years old) left school and is currently selling cigarettes in the same area. Amna is worried about the fact that she does not possess her own house, and she might be relocated again to areas far from her workplace.

The above cases represent examples of how the forced movement exerted different effects on the displaced. Case (1) represents a situation where a displaced old-timer adapted to a new situation and succeeded in eking out a living. Case (3) clearly manifests the sorts of stresses the displaced face, the severe tests to which families are subjected and how displacement could lead to a total family collapse and disintegration. This disintegration manifests itself in different forms. It could be a complete separation of spouses (divorce), quarrels, and lack of control over children due to the absence of parents most of the time. While previously children and families were virtually protected by normative values and traditions, currently there is no such recourse, and the upbringing of children in the new milieu tends to be a problem in its own right.

Given the sort of skills the displaced males command, they cannot compete sensibly in the urban informal sector, and as a result their labour becomes a waste. While previously men assumed direct responsibility for their families, many of them are now increasingly becoming dependent on their female household members.¹⁷ Consequently, there seems to be not only change in gender roles and relations, but also the prevalence of gender inequality in the sense that females are overburdened because they are increasingly becoming major caterers and breadwinners for their households. Nevertheless, my first hand material suggests that the economic independence of females and the concomitant dependence of males have very little impact on the power structure in the household (case 3). This poses a serious challenge for many of the NGOs' projects targeting income-generating activities for displaced women. It also challenges a sweeping belief in the feminist literature that the economic independence of females necessarily takes them out of the margin and consequently leads to increasing their power (Kuiper and Sap 1995). What should be considered in the case of some displaced groups is not only economic dependence/independence but also the cultural construction of reality. The balance between these two aspects is not easy to strike, however. Moreover, it would be an oversimplification to consider the household as an arena of common interest and consensus, or to portray women as altruists who always work for the benefit of the household.

The above state of affairs of these four women and the beleaguered situation of the displaced in general are further compounded by the state of uncertainty among the displaced. The displaced are congregated in temporary camps. This seems to be a prelude to another yet-to-come process of relocation or repatriation to original areas. In fact, the way these

camps are erected conveys the impression that they are temporal, and are set to get rid of the nuisance of the displaced and avoid their destructive potential. The temporality of these camps is legitimised by the authorities' belief that the displaced are transient persons and if they are given permanent residential plots, they might simply sell these plots and creep again to areas where they can squat. However, the social/psychological damage inflicted on the displaced seems to receive very little attention and is not duly considered by those who are concerned with rehabilitation or repatriation programs. While many war displaced persons may have experienced serious social and psychological stresses, some of their drought counterparts seem to be experiencing rapid transformation, though they are unable to influence its course (cases 2 and 4).

Many displaced persons suffered a lot; they were tortured, terrorised and separated from families. Indeed, if these encounters did not exert stress on the displaced, that would be something to be explained. The very word displacement implies an assumption that all human populations belong to a certain place and that, ideally, they should be where they belong. Any other state of affairs is thus viewed as an anomaly. However, when considering displacement and the question of social and psychological distress among the displaced persons, it is necessary to remember that we are dealing with a set of empirical questions. We cannot claim to know, from the mere fact of displacement, the actual sources of a person's stress. The continuous portrayal of the displaced persons as "vulnerable" certainly obscures their agency. However, I should also note that generalisation makes it possible for intellectuals to identify with and lend their voice to all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug.¹⁸

The status of the displaced is ambiguous and the Sudanese government's stand is ambivalent. The Ministry of Engineering Affairs executed a pool of policies at the beginning of the 1990s regarding demolition of shelters, relocation of the displaced persons, and upgrading of squatter settlements. These policies (technical packages) culminated in re-planning areas formerly occupied by squatters and the erection of camps in the outskirts of Khartoum. Although these policies resulted in organising the habitat, they are disappointing to the displaced whose survival strategies were subjected, as a result, to a formal and *solicited* displacement. What remains tenable is the fact that the displaced are in need of being provided with the basic and prime need (food) and means of sustainability, no matter who provides them. The situation of the former is somehow dealt with in one way or another, while the latter does not seem to be an easy task. This is simply because relief distribution is easy but enabling the displaced to control the means of livelihood and sustainability appears to be an impasse to all the parties concerned. For the displaced, it is a dream that is yet to be fulfilled. For the government, it may not be a priority or interest because the displaced themselves are dealt with on a temporary basis, or because of lack of financial resources. Taking the part of the NGOs, the scene is much more

paradoxical and intriguing. NGOs are financially better off (at least according to my conceptualisation of aid provided at the beginning of this paper).¹⁹ Their existence and the flow of funds from donors are ethically justified by the NGOs' contribution to the well-being of people whom they serve.

Most NGOs working in poor areas and displaced camps are preaching and targeting sustainability²⁰ through community development projects. Such projects include investing in poultry, goats, handicrafts and many other ventures that are thought to avail the opportunity for the displaced families to be productive and hence depend on themselves. The feasibility/sustainability of many of these projects is another area that needs to be investigated. Yet, helping the displaced to control sources for their livelihood, and hence sustain themselves, if this is truly targeted at all, should reckon with the fact that displacement has long term associations and consequences that are not easily amenable to rectification. Some of these consequences whose effects are likely to continue even if conditions leading to displacement are over include the disarticulation and social damage inflicted on those who survived the process of displacement. Accordingly, a thorough understanding of such realities is a prerequisite for any action meant to improve the lives of the displaced. But this should reckon with the fact that, in order to clearly understand what is going on in a certain displaced community, the investigation should not be confined only to that community. It should include decision-making centres, the bureaucracy and the power system in general.

5. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCHERS, BUREAUCRACY AND NGOS: A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

The relationship between these three *partners* is tense and shaky. Each one of them has its own interests and agendas that, more often than not, are not compatible with those of the others. Nevertheless, the congregation of what seem to be odd players in the front stage often operates smoothly in the backstage. Thus, the manifest animosities within this group should not be allowed to obscure some latent dynamics which, while continuing to guarantee the group's interests, perpetuate the vicious circle of aid. Alex de Waal (1997, 65) calls such a group "the humanitarian international" that includes:

...the international elite of the staff of international relief agencies, academics, consultants, specialist journalists, lobbyists and also, to a greater extent, conflict resolution specialists and human rights workers. It is a sub-group of the larger development industry.

What I would like to add to de Waal's definition are the local government bureaucrats, who deal in one way or another with aid projects, and national NGOs' staff. Here I will draw on my personal experience with NGOs and bureaucracy. The two quotes I provided in the very beginning of

this paper denote the type of intrigues which ensue when academics, practitioners (government officials and NGOs or project staff members) collide. Researchers get involved as evaluators of projects or are recruited to carry out baseline studies or surveys that would be the basis for initiating projects. According to Chambers (1983, 34-5; my emphasis):

Evaluation is called for but may be *regarded by managers as threat not support, while evaluators [academics] appear as spies, not allies*. When criticism is offered, or damaging information comes to light, there are several possible reactions. The hardest is to accept it and change course; others are to deny it, to try to keep it quiet, to buy off the critics or to co-opt them into a public relations role. Morale may then be maintained, and selective perception and myth have their part to play in maintaining support, ... but in the long run, the costs in benefits foregone and eventual disillusion may be high.

I participated as a member of a team employed by an NGO in 1997 to carry out a research on urban problems. The basic objective was to come out with specific recommendations that would help planning projects or execute actions aimed at urban poverty alleviation. During that period, the NGO was not directly involved in displaced camps or engaged in relief distribution of any sort. Rather, its efforts were aimed at assessing the strategies of the poor and providing help to strengthen their community-based organisations. We were faced with a formidable task because the analysis of poverty, what it means and how to alleviate it, goes far beyond both micro and median levels to include the macro level as well. This necessarily brings into the stage the political economy of the country that operates in a way that makes some people winners and others losers. The team members were confronted by many unfavourable conditions from both the bureaucratic apparatus and the NGO. One interesting aspect is that the faith in “interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary” team work was so rampant in the NGO’s thinking that forming such inter/multidisciplinary body seemed to be an end in itself. For us, as a team, we were very much preoccupied with how to avoid collapsing into disciplinary feuding and accommodate the apparent disciplinary diversity in the final study product. This is, however, a less serious problem compared to others.

On the government’s bureaucracy side, there was the hostile view to, and discouragement of, any attempt to study the displaced.²¹ Worried about the intrusive nature of NGOs, the bureaucrats’ assumption was that studies sponsored by aid agencies on displacement served to reveal and reflect the ugly face of the proud country, while Khartoum State’s slogan was “beautification of the national capital”. The bureaucrats held and frantically clung to the belief that foreign NGOs’ reports were not always used for their declared objectives. Instead, such reports were believed to represent a platform for the continuity of NGOs, a dubious entity that is reluctantly accepted by the government. What is even worse is that the bureaucracy is sceptical even about indigenous researchers who may wish to carry out

research on their own and embrace nothing more than simple, and often naive, academic convictions. The bureaucrats seem to embrace Chamber's (1983, 30) claim that "academics are trained to criticise and are taught to find fault". This is one of the serious problems facing researchers in the developing countries, and certainly even more so in current day Sudan.²¹ While the worries and concerns of the bureaucrats should be considered by researchers, I shall argue that an *anthropology of bureaucracy* is very much needed to help understand how bureaucrats and decision-makers think, act and operate, particularly in times of crisis and stress.

The NGO authorities, on the other hand, wanted us to study urban problems (for me such problems are not urban at all; they simply configure the deep crisis in the country in general) and provide guidelines for urban poverty alleviation in Greater Khartoum in a very short period of time. At the same time, we were expected *not to embarrass* the NGO, which means that we should not criticise the status quo or make indications to any possible government policy faults. This is not uncommon in the context of a hostile or tense relationship between the state and NGOs, on the one hand and, a context where the general NGOs' tendency is to come up with predefined research that necessarily produces supportive documents.²² While the experience with this specific NGO appears to be a special case, it does not seem unwarranted to contend that researchers are increasingly facing unfavourable conditions at a time when research is becoming commercialised, privatised, carried out by the "humanitarian international" and mostly funded by the *development industry* and the room for *independent* research is increasingly becoming slim. This poses a serious problem that relates to research ethics. I shall return to this point at the end of the paper.

The implications to be drawn from the encounter of researchers (be they anthropologists or social scientists in general), NGOs' staff and bureaucrats or, to use de Waal's apt phrase, the "humanitarian international", appear to be frustrating. This is because although research on aid and humanitarianism is in most cases a critique to the current practice of aid or development by humanitarian institutions, it seems to have the effect of enriching the same institutions it seeks to critique. It appears that the legitimacy of NGOs or donors, and to a lesser extent repressive rules, seems to be strengthened by research. Although my claim here lacks a proper documentation, it can easily be backed or substantiated by looking into the continuous evaluation and re-evaluation of aid projects and the resulting myriad of reports that often call for the need to extend project phases and recommend additional funding. It must be said that all this is sustained at the expense of the people who continue to suffer. The analysis of the displaced persons' realities has, hopefully, shown a glimpse of that suffering. But should such frustrating encounter between the various players justify disengagement from the part of anthropologists, as it may seem to be

suggested by post-structuralist critiques (cf. Escobar 1995)? The position of this paper is that the costs of disengagement or distancing are very high.

6. ANTHROPOLOGY AND AID: BROADER IMPLICATIONS

Earlier I argued that anthropology could provide aid agencies with solid studies on which they could base projects aimed at serving communities where these agencies operate. While this may appear to be an unrealistic assumption by the very standpoint I am taking, again, it remains an open question if those aid agencies are really serious enough to make use of anthropological, or for that matter, other research insights. And even if the lack of seriousness from the part of aid agencies is established beyond any reasonable doubt, it remains an ethical responsibility of researchers to come out with fair and realistic representation of what they are engaged with. At the micro level, anthropologists should come out with fair representation of the social and cultural realities they reflect on, without prejudice or a priori stands. At median and macro levels, they must distinguish between winners and losers. Although what anthropologists provide may not always resonate with the jargon of development industry, it is an ethical responsibility to record reality as it unfolds in the field. But is it easy to record reality as it unfolds? I shall try to address some of the problems facing researchers and explore anthropology's potential in the following pages.

Acknowledging the limits of anthropologists and the complex realities within which they practice anthropology, it is my argument in this paper that anthropologists are in a position to provide basic information on the basis of which community development projects and sustainable development are to be invoked. Such an argument is based on a simple conviction that most community development projects suffer from poor knowledge of the social, cultural and institutional environment in which they are to be implemented, hence anthropological input becomes necessary. This conviction, however, should not give rise to any impression that confuses it with a policy of conserving conditions of target groups, or opposing change. By basing aid projects on a thorough understanding of the socio-cultural environment in which they will be implemented, change will eventually follow. It is unfortunate that applied anthropological knowledge to community development or directed social change have often had a mixed feeling about transforming old and valued ways: a somewhat romantic appreciation of *traditional cultures* runs very deep in anthropology (Keesing and Strathern 1998). Equally likely, the anthropological community has the inherent tendency to reward and celebrate "bizarre" engagements, even if they contribute very little to the benefit of the target communities and the advancement of anthropological theory. A piece of research that is useless in both theory and practice may still secure academic advancement. Having said this, however, it must be emphasised that nothing is bizarre by principle. Things become bizarre if and when they are put out of context. Thus, studying witchcraft may

become very important and instrumental if it is linked to the well-being of the Azande of southern Sudan, for example, and not simply pursued as an end in itself. After all, what is the relevance of social theory if it does not contribute to serving humanity? We must not forget what science is basically meant to serve, and we must also not lose sight of the connection between the social purposes of knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (Rappaport 1994). A major contribution of the anthropologist is to reveal the reality expeditiously. However, when it comes to the formulation of statements of what should be done, the anthropologist “will be skating on a thin ice” and “those who claim that if planners only listen to their advice, they have the guarantee for success, are just naive” (Haaland 1982, 25). How can anthropologists secure “thick ice” on which they could skate? To my mind, that requires being part of the decision-making, not just providing advice that may not be taken seriously by planners.

Let me go back to the displaced in Greater Khartoum. The first step towards understanding the complexity of displacement must start by a concerted fieldwork. It is unfortunate that some post-modern anthropologists are advancing dubious and sarcastic notes about fieldwork. A leading figure in this direction is James Clifford, in whose eyes fieldwork in anthropology is “sedimented with a disciplinary history, and it continues to function as a rite of passage and marker of professionalism” (1997, 193) and, moreover, it [fieldwork] is “a disciplining process and an ambiguous legacy” (1997, 195). It is of course true that fieldwork is a rite of passage and a marker of professionalism in anthropology. But the question is do anthropologists engage in fieldwork only to get those academic credentials, or to mount the horse of professionalism? These kinds of utterances emphasise what I termed in the beginning of the paper as “a muted anthropological elitism”, and without fieldwork it becomes unclear how the complex realities like those of the displaced persons could be unravelled. Fieldwork among displaced communities should lend itself capable of finding out what concepts like *sharf* (honour) and *aib* (shame) mean for a community whose members are drawn from *conservative* rural Sudanese society, and how such concepts impinge on females’ work. It would be a simple-minded effort to recommend supporting income-generating opportunities for females without duly considering the cultural construction of reality among the displaced. A further step is to depict the interconnectedness of the various phenomena and see how all this relates to the macro processes.

This simple model is based on the conviction that realities are always interconnected and the ambition of any serious researcher must be the ability to say something sensible about such interconnectedness. The case studies presented in this paper relate in the first instance to the basic life realities of the displaced women. Those realities cannot, and should not, be disentangled from other realities in an urban system that subjects displaced women to all sorts of inconveniences (insecurity, harassment, low

remuneration, etc.). Furthermore, these two levels are necessarily to be seen in the context of mounting economic and social crises in the country as a whole and, almost as equal, within a context of an urban upper class ideology that is hostile towards displaced persons. The evacuation of displaced persons to areas far from cities attests to such an ideology. The core of this ideology is that the displaced are responsible for all sorts of urban problems (crime, alcoholism, congestion in public transport, threatening public peace and order, etc.), and as such they should go back to where they came from, or to their “home”. But if going back to home is where one feels safe and at ease, instead of some essentialised point in the map, then it is far from clear that returning to where one fled from is the same thing as going home. It is unfortunate that such basic realities are often swept under the rug of current development discourse (advocacy, emancipation, sustainability, empowerment, etc.) and the result, of course, is the perpetual suffering of the people for whose help everybody is arguing.

Now, having been able to delineate such intricacies, what is next? What is required from the anthropologist? There are limits to what anthropologists or social scientists can offer. There are also limits to the ability of any system to handle the knowledge which anthropologists provide. Even a good understanding does not offer much hope that knowledge will make a significant contribution to development; at least in the sense that it is not going to identify ways in which aid resources or money can be usefully spent. This is yet another issue to which anthropologists should turn their attention. But in the first place, can anthropologists venture into such an area successfully? Such a question is very much intriguing and difficult to answer. Earlier I mentioned how the research environment is unfavourable particularly for the anthropologist. The colonial legacy of anthropology has much to do with this unfavourable environment, especially in the Third World countries. In the First World (the North), anthropologists or social scientists in general are faced with institutional problems (Kapferer 2000) and other problems that relate to the ethics of research. Research ethic is one of the age-old controversies that relate to objectivity and subjectivity in social sciences. Terje Tvedt (1998b, 214) has clearly pointed out to this problem of ethics:

In many OECD countries the most active research centres are often funded by the foreign ministry or by the aid bureaucracies themselves, as is definitely the case in Norway. In Norway, development research has to a large extent been financed either by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or by the Ministry for Development Co-operation. The ministries pay most of the bill for influential research centres and build up whole research programs for political purposes, institutions and programs that in some cases have become integrated parts of traditional university affairs.

Although some critics believe that Tvedt “seems to spend a lot of time in breaking open doors” (Tostensen 1999, 133), Tvedt’s pertinent point is that the interminable association of researchers with such powerful institutions necessarily erodes research ethics. In the Third World (the South) development research is particularly contingent on other equally compelling circumstances. Let me quote Tvedt again:

Academic freedom is weak in many of the so-called developing countries, not only because they live under oppressive regimes, but almost as important, because they also are even more dependent on funds from different aid donors than what we are (ibid.).

Tvedt’s point is that in the process of seeking to influence powerful aid agencies, development research may itself become influenced by the values of power and affluence to be found in these agencies. He believes that researchers should be autonomous and strive to understand the complexities of life in more profound ways than what aid workers, politicians or media people are normally in a position to do. Yet Tvedt’s arguments, convincing though they may be, leave a lot that is to be hoped. It is easy to call for autonomy. It is notoriously difficult to effect that autonomy, however. While Tvedt is calling for “distancing” from powerful institutions, I am in favour of “engagement” and while he believes that engagement erodes research ethics, I believe it is difficult to think of *absolutely value free* research (actually it does not have to be), and through engagement we can affect those powerful institutions. Else how can we hope to be effective? If the knowledge we provide is not taken seriously, then it may be imperative to be part of the decision-making apparatus.

I am for autonomy. However, to be autonomous implies neither to detach oneself from funding institutions and aid agencies, nor to try to be *absolutely* neutral. To detach oneself from funding institutions or agencies necessarily means to stop doing research. This is particularly the case with anthropology, the basis of which is prolonged fieldwork. To be neutral is synonymous with not making a moral commitment. But this is in itself a commitment: two completely different stands but, paradoxically, exactly the same. To be neutral is making a commitment to the support of the system within which one is working anthropologically. If one does not *notice* oppression or injustice or exploitation because one is *only a scientist* and science does not concern itself with political issues, then one is being myopic and self-deluding about objectivity. Ultimately amorality is immorality.

7. CONCLUSION

This paper argued for a positive role of anthropology in development. This argument is not out of glue. It is based on my belief that anthropology deconstructs the homogenising and generalising models produced by the established development discourse. It achieves this through the

ethnographic method, and by mapping the relevant societal structures for development processes. The material on the displaced persons was hoped to advance such an argument and to emphasise the importance of looking into power structures. In light of the increasing involvement of anthropologists in aid and development industry, it would not do justice to continue looking into anthropology as hopelessly compromised by its involvement in mainstream conventional development. Anthropologists can take advantage of the ethnographic method to explore the relationship between ideas and organisations, and with this they can achieve a better understanding of people whom they study. This applies whether the anthropologist is in academia or working as a consultant. Acknowledging the limits of anthropologists, all one can do is offer the best possible explanation and recommendation they can make with the knowledge and understanding that is available to them. A promising, if problematic and double-edged, engagement is to be part of the decision-making apparatus.

The role and place of NGOs cannot be underestimated. NGOs are part of the development industry and their involvement has two dimensions. The first one is related to the material part of development; i.e., provision of relief food and engagement in the so-called community development projects. The second dimension of NGOs' involvement is the creation or production of knowledge through short-term consultancy research or through research conducted by NGOs' staff. The quality of that knowledge and the relationship between these two dimensions (material and knowledge) need to be assessed. This would problematise the dichotomy between pure and applied research and renders the distinction between the two blurry or difficult to sustain.

Following recent debates in the discipline, I have argued throughout the paper that anthropology cannot concern itself only with powerless and marginal communities. Rather, it must also look into the macro structures that impinge on the powerless and marginal communities (Haaland 1990). In their attempts to effectively challenge the dominant paradigms of development, anthropologists must analyse the institutional apparatus of development, the system of power established by such an apparatus, the ethnographic analysis and critique of modernist constructs and, to echo Escobar, the possibility of contributing to the political projects of the subordinate. Such a role cannot be enacted if anthropologists are to stay in the sidelines and content themselves with the criticisms they advance every now and then (Ahmed 1979). After all, somebody needs to be part of a structure if they want to effectively contribute to, and/or change, it. However, shifting the analysis to power structures and institutional apparatuses must not be undertaken at the cost of relegating to a second degree revealing the realities of the subordinate or the powerless. Doing so will amount either to muted elitism or romantic appreciation of subordinate or traditional "cultures". This paper tried to highlight such aspects and structures in the political economy of Sudan. While it cannot claim by any

means that it succeeded in doing so, or provided solutions to the problems involved in aid or development projects, it certainly represents an experience that is to be pondered on, and a positive contribution to what anthropologists or social scientists should look for in their striving to understand social realities and complexities.

NOTES

1. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 5th International Conference of Sudanese Studies, University of Durham, UK, 30th Aug. - 1st Sept. 2000. I would like to thank Bruce Kapferer, Leif Manger, Gunnar Haaland, Olav Stokke, Anwar Osman, Ibrahim Sahl, Aliah Abdelrahman, Justin Willis, John Ryle and Data Dea for their valuable comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I am very much indebted to the two anonymous EASSRR reviewers whose critical comments helped to put the paper in its final shape.
2. Although it could be argued that “development industry” is not funding *basic* research and that what is being funded is commissioned research under strict terms of reference, development industry is generating knowledge. The quality of that knowledge needs to be assessed, which is, however, a task which is beyond the scope of this paper.
3. Of all social sciences’ concepts, “development” is the most intriguing, controversial and notoriously difficult to define. Without further ado, I take “development” in this paper to mean improving life conditions of people by helping them help themselves.
4. For critical accounts on anthropology and development or for that matter development anthropology, see, for example, Manger (1985), Haaland (1990), Hobart (1993), Abraham and Waldren (1998) and Kjerland (1999).
5. El-Hassan (1998, 2-20) periodised the history of anthropology in Sudan into four phases: (i) the colonial period; (ii) the transitional period; (iii) the emergence of Sudanese anthropologists; and (iv) the students of the first Sudanese anthropologists.
6. Two of the areas where anthropology is rooted were Africa (especially south of the Sahara) and South and Southeast Asia (Papua New Guinea, India, Sri Lanka, Indonesian archipelago, etc.). These two regions, if you will, currently represent hotspots in the world. In the case of Africa, civil wars and ethnic tensions (Sudan, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Nigeria and Zimbabwe) are currently simmering and some of these countries are at the brink of a total collapse, as happened in Somalia. In other areas of the continent, inter-country wars are threatening the stability of the whole continent (e.g., the conflicting interests of the Great Lakes countries in the Democratic Republic of Congo and, most recently, the dramatic and senseless outbreak of war between Ethiopia and Eritrea). The South and Southeast Asian case, another traditional anthropological location (especially for American anthropology), represents a contrasting case to the other region. The results in both cases, however, seem to be isomorphic: episodes of calamities and perpetual human suffering.

7. I will not endeavour to provide a definition to what is meant by an NGO. That is beyond the scope of this paper and might be distracting as well. For definitions of NGOs the reader is referred to Tvedt (1998a) and Marcussen (1996). For a background about NGOs and humanitarian assistance in Sudan, see Abdel Ati (1988).
8. Perhaps this is why there is a mixed feeling, ambivalence and a change of attitude on the part of some partners (especially government officials) towards NGOs. According to Abdel Ati (2000, 1) "One major reason that gives rise to such change of attitude towards humanitarian assistance (from neutrality and political innocence to suspicion, political loading and propaganda) and the opposing perceptions seems to be the perpetual link between the need for humanitarian assistance and political (civil) conflicts and/or its association with totalitarian regimes...".
9. This type of macro-economic aid to Sudan has been discussed by many studies. See, for example, Beshir (1985); Saeed (1985); Khogali (1985); Morton (1994).
10. This applies also in the case of "refugees", another equally mystified concept. Nationalism and racism, xenophobia, immigration policies, censorship and silencing are the main causes of refugeeeness. In many studies of refugees, argues Malkki (1995, 496), "these are the kind of background information or root causes that sometimes have been considered, for many reasons, beyond the scope of study". It is worth noting that Sudan also hosts hundreds of thousands of refugees from neighbouring African countries. A recent episode is the Eritrean refugees fleeing the Ethiopian forces.
11. I would be the last to suggest that statistical investigations are necessarily mistaken in aim or application, but they are certainly limited in scope. It is my thesis that there is a wide range of phenomena which are intrinsically inaccessible to statistical investigation of any kind, and that human behaviour cannot be handled as figures that can be fed to computers to give dubious correlations. Some of the aspects discussed in the case studies provided in this paper (e.g., honour and shame) are such aspects that cannot be gauged by statistical contrivance. It is in this area of non-statistical social fact that the anthropologist is an expert.
12. For detailed accounts about this part of the Sudan and the recent involvement of NGOs, see Manger et al. (1996); Abdel Ati (1993); and Egeimi (1996).
13. Actually my engagement with the displaced started earlier in 1994 in the capacity of a research assistant in a project on "Urban Poverty in Khartoum". Intensive interviews were conducted with 1500 displaced households, using questionnaires, in two major displaced camps in the peripheries of Khartoum. Subsequently, I also assisted in the computing process and statistical manipulation of the data. However, for unknown reasons, that study has never seen light.
14. MSF Holland is providing the material for pit latrines in the camp. It encourages people to dig their latrines by giving material incentives to those

who dig their own latrines. On the other hand, the Red Cross provides drinking water through its fleet of tankers and operates a small health unit in the camp. The deplorable conditions in the camp mirror the ravaging urban poverty in Sudan (see Ahmed and Al-Battahani 1995). Conditions in other poor corners of Khartoum are no better than those in the camp in any sensible manner.

15. This is a very famous market in Omdurman where women who are mostly displaced grill fresh meat. In fact, this market appeared a few years after the arrival of the drought displaced.
16. Selling tea is one of the important and basic income-generating activities for women in urban Sudan. But the activity is not organised by the authorities. It is left to the whim and judgement of municipal personnel to decide on who is allowed to engage in tea-selling. This subjects women to perpetual episodes of harassment and confiscation of their property.
17. This is coupled with a general tendency of increasing numbers of females in the public sector and higher educational institutions in Sudan. This tendency is believed to be the result of males deserting the public sector and higher education in favour of either migrating or getting into other rewarding ventures. While this is obviously an interesting development, its discussion cannot be undertaken in this paper.
18. We should differentiate between generalisation as a means of creating solidarity with people whom we intend to study and represent, and generalisation as a means of objective scientific knowledge. The balance between these two notions is difficult to strike and this reflects the extent of the predicament not only of the anthropologist but also of the social sciences in general.
19. One extreme example was in Darfur during the 1984-5 famine, when Save the Children Fund, a foreign NGO involved only in famine relief, had a budget for transport only, not counting the value of the food relief itself nor of the expatriate staff involved, in excess of the regional government's budget (Morton 1994, 48).
20. This is also one of the most controversial concepts in the development literature. But generally the definition in the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development) "Our Common Future" is widely quoted: "sustainable development is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs" (1987, 43).
21. While bureaucratic procedures greatly impede research that has something to do with NGOs or aid, it is equally important to note that the bureaucracy's reluctance is not completely unjustified. A Norwegian television documentary (shown in Nov. 1999), entitled "Weapons Smuggling in Sudan", has highlighted the role played by some aid agencies in logistically and politically perpetuating the Sudanese civil war. The documentary clearly outlined the Actions of the Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) in supplying the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) with weapons in the course of the Sudanese

civil war in the 1990s (Vapensmuglerne I Sudan, "Brennpunkt", NRK Television, Norway, 17 November 1999). But then it has also been proven that the Sudanese state itself has used food as a weapon in its war in the south and supported some of the warring factions in the tribal conflicts in western Sudan (Harir 1994; Abdel Ati 2000).

22. For unknown reasons, the Government of Sudan refused to allow the release and publication of Sudan's first Human Development Report that was sponsored by the UNDP. I was a member of the multidisciplinary team entrusted with the report in 1998. For details of difficulties faced by researchers in displaced camps in particular, see Hampton (1998, 84-87).
23. Donors' agenda and "whim" are increasingly contributing to a fashioned voluntary work. According to Abdel Ati (2000, 13) "...issues of the environment, gender and more recently poverty became common agenda and characteristics of proposals and plans submitted to donors.... Although, as real problems, these are legitimate areas for seeking support to tackle, in some cases they have been used by some NGOs, neither because of their conviction nor they have the required competence, but because that is what guarantees funding (what the donors want)".

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