

# Revealing, widening, deepening?: a review of the existing and potential contribution of anthropological approaches to 'third sector' research

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## Abstract

Anthropology brings a distinctive paradigm and research methodology to bear on social research. However, the profile of anthropologists and anthropological approaches in current third sector research is relatively low. The first part of the paper reviews the status of anthropological work dealing organizations generally before focusing more specifically on work on the third sector, focusing mainly on ethnographic research on voluntary organizations carried out in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in Africa. This paper notes that anthropologists have more recently done less work in this area, but shows how more recent anthropological work on bureaucracy, development and policy issues is highly relevant to third sector research and the second part of the paper briefly reviews such work. The paper concludes that anthropological research can firstly reveal more of the hidden third sector by providing detailed micro-accounts (e.g. of informal groups, grassroots associations), secondly widen the scope of third sector research (by throwing light on the diversity of organizational life and challenging Western bias and ethnocentricity) and thirdly deepen the analysis of third sector research through its distinctive use of an actor-centered, process-based analysis of highly complex issues (such as organizational culture, values). The paper concludes with the observation that closer engagement with third sector research might also benefit current anthropology, which has been criticized in some quarters as losing relevance to the contemporary world.

## Introduction

The term 'third sector' has grown in popularity among researchers and policy makers in recent years to refer to the loose grouping of organizations which are variously termed within different cultures and contexts 'voluntary', 'non-governmental' or 'non-profit'. The profile of such third sector organizations around the world has increased dramatically during the past two decades, a phenomenon which has been described by Salamon (1994) as a 'global associational revolution'. Both industrialized and aid-recipient countries have witnessed a growth in numbers and scale of these organizations and an increased interest in their activities from policy makers and researchers. Professional academic research associations such as the *Association for Research on Nonprofit and Voluntary Agencies* (ARNOVA) and more recently the *Society for International Third Sector Research* (ISTR) number hundreds of inter-disciplinary researchers among their members and both hold regular international academic conferences.

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The 'third sector', so called because it can be distinguished in broad terms from the other two 'sectors' of government and business, has been recognized as playing an important role in community mobilization and self-help, welfare work, service delivery and campaigning activities (Salamon and Anheier, 1997). It contains a vast range of organizations from large scale NGOs and trade unions to informal self-help groups and community organizations. The activities undertaken by such organizations take place within a wide range of contexts including the workplace, the political sphere, the realm of religious activity or the world of international development agencies and institutions. The new interest in the concepts of 'civil society' (Hann and Dunn, 1996) and 'social capital' (Putnam, 1993) have only served to intensify the spotlight on the third sector as a metaphor with which to understand this 'family' of organizations.

During the last decade or so an inter-disciplinary grouping of academic researchers mostly in Europe and North America have begun to focus on third sector issues, bringing into being a field which might be termed 'third sector studies' (e.g. Powell, 1987; Salamon and Anheier, 1997; Billis and Harris, 1996). This research has examined issues such as the origins of third sector organizations, the range of organizations which exist, their relationships to policy and the organizational challenges that they face. This research literature has been complemented by a parallel growth of research interest in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as development agencies among researchers in development studies (e.g. Edwards and Hulme, 1992; Farrington and Bebbington, 1993; Hulme and Edwards, 1997). This second literature has examined the roles organizations from the industrialized countries and those from 'the South' have played in 'development' work -- from project implementation to organizing campaigns on environmental or human rights issues. However, despite covering overlapping ground these two literatures have remained largely separate (Lewis, 1998).

This paper argues that neither set of researchers have not yet made effective use of anthropological approaches to understanding third sector organizations. Economists, sociologists and political scientists have all made distinctive contributions to the growth of third sector studies. For example, the economist Burton Weisbrod (1977) attempted to explain the existence of the non-profit sector by showing how markets fail some consumers. The sociologist Etzioni has provided a framework of 'compliance' within the three main types of organizations which throws light on the specific character of third sector organizational cohesion (Etzioni, 1961). Fisher's (1994) work on NGOs and political systems in developing countries brings a political science approach to studying NGOs as political actors. However, relatively little use has so far been made of anthropological work; nor have anthropologists tended to become formally involved in third sector studies. Third sector studies has drawn only occasionally upon the work of social or cultural anthropologists. For example, Anheier (1987) refers to ethnographic work undertaken by anthropologists in Africa on voluntary organizations, while Billis (1993) draws briefly upon the ideas of the British anthropologist Edmund Leach in his work on transition and ambiguity within bureaucratic voluntary agencies.

As Haviland (1974) shows, from its early days the concept of 'organization' has been prominent in anthropological studies, most of which were concerned with the attempt to understand how different societies organized themselves in terms of kinship, politics and economics and religion. More recently organizations themselves have come to be viewed as types of 'communities' by some anthropologists who have studied groups of all kinds from age-sets in Africa to private commercial businesses in the United States (Chambers, 1985).

There is enormous potential for anthropological work to enrich third sector studies both in terms

of the sharing of ethnographic data which already exists with third sector researchers and in the theoretical and methodological approaches which anthropology potentially offers future non-profit research. There is also an opportunity for more anthropologists to make a distinctive contribution to this growing research field.

### *Existing and potential contributions*

Anthropology has been associated with the study of 'traditional' or non-Western communities, particularly those which were subordinate, marginalised or geographically remote. There is undoubtedly a wealth of ethnographic material relating to non-Western voluntary and non-governmental organizations contained in many anthropological monographs from as long as the discipline has been in existence. However such a narrow view of anthropologists as travelers and purveyors of the exotic is now agreed to be long out of date, at least to those within the discipline of anthropology. Anthropologists as long ago as the 1950s began to focus on organizational studies in industrialized societies and the idea of studying organizations as communities. Anthropological research more recently years has been concerned not just with communities 'at home' but with community relationships with wider policy issues of education, health and bureaucracy or with international development institutions (Wright, 1994). More recently, the need for anthropologists to 'study up' and focus on the powerful and the mainstream has been a widespread preoccupation (Gardner and Lewis, 1996).

To all these areas of research anthropologists have brought a distinctive research methodology: an approach which sought to understand small-scale communities primarily through long-term 'fieldwork' to facilitate face-to-face data collection, often using a qualitative 'participant observation' research methodology. This small-scale, interpretative approach to research has tended to distinguish anthropological work from that of sociologists. Of particular interest to third sector studies is the practice of 'organizational ethnography' in which organizations and their relationships are treated as units for research using participant observation. However, this type of work has become less common and the relationship between anthropologists and organizational theorists has waned in recent years (Bate, 1997). As Bate argues, ethnographic research is at the core of anthropology and provides a methodology, a way of thinking and way of writing which can enrich much of the current writing about organizations, which is frequently weakened by its reification of culture in organizations and by 'quick fix' conceptual thinking. The overview and critique of institutional ethnography which Bate provides could, it is suggested here, could be extended effectively to third sector organizations.

But anthropology offers far more than just a distinctive research methodology, which after all is no longer unique to the discipline and is now widely used among other social scientists. As Gledhill (1994) has convincingly shown the distinctive contribution of anthropology to social science is primarily a theoretical one which:

... attempts to examine social realities in a cross-cultural frame of reference. In striving to transcend a view of the world based solely on the premises of European culture and history, anthropologists are also encouraged to look beneath the world of appearances and taken-for-granted assumptions in social life in general. This should help us to pursue critical analyses of ideologies and power relations in all societies, including those of the West (p.7-8)

The study of Western third sector organizations, whether US nonprofit organizations, UK voluntary agencies or international development NGOs, brings with it a set of assumptions and biases rooted in the history, values and cultures of the West. These are only now beginning to be questioned as nonprofit studies begins to widen and internationalize its focus (e.g. Salamon and Anheier, 1997).

The remaining sections discuss three general kinds of potential anthropological contribution to third sector research: *revealing* (exposing areas of the third sector which presently receive little attention); *widening* (opening up important non-Western perspectives on third sector organizations) and *deepening* (a distinctive critical perspective on third sector organizations and their contexts). This paper does not seek to present a comprehensive review of the research literature, but instead uses selected work by anthropologists to illustrate these three points and to suggest the potential for enriching research on the third sector.

### *Revealing more of the 'third sector'*

The third sector contains a diverse group of organizations. Much of the third sector research literature has so far focused on larger, bureaucratic forms of organization, such as international NGOs like Oxfam or Save the Children Fund or welfare service agencies such as the YMCA. There has been much less emphasis on small-scale, local or 'associational' forms of activity, particularly those concerned with 'self-help' and mutual support in membership organizations. This bias has been observed in the research on the third sector in both the US and Britain (Horton Smith, 1997; Rochester, 1998). A similar bias can be seen to have existed in the NGO literature (Edwards and Hulme, 1995). The existence of ethnographic research by anthropologists in both Western and non-Western societies might provide a foundation on which this imbalance could begin to be addressed. The richly detailed micro-accounts which anthropology can provide are well-suited to the exploration of less 'visible' parts of the sector.

Much of the early work on voluntary associations by anthropologists was undertaken in the context of rapid social change. In the 1950s and 1960s anthropologists working in Africa became interested in the role of voluntary associations which they saw as providing adaptive mechanisms for members of communities experiencing rapid change, such as urbanization (Banton, 1968). Members of communities undergoing profound economic and social change were previously structured by kin relations in predominantly rural areas, but were reorganizing within new urban, capitalist contexts (Haviland, 1974). Terming these 'voluntary' or 'common interest' associations, Kerri (1968: 23) suggests they were studied as '... adaptive mechanisms in situations of social, cultural, ecological, and technological change'. Summarizing this early work, Kerri goes on to suggest that under certain conditions of change, the basis of organization for social groups becomes restructured around common interests such as occupation, profession, recreation or spirituality which provide the means for social groups to adapt or re-form to new urban contexts. This is because voluntary organizations, which rely on the common interests and voluntary participation of their members, lack the rigidity of kinship-based groups (which may be the basis of land-ownership, social exchange) or of territorial units (such as government structures at the local or national levels).

For example, Little (1965) who began writing on West Africa in the late 1940s described how the tribal institutions of urban migrants disintegrate and are replaced or supplemented by new groups. These new associations cater to peoples' economic, religious or other needs and assist

with adaptation to the new environment in terms of companionship, protection and appropriate behavior. Many traditional forms of organization persist, but the family tends to lose its old significance in providing mutual assistance and support and age-sets and secret societies take on these roles. Little classifies four types of associations: tribal unions, friendly societies, occupational associations and recreational associations and sees them as providing a cultural 'bridge' which can convey individuals from the 'traditional' into the 'modern' context. Banton (1968) argued that devolved authority in some tribal societies increases the likelihood of contractual, common interest associations forming in the urban context, either because young men reject traditional authority or because they gain knowledge of more relevant alternative means for dealing with urban problems. As 'ascribed status' becomes less important these associations allow the recent migrant to adjust to the gaining of 'achieved' status. Although such Durkheimian dualism has long been left behind by anthropological thinking of a structuralist or post-modern character, arguably such accounts remain important for the richness of their ethnographic detail.

Another point of entry to the early ethnographic work for third sector researchers is the large amount of work undertaken by anthropologists on rotating credit associations, a form of self-help group common in many countries. There has long been discussion in the anthropological literature of this type of association. A formative paper was that of Geertz (1962: 243) who wrote from fieldwork in Indonesia:

... the basic principle upon which the rotating credit association is founded is everywhere the same: a lump sum fund composed of fixed contributions from each member of the association is distributed, at fixed intervals and as a whole, to each member of the association in turn.

Geertz located this type of organization within societies making a transition from the traditional agrarian to a modern commercial orientation. More recent work by Chhetri (1995) continues this theme and examines the Nepali *dhikuri* credit association as an adaptive mechanism rooted in the wider community through which people also challenge the legitimacy of modern banking institutions since they are based on face to face trust rather than on impersonal relationships.

The analysis of gender issues in relation to the third sector can also be expanded through anthropological perspectives. Many self-help groups are started by women, such as 'harambee' groups in Kenya and these may at times have served multiple functions of mutual support, economic enterprise and the reduction of dependence upon male kin (Moore, 1988). Earlier anthropological work, though theoretically unsophisticated, provides rich ethnographic detail on types of women's organizations particularly in the African context. Little (1972) describes the role of voluntary associations as providing a vehicle for social mobility for West African women moving out of 'traditional' roles into gaining 'achieved' status. These organizations provide mutual benefit schemes, trading contacts and capital and also help to counteract loneliness in new urban environments. As women moved away from traditionally ascribed status, mobility was possible through identification with a husband's position, membership of a voluntary association, trade and prestige from the education or marriage of offspring. Despite the link between much anthropological work of this period and the simplistic modernization theories of development common at this time, the ethnographic record of such organizations still serves to reveal a little more of the wider third sector.

Anthropological research of this type has not been confined to the African context but has

examined wider influences on the growth of voluntary associations in the industrialized countries as well. After carrying out work in Japan in which he shows how 'common interest associations' have grown in importance alongside government social welfare institutions and have taken over from many kin-based functions, Norbeck (1972) has argued that such common interest associations should be seen as a general category of which voluntary associations form a sub-category because sometimes membership of these associations is urged by government. Such associations, the author argues, are both indicators and instruments of change in both urban and rural areas. Work in Europe and North America has reflected similar interests by anthropologists. Anderson and Anderson (1959) have studied communities in Denmark and France and suggest that voluntary associations respond to needs which are either beyond the concern of government or else not yet important enough to receive attention. For example, the needs of recently arrived migrants or ethnic minorities may fall into this category. Among Ukrainian communities in France they find that associations unite migrants in urban areas beyond those in their home communities which are structured primarily by kinship and territory.

Anthropologists also began to make links between changing modes of production, state policies and local responses and survival strategies. Hamer's (1967) work among the Sidamo of Southwestern Ethiopia links the growth of voluntary associations with the growth of a cash crop economy and a centralizing state. Work associations were formed to facilitate the coffee harvest, partly assisted by the mission churches, because the traditional extended family was insufficient for this purpose. Knowledge of other formal organizations elsewhere in Ethiopia, sanctioned by the State, also helped to facilitate this growth. Moore (1988) also makes the point that self-help initiatives - such as *harambee* in Kenya - are usually the result of combinations of both internal and external factors.

#### *Widening the scope of third sector research*

The existing non-profit literature, with a few notable exceptions, tends to be rooted in research undertaken primarily within the domestic third sectors of Britain and United States, where there are distinctive local histories of 'charitable' and 'non-profit' organizations respectively. Far less attention has been given to the multiple forms of organizational activity which exist outside the dominant cultures of these societies (such as the kinds of third sector organizations formed by minorities, refugees and economic migrants) or to the diversity of voluntary action in the rest of the world (such as rotating credit groups in peasant societies or local ideologies of self help).

This bias leaves a wealth of definitions, terms and assumptions open to question. Is the third sector a term which only has meaning in certain societies? The cultural values which create and sustain these organizations may need to be understood on their own terms. How is the concept of 'voluntarism' manifested in other cultures? What is reflected in the labeling of certain organizations as 'voluntary' or 'non-governmental' in some contexts and not in others? (Lewis, 1998). The varieties of organizational forms and management approaches also needs to be considered. Can 'indigenous' forms of management be contrasted with those from Western knowledge bases and discourses? (Marsden, 1994).

One important area on which existing anthropological work throws light is in the analysis of the historical encounter between Western and non-Western forms of organization. For example, Meillassoux (1968) discusses voluntary associations in Bamako and concludes that traditional village associations which organized work and entertainment, and which emerged during the

colonial period, were suppressed by the post-colonial government which sought to create its own structures through the national political party. However some old associations persisted. Ottenberg (1955) describes improvement associations among the Afikpo Ibo in Southern Nigeria in which young men, often employees of the government, work towards village improvement through such activities as social events, schools, hospitals, roads and scholarships. He suggests that village rivalries of the past that often involved warfare have evolved into modern inter-village rivalries based on provision of education and maintenance of infrastructure. These associations therefore combine both 'traditional' and 'modern' elements. In Asia, a study by Anderson (1964) of voluntary associations in Hyderabad in India found that an 'imported' (or imposed) Western model of formal voluntary organization was co-existing with indigenous informal structures. This had led these newer organizations to be characterized by unreliable or corrupt leadership and 'role ambiguity'. Anderson suggests that the Indian State in its planning process had placed hopes on such organizations based on experience drawn from their roles in Western societies.

A second key area in widening the scope of third sector studies is in understanding different cultural perspectives on concepts such as 'voluntarism' and 'giving'. In understanding charitable giving, development aid and philanthropy there is a useful link which can be with anthropological traditions of seeking to understanding gifts and reciprocity, which has its origins in the work of Mauss (1958). As Mauss argued, the provision of a gift confers power on the giver. One recent village study which has examined these ideas in the context of development work is Vandergeest (1991), who shows convincingly how the state and other development agencies have appropriated the language of the gift in Thailand since the 1930s in its attempt to modernize rural areas, in contradiction to the more egalitarian local traditions of mutual help. The language of helping has been co-opted and transformed by developers to coerce villagers into participating in development projects. Vandergeest's work attempts to show that views of community in the pre-capitalist village may be constructs of the present. In the 1930s, there were development projects (now 'remembered' as forms of mutual support within villages) which were actually forms of state-building from outside (couched in the terms of gifts from the state which linked 'leaders' and 'followers' in pursuit of the 'common good'), and that rather than helping villagers to help themselves, the emphasis should be 'to replace the language of helping with the language of 'rights'' (p.426). Villagers at that time 'had to help', for example, as laborers on the fields of local elites.

Nevertheless forms of mutual 'helping' do exist in the villages, such as informal networks in which women transplant and harvest rice, thus creating 'political' groups which also provide support against problems with husbands or fathers:

...relations of helping or 'gift exchange' are not associated only with serfdom, unequal power or control and regulation. They can also be used in creating mutual aid networks (p.438).

The paper goes on to argue that gifts empower the givers who can withdraw it as they wish as well as imposing conditions on the receiver. This can be contrasted with rights, which empower the receiver by shifting obligation to the giver, such as when the state is then obliged to guarantee security or democratic participation. Another paper by Stirrat and Henkel (1997) develops Mauss's ideas in the context of funding relationships between Western non-governmental organizations and their Southern counterparts.

The work of anthropologists is not only of value at the small-scale, associational end of the third sector but also within bureaucracies. As Billis (1993) and others have shown, the study of bureaucracy is central to an understanding of the organizational challenges faced by larger third sector organizations. Bureaucracy has long interested anthropologists as well and Heyman (1995) has recently reviewed various approaches. Heyman argues that Weber's original work on bureaucracies led to a narrowing of research interest by sociologists and others towards diagnosing administrative problems with an over-emphasis on internal aspects of bureaucracies. He points out that Weber was also concerned with the 'modernization of societal power' in the shift from rule by elites to institutions of capitalism and democracy. This second aspect of his work has been continued by, among others, anthropologists.

Herzfeld (1992) points out that 'modern' Western bureaucracy cannot be simply contrasted with 'primitive' or non-Western forms of organization, but can be analyzed in ways similar to those used by anthropologists to study the formal ordered patterns of rituals in any society. While hierarchy is not only a Western concept, Weberian notions of bureaucracy can be seen as representing a form of thought distinctive of Renaissance and modern Western tradition with a symbolic distinction between insider and outsider not found in all societies (Herzfeld, 1992) -- it is the idea of transcendence which is Western and culturally distinctive. The concept of accountability, though universal, is 'a socially produced, culturally saturated amalgam of ideas about person, presence and polity' with 'culturally specific meanings' (p.47). In the context of Greece, for example, Herzfeld shows that the symbolic form of bureaucracy is a cover for the tactics of 'power grabbing, humiliation and indifference'.

### *Deepening the analysis: new critical perspectives*

Anthropology is more than simply a research methodology and a means of uncovering the diversity of social life, but can also bring a distinctive critical focus to our understanding of organizations and their contexts. This section explores a sample of research that is relevant to third sector research and considers two main themes - organization and policy.

The first theme relates to the challenge of understanding how organizations work. Links between anthropology and organizational studies have existed for many years. In the 1920s anthropologists contributed to the scientific management theories of Taylor in studies of two Western Electric Hawthorne Plants in Illinois. These studies emphasized the role of formal managers rather than more participatory perspectives, which followed with Gluckman and the Manchester school's work in the 1950s and 1960s which emphasized the wider context of the work situation and the ways in which people constructed meaning on the shop floor from a wider cultural repertoire of social roles. But by the late 1960s anthropologists moved away from studying Western organizations again towards third world societies, while organizational studies adopted the positivist paradigm and left behind interpretative approaches (Wright, 1994).

Anthropological concepts have begun to influence organizational theorists in their attempts to understand the elusive concept of 'culture' within organizations (Wright, 1994). Anthropology is concerned with cultural analysis and interpretation whether in studying the kinship of small isolated societies or the ways in which a large business corporation employs people (Chambers, 1985). Culture in this definition refers to information and its interpretation by people and to the processes through which these meanings are passed around between people. Debates about culture have again brought anthropologists and organizational theorists into dialogue. Geertz's



(1973) emphasis on culture as process is supplemented by emphases on language and power to show how discourses are constructed and contested both within organizations and in relation to their wider contexts. Wright (1994:27) concludes that:

Culture is double faceted. Culture is an analytical concept for problematizing the field of organizations; in that field, culture is an ideological claim, rooted in historical conditions and subject to challenge.

Not that anthropologists and organizational theorists necessarily see 'culture' in the same terms. The 'culture concept' has become increasingly prevalent in organizational studies and while its origins are attributed to the work of anthropologists, the two disciplines arguably use the term somewhat differently. Within organizational studies interest in culture has been in the context of (i) management across different national cultural contexts, (ii) integrating workers with different ethnic identities into a single unit, (iii) the attitudes of a workforce and (iv) the collective culture fostered by managers for their company (Wright, 1994). Anthropological ideas about culture have also been brought into organizational studies as the view of the organizations as rational structures has been challenged by a 'post-modern' perspective on organizations as 'sites for constructing meaning'. But according to Wright (1994: 3) there remains a disjuncture in which organizational theorists tend to view culture as something that an organization *has* and which can be manipulated rather than something which an organization *is*. Anthropological ideas about culture as being about conflict, negotiation and process have sometimes become solidified into an ideological tool of management control:

... to an anthropologist influenced by Geertz's ideas, 'sharedness' is more likely to imply a common repertoire of ideas which are reworked continually in imaginative ways that are systematic, explainable, but not predictable. Not only is ambiguity essential, as it provides the space for this reworking, but the process is political: meanings of concepts and symbols are not just not fixed, they are actively contested. (p.4)

Moving on to the question of policy, anthropologists have tended to research the ways in which policies are generated and implemented (van Willigen, 1993). Anthropological insights can bring to discussions about policy an awareness about how certain groups of people (and particularly those outside the social mainstream) respond to circumstances over which they may have little control, such as those groups of people affected by the rapidly modernizing state (Chambers, 1985: 188):

If the major goal of anthropology over the past century has been to improve our understanding of cultural process on the basis of cross-cultural research, the emerging major goal of applied anthropologists is to understand how cultural process affects the circumstances of policy decision making. It is hard to imagine how this can be done without paying as much attention to those who make, transmit, and implement policy as we have given to those who are most affected by it.

For NGOs concerned with development, anthropologists can also highlight aspects of development policy. Anthropologists have brought new perspectives to the policy context in which organizations operate, particularly the anthropological critique of the 'development industry' and its institutions (Ferguson, 1990; Escobar, 1995; Gardner and Lewis, 1996).

One of the key areas in which anthropologists have worked has been in looking at the ways in

which policy gets translated into practice. This has from often involved looking at situations that involve the work of third sector organizations. For example, Kurtz (1973) analyzed problems within the 'war on poverty' initiative in California during the 1960s. He shows that the leaders of a local Community Action Council at the grassroots were hired to direct a poverty program but became bureaucratized by the mainstream and their actions began to reflect the interests of their new-found middle class status rather than the communities which they represented. But there is also another area that has received less attention from all sides: the ways in which programs of change are formulated and administered in both the formal and informal spheres. For example, Salisbury (1977) developed an approach which deconstructs different realities of different 'actors' within a development project in what she terms a 'prism of perceptions' in order to identify different meanings and understandings. Such approaches have great relevance to NGOs that often take part in development programs.

Returning to our earlier discussion about bureaucracy, anthropologists have examined the ways in which policy and implementation are related. Hyman suggests that the anthropology of bureaucracy has a useful role to play in going beyond the formally stated policy and goals of officials in order to understand the deployment of organized power. In particular, he focuses on the relations between bureaucratic workers and the persons they work with or exercise power over. Heyman's research concerns the US immigration service at the Mexican border, which is one of the largest attempts to control people in the world but which, despite arresting more than a million people each year, largely fails in its primary task of preventing illegal entry to the US. It would not be difficult to argue the case that the stated purpose of the development industry, to reduce poverty, has been similarly ineffective. Heyman's (1995: 263) research focuses on what he terms 'thought-work', a concept that he creates and uses to analyze the inevitable struggle within bureaucracies:

... bureaucratic workers must think for themselves because of the nature of their tasks, yet they must be controlled as thinkers in order to ensure the regular production of control duties.

In other words, bureaucracies generate social relationships and can only be understood if we move beyond simply looking at the internal structure to include the external relationship between controller and controlled, which helps shape organizational processes and cultures. The ways in which certain types of NGOs work with communities, and the ways in which the organizations' values and development philosophy are reproduced within an NGO might be usefully analyzed using this type of perspective on bureaucracy.

Finally, the issue of policy construction in relation to non-profit organizations has been under-researched. There is potentially useful evidence from anthropological work which suggests that the rationality of most types of organization is complex and ambiguous (Quarles van Ufford, 1987). Rather than simply carrying out policy these organizations generate interests and goals in their own right, both shaping and being shaped by policy environments. These ideas have been developed in detail by anthropologists such as Ferguson (1990) and Escobar (1995) to show how development policy 'discourses' are linked to outcomes in ways which serve less explicit interests and power structures.

## *Conclusion*

It is surprising that anthropological work has not so far contributed to any significant degree to the growing area of research on non-profit organizations. There are few anthropologist members of ARNOVA or ISTR and research articles written from an anthropological perspective rarely feature in the third sector academic journals. Much of the ethnographic material referred to in this essay is not new, but very little of it has found its way into the work of third sector scholars. However, the extensive body of anthropological research which already exists along with newer work by anthropologists selectively summarized here can contribute to the strengthening of ongoing work within the field of third sector studies because it has the potential to:

- provide richly detailed micro-level accounts of organizational activity
- reveal cultural diversity of organizational forms, from small-scale informal types to larger bureaucratic structures
- challenge Western bias in the study of non-profit organizations
- describe and analyze organizational culture and change using a rich range of conceptual approaches
- link research and action at community or policy levels through the growth of an ‘applied anthropology’

Each of these *foci* can provide an opportunity for anthropologists to contribute to an area of third sector studies. For example, voluntary organizations tend to be embedded in communities, their histories and cultures, and their operation depends on a complex mix of value-driven motives from staff and members. Some form of ‘voluntary’ activity is found in most societies on a global level and yet values are clearly embedded in culture, which needs to be analyzed in all its diversity. The study of non-profit organizations is firmly rooted in Western industrialized traditions, and concepts that have arisen are likely to be culture-bound in important ways. Cultures, both organizational and more widely within societies, are rarely static and change, evolve and are transformed in complex ways. Non-governmental organizations are commonly transnational in character. At the organizational level Western organizational forms such as bureaucracy interact with local structures such as clan, while individual members of voluntary development agencies travel to other communities in order to provide development assistance. Reeves-Ellington (1995) illustrates this issue in the context of global corporations. Just as anthropologists can usefully study development processes and institutions (Gardner and Lewis, 1996), there would also be potential benefits to academics and practitioners from a broader set of anthropological perspectives on the third sector.

While this paper has argued that anthropology might bring new ideas and insights to third sector studies, the reverse may also be true. Anthropology has been through a long period of soul searching from which it is emerging into an uncertain future. Ahmed and Shore (1995:15-16) write:

Social anthropology as we have known it is in danger of becoming marginalised and redundant unless it adapts to the changing world that now threatens to understand its cherished theories, methods and practices. This means, above all, re-evaluating its conventional objects of study and developing new domains and methods of inquiry that are commensurate with the new subjects and social forces that are emerging in the

contemporary world. It also means engaging with issues and problems of wider public concern.

There may therefore be benefits for anthropology and anthropologists in terms of greater policy relevance from a greater interest in growth of the third sector, which has been hailed in some quarters as one of the most significant social changes of recent years. The sub-discipline of 'applied anthropology' (Cernea, 1995), with its troubled relationship to mainstream anthropology, may benefit in particular from a more active engagement with these issues. The potential which anthropology has to offer the study of the third sector may in the end benefit both communities of researchers.

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