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Bill Cooke

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A new continuity with colonial administration: participation in development management

BILL COOKE

ABSTRACT Development management owes an unacknowledged debt to colonial administration, specifically to indirect rule. Development management, as opposed to development administration, has newly adopted a specific set of managerialist participatory methods, to achieve 'ownership' of development interventions. These methods are particularly evident in World Bank/IMF implementation of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Comprehensive Development Frameworks (CDFs). They have their conceptual foundation in action research, invented, it can justly be argued, by John Collier, Commissioner of the US Bureau of Indian (ie Native American) Affairs 1933–1945. Collier was a self-proclaimed colonial administrator, and remained an advocate of indirect rule as late as 1963. Evidence is presented to show his development of action research was a tool of indirect rule. Achieving 'empowerment' through participation was at its very beginning, therefore, subject to the colonialist's asserted sovereign power; and the limited autonomy it granted was a means of maintaining that power.

This article is about continuity and change in development administration and management (DAM). The change it identifies is DAM’s recent adoption (within the past five years or so) of a particular, managerialist, version of participation as a distinguishing feature. The continuity is of this version of participation with colonial administration of 80 years or so ago.

Claiming a link between colonialism and development (eg Cowen & Shenton, 1995; Crush, 1995; Escobar, 1989, 1995) and colonial administration and development administration (Dwivedi & Nef, 1982; Hailey, 1999) is not, of course, in itself particularly original. What distinguishes this article, first, is that the continuity is seen in a particular idea associated with development management—managerialist participation—which its proponents claim reconfigures First World–Third World power relationships. Second, this idea is claimed to be both a novel and defining feature of development management compared to its administrative predecessors. Third, the continuity is evident in more than a replication of colonialist power relationships, although this replication is worth revealing in its own right. There is a direct genealogical link with indirect rule.

Bill Cooke is at the Manchester School of Management, UMIST, PO Box 88, Manchester M60 1QD, UK. E-mail: w.cooke-2@umist.ac.uk.
This article is also different in that it approaches its subject not just from a position which largely concurs with critiques of development, but also from one which offers a critique of management. Development’s heterogeneous critics challenge its orthodoxy to locate it within a range of critical sociological, political and/or historical analyses (eg those who see the link with colonialism listed above). Management’s critics do the same with management (see, for example, Alvesson & Willmott, 1996), and have come to be collectivised as having a commitment to Critical Management Studies (CMS) (see Grey & Fournier, 2000). CMS literature is heterogenous too. If it has anything in common, though, it is a recognition that managerialist representations of management as a neutral, technical means-to-an-end set of activities and knowledge conceal its status as a product of broader social (at every level from the global to the personal) power relations, and in particular, its role in sustaining these.

The article reinstates part of the social and historical context of development management, then, by demonstrating its link to colonial administration. This link is personalised in John Collier, who was Commissioner of the US Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) during the New Deal under Roosevelt, from 1933 to 1945. Collier subsequently set up the Institute for Ethnic Affairs (IEA).

The article’s sequence of argument and components is as follows. First, it briefly presents a short assessment of indirect rule, the particular form of colonial administration with which contemporary continuity is seen. Second, it shows that the version of participation that development management has adopted is specifically managerialist. This is done by exploring conceptual accounts of development management (from Brinkerhoff & Coston, 1999; Thomas, 1996, 2000), and then examples of contemporary development management practice on the part of international agencies, particularly the World Bank, IMF and UNDP. Third, the article goes on to explain managerialist participation’s debt to indirect rule. The managerialist orthodoxy identifying the psychologist Kurt Lewin (1898–1947) as participatory management’s founder, which derives from his supposed invention of action research, is explored. This is contrasted with the hitherto less recognised claim that John Collier was action research’s inventor. The section then moves on to show that Collier’s invention and advocacy of action research was, unequivocally, as a tool of indirect rule. There is then a brief conclusion.

Colonial administration and indirect rule

As with imperialism and colonialism more generally there are dangers in seeing colonial administration as a homogeneous set of ideas and practices. Indirect rule did, however, dominate large parts of Africa, Asia and beyond in the late colonial era; indeed, it was practiced, as is shown below, on the US mainland itself. The principles of indirect rule were most famously set out in the British colonial administrator Lord Lugard’s (1965) The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa, originally published in 1965. According to Perham (1965: xliii) this was a ‘canonical book’ for British Colonial Administrators in the 1930s.

In The Dual Mandate, Lugard argued that British colonial rule could only be situated ‘indirectly’ by co-opting (or often in reality, creating) ‘native’ (sic)
PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Institutions. Hence indirect rule had as its essential feature the fact that ‘native chiefs are constituted as an integral part of the machinery of the administration’. However, the ‘chief himself must understand that he has no right to place and power unless he renders his proper services to the state’. More, there were limitations on ‘chiefs’ powers—they could not raise or control armed forces, raise taxes, appropriate or redistribute land, and ‘in the interests of good government the right of confirming or otherwise the choice of the people of the successor to a chiefship and deposing any ruler for misrule is reserved to the Governor’ (1965: 207). Hence, Mamdani’s description of a ‘separate but subordinate state structure for natives’ (1996: 62).

As Mamdani points out, the idea of indirect rule did not ‘spring full blown from the mind of a colonial architect, for although Lugard theorized it as the British colonial system, its origins predated Lugard’s reflection on it; also the practice it summed up was not confined to British colonies’ (1996: 62), in Africa or elsewhere. Mamdani also noted the pejorative and offensive nature of the terms ‘native’ and ‘tribes’, and argued that the investing and, often, the invention of ‘chiefs’ with administrative power led to forms of decentralised despotism.

The need for imperial rule to be sustained in this way was described by Lugard in terms of obligation first, exploitation second. Thus the first part of the dual mandate typifies what Said (1994: 10) identifies as an ‘almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior or less advanced peoples’, and consists of:

- moral obligations to the subject races … such matters as the training of native rulers; the delegation to them of the responsibility as they are fit to exercise; the constitution of Courts of Justice free from corruption and accessible to all; the adoption of a system of education which will assist progress without the creation of false ideals; the institution of free labour and a just system of taxation; the protection of the peasantry from oppression and the preservation of their rights, etc. (Lugard, 1965: 58)

Here we see themes that have current development management parallels—the need to train to build capacity, the importance of the rule of law and the absence of corruption, the role of education in progress, flexible labour markets, fair revenue collection, and espoused support for the rural poor. Having apparently given moral and ethical issues primacy, the second part of the mandate went on to address economics, concerning ‘material obligations … [the] development of natural resources for the mutual benefit of the people and mankind in general’ (1965: 58). Lugard was clear that there was self-interest involved here but argued that both the colonisers and the colonised would benefit. Underpinning indirect rule was racism. Lugard asserts ‘we hold these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonize, to trade, and to govern’ (1965: 618–619).

Indirect rule was subsequently endorsed by, among others, the British liberal imperialist Huxley (who was to become the first Director-General of UNESCO in 1946). In Africa View he states:

Indirect rule, in fact, means the employment of the existing institutions of the country for all possible purposes to which they are adequate, their gradual molding by means of the laws made and taxes imposed by the Central [ie colonial] Government and of the guidance given by administrative officers, into channels of pro-
gressive change, and the encouragement within the widest limits of local traditions, local pride and local initiative, and so of the greatest possible freedom and variety of local development within the territory. (1931: 103)

Of note is Huxley’s vision of colonial officers as mere technocrats and as agents of ‘progressive change’, and his identification of ‘development’ as a concern of colonial administration.

Here the consideration of colonial administration comes to a temporary halt. It is important to recollect, though, that colonial administration, or the administration of imperialism in practice did not of course end with indirect rule. Particularly important to historical understandings of the more generic uses of participation in development is the point noted by Hailey (2001) regarding participation’s possible debt to participatory methods developed in imperialist wars in Southeast Asia in the latter half of the twentieth century. For the case being made in this article, however, the preceding consideration of indirect rule is sufficient.

Development management and participation

In this section I address the novelty and significance of participation in development administration/management; the particular managerialist forms that it takes in DAM; and, from a CMS perspective, the purposes of managerialist participation. That there is generically a continuity between development administration and development management is not disputed. Hirschmann’s historical survey notes that for its internal disputes ‘the theory and practice of Development Administration (or Management as it came to be known) have continued, and with some vibrancy’ (1999: 288). Brinkerhoff and Coston’s (1999) assessment of development management tracks its history back to the development administration era of the 1950s, although it does argue that it is nonetheless qualitatively different.

From development administration to development management

Brinkerhoff and Coston here identify changes in focus—away from the state as the sole vehicle of development—and in processes used, which is the main concern of this article. They also identify four ‘facets’ of development management, of which two relate to these processes:

Development management as toolkit ... promotes the application of a range of management and analytical tools adapted from a variety of disciplines, including strategic management, public policy, public administration, psychology, anthropology and political science. (1999: 350, emphasis in the original)

Whereas:

Development management as process operates at three levels—[first] in terms of the individual actors involved it builds on process consultation and organization development ... starting with the client’s priorities needs and values ... [second] at the organizational level, whether ... individual agency or multiple organizations ... concerned with the organizational structures and processes through which plans are implemented ... [third] at the sector level—public, civil society, and private ... [it] addresses broader governance issues, such as participation, accountability, trans-
PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Here the strong presence of managerialist participatory approaches in development management is evident. This is not just in the overt references to ‘management and analytical tools’ per se. ‘Organisation development’ and ‘process consultation’ are specific participatory management approaches, which make a point of ‘drawing from a range of disciplines’ (see French & Bell, 1999; and Cooke, 1999 respectively). At the same time, Brinkerhoff and Coston establish that these managerialist approaches are to be applied beyond the micro- organisational-level context, that is in civil society, government, and society more generally.

A similar incorporation of managerialist participation is identified by Thomas (1996), whose setting out of the field of development management specifies that it should include ‘conventional management theory in a development context’ (1996: 108) and, consequently, that it should draw heavily on ‘empowering’ managerialist approaches. In fairness to Thomas, he also argues that participation in development management should go beyond that offered by managerialism, and include the radical approaches of, for example, Freire, Chambers’ (1997) PRA, and Fals-Borda and Rahman’s (1991) Participatory Action Research. Thus it should include ‘radical participative methods aimed at enabling and empowering, arising from cases where development management may be viewed as the management of interventions on behalf of the relatively powerless’ (1996: 108).

While Thomas is clear that this pro-powerless intervention is what should happen in development management, he is cautious about whether it actually does. Brinkerhoff and Coston do not, implicitly, share this caution. One of their two remaining ‘facets’ of development management is ‘development management as values’. Here they recognise explicitly that DAM requires political interventions in the status quo, but for the best of reasons, because it ‘takes a normative stance on empowerment and supporting groups, particularly the poor and the marginalized, to take an active role in determining and fulfilling their own needs’ (1999: 349). Their analysis does have some nuance in its understanding of First World–Third World power relationships within these processes. The remaining facet recognises that DAM is about First World interventions in the Third World, identifying: ‘Development management as a means to foreign assistance agendas … most often sponsored by international aid agencies, all of which have their own … agendas; typically development management professionals enter the scene upon the request from a donor agency for a predetermined task’ (1999: 349, emphasis in the original).

The preceding two paragraphs have moved this article on from establishing that managerialist participation is one of the features which, it is claimed, define development management as new, to a consideration of the purposes for which it is used. Practical examples follow; but first the nature and purposes of managerialist participation generically must be explained.

Purpose and practices of managerialist participation

The overt purpose of participatory management is to improve organisational effectiveness, on management terms. Its variety of approaches to participation
are most coherently brought together and codified in the field of organisation development (OD), within which the idea of process consultation, developed by Edgar Schein (eg Schein, 1987) is an influential strand. Identified specifically with development management by Brinkerhoff and Coston, OD and process consultation have presences in management in their own right. They also feed ideas into texts and practices associated with the terms planned change, change management, organisational learning, action learning, total quality management, and so on, which Kunda has categorised as ‘culturalist’ forms of management (Kunda, 1992).

What can be seen as the raison d’être of all of these is the manipulation of employees’ values and beliefs (the culturalist obsession) to engender ‘psychological ownership’, often shortened to just ‘ownership’. The intention is that employees have a high level of belief in and commitment to what their work organisation is doing, and take responsibility for ensuring that it operates effectively (that is, they are ‘empowered’ to do so). An alignment between personal or group aspirations and (apparently reified) organisational aims is sought. Opportunities for resistance to management control are diminished, because ‘empowerment’ apparently removes that control. ‘Ownership’ is never literal, however, and empowerment is permitted only in relation to micro levels of organisational processes. Broader managerial goals remain given and immutable; moreover, the desire and strategies for ‘ownership’ are managerially impelled. Critical understandings of management therefore see its purpose as co-optation and control, and not genuine empowerment. Alvesson and Willmott argue that together these approaches ‘portend a more totalizing means of management control that aims to produce an internalization of the means and norms selected by senior managers’ (1996: 32), although, unlike some other CM theorists (see Grey & Fournier, 2000), they see managerialist participation providing (highly constrained) opportunities for genuine empowerment.

This managerialist requirement of ‘ownership’ is now a familiar part of development management rhetoric; although in an interesting, obvious, but as yet unremarked within CM shift, development management makes ownership a prerequisite of (apparently) nation-states rather than individuals or workforces. An example is a recent (within the past five years) but undated UNDP Management Development Programme manual. Entitled Systemic Change in the Public Sector: Process Consultation, it takes for granted the requirement for a particular form of public sector restructuring. (Hence, ‘as the pace of change accelerates, governments with administrative processes designed for routine operations and agencies geared to the performance of distinct and separate functions will have difficulties. Bureaucratic organizations are not designed to cope … administrations need to develop flexibility, creativity’ (Joy & Bennett, nd: 9). But while it adopts managerial process consultation, hitherto only applied at the organisational level, ‘ownership’ has to be achieved by national governments. Hence ‘systemic improvements must be internalized … fully assimilated and owned by the system’ (nd: 5), the requirement of a ‘national programme for action’ which ‘has to be owned by those who implement it’ (nd: 21).

More current, and more significant in terms of its ongoing impact and relevance to Thomas’s aspirations, and Brinkerhoff and Coston’s claims, for a
pro-poor development management, is the implementation of Comprehensive Development Frameworks (CDFs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) by the IMF and the World Bank. The Bank emphasises that there is a strong link between the two, although what that means in practice is not clear. Now that the problems with Structural Adjustment Programmes have been attributed to their unwanted imposition on governments by external agencies (and thus to a lack of ownership), it is the case that:

country-ownership of a poverty reduction strategy is paramount. Broad based participation of civil society in the adoption and monitoring of poverty reduction strategy tailored to country circumstances will enhance its sustained implementation.  
(IMF/IDA, 1999: 6)

The Bank also uses managerialist participatory processes in CDFs. Thus claims are made for action learning, a process which attempts to reconfigure ‘learning set’ members’ cognitive frameworks by setting up problem-solving terms with different professional and organisational backgrounds (eg in this case getting ministry of finance and World Bank teams to work together). The claim is made that ‘people learn better by using a “hands-on” approach than the traditional classroom setting’; this helps the Bank focus on the ‘need to deliver real country products in real time’. According to the World Bank Country Director for Bolivia, action learning ‘was essential in producing effective stakeholders discussions. I have never seen this in the Bank before—where you go through the process of discussion, have so many perspectives at once, but you have action, but you have action at the end. And there was not just a unilateral decision, but everyone was involved.’ A managerialist NGO, the Society for Organizational Learning (SOL) was commissioned by the Bank to evaluate its action–learning programme in the CDF pilot phase, and concluded that ‘the approach catalyzed innovative institutional change, enhanced leadership competencies consistent with the CDF requirements, and led to enthusiastic support for the new way of doing business’. Note that, in making this comment SOL extends its mandate to institutions. (All quotes from World Bank, 2001, unpaginated).

Elsewhere the Bank reviews its CDF work with five countries (Bolivia, Ghana, Morocco, Romania and Vietnam) using managerialist language hitherto employed only in the context of work organisations. This work is categorised in terms of whether it is about ‘leadership behaviour (roles, skills, attitudes)’, ‘organizational environment (structure, processes, culture)’, or ‘learning approach (learning, context, content, process)’. Again this is culturalist language which is easily found in standard texts on organisation development, leadership and culture change (see for example Cummings & Worley, 2000; Schein, 1990). Likewise the terminology used to describe country specific activities. In Bolivia this included ‘empowering teams … and infusing passion’ and ‘using a results- and decision-oriented learning approach which promoted a results- and decision oriented work culture’. In Ghana it was ‘building a culture of mutual respect and trust’ while ‘applying an action-learning approach sped the process of joint learning’. For Morocco ‘facilitation of country team retreat by process expert enhanced team process skills and effectiveness’, and so on.

The implication of the standard CMS critique of these approaches is insofar as
they work on their own terms they engineer the co-optation and ideological conversion of technocratic/political elites (Cooke, 1999, 2002) or, even where they don’t, bring about a knowing if unwilling capitulation to the realities of Bank/IMF power. This co-optation is one of the ways in which the uses of managerial participation might be represented as colonialist, or at least a neo-colonialist replication of power relations in practice. This claim is all the more substantiated, however, through the main purpose of this article, to reveal the direct line of continuity with colonialism in managerial participation itself. This is addressed in the next section.

**Managerial participation’s debt to indirect rule**

This section explores the intellectual foundations of managerialist participatory change, including that associated with development management. It begins by noting the prominence attributed to Kurt Lewin and the reason for this prominence, including his invention of action research. Action research’s foundational status in relation to managerialist participation is explained; then the case for considering Collier as its inventor is set out. Following this, Collier’s status as a colonial administrator, his advocacy of indirect rule, and of action research as a tool of indirect rule are analysed.

**Action research: the foundation for managerialist participation**

In the management orthodoxy little attention is paid to John Collier. Instead, the psychologist Kurt Lewin (1890–1947) is identified as the most important individual in the history of participatory management. For Schein, of Process Consultation fame (1980: 238) ‘there is little question that the intellectual father of contemporary theories of applied behavioral science, action research and planned change is Kurt Lewin’ (see also Kleiner, 1996). Most important among the ideas with which he is credited are those of group dynamics, from which team building sprang, and coterminously, and particularly here, action research.

Action research has an extensive currency outside managerialism. Not least it is applied in participatory development interventions. This is most evident in Fals-Borda and Rahman’s (1991) PAR (and they too pay homage to Lewin), but Reason and Bradbury (2001) also identify action research with the work of Chambers. The history that follows is that of these broader generic uses of action research in development, as it is of its uses in development management. However, it is in development management that the genealogical link is most prominent, and most telling, not least since it is with colonial administration.

Action research is at the core of managerialist workplace participatory approaches such as OD, process consultation, action learning and total quality management (TQM), which are now finding their way into development management (see Cooke, 1992; French & Bell, 1999; Reason & Bradbury, 2001). French and Bell identify action research as offering both a process and a philosophy of organisational change. As a process it proposes a sequence of steps in which standard elements of a research process are followed by action components round an iterative loop. As a philosophy, action research centres on collaboration...
between researchers and the researched. This collaboration brings better results instrumentally. Participants know more than external researchers about organisational practicalities and modalities; and about the broader organisational culture. Furthermore, the very act of participation, and engaging participants in data gathering, analyses and problem solving is intended to engender their commitment to the process, and to implementing, archetypally, the action plan which would not be achieved by the imposition of external expertise. In short, action research brings about ownership. Finally, action research is prescribed as a means of changing workplace culture per se, by incorporating values or attitudes, and critical reflection thereon, in the research process.

The case for Collier as inventor of action research

Lewin’s status as inventor of this foundational process rests on minimal documentary foundations. Lewin only ever wrote three articles on action research. One discussed the action research work of others (Lewin, 1946a); another (1947), was published after his death, with post-mortem editorial improvement. In the other, *Action Research and Minority Problems* (1946b) Lewin does make mention of colonialism and of John Collier. The article refers to an early action research workshop, at which group dynamics are also invented, the so-called New Britain Workshop in Connecticut in 1946. That workshop’s own status vis-à-vis imperialism is ambivalent (Cooke, 2002). It was, however, a workshop designed to address inter-ethnic group relations, and in his account Lewin aligns it with a global struggle against imperialism (1946b: 45–46):

> Inter-group relations in this country will be formed to a large degree by the events on the international scene, and particularly by the fate of the colonial peoples … Are we … to regress when dealing with the United States’ dependencies to that policy of exploitation which has made colonial imperialism the most hated institution the World over? Or will we follow the philosophy which John Collier has developed in regard to American Indians and which the Institute for Ethnic Affairs is proposing for the American dependencies? This is a pattern which leads gradually to independence, equality and cooperation.

This reference to Collier is the first of a series of pointers to his having worked with, rather than independently of, Lewin. One text on managerialist participation (French & Bell, 1999) identifies Collier as inventing action research simultaneously, but ‘independently’, of Lewin while Commissioner of the Bureau of Indian Affairs between 1933 and 1945. French and Bell’s source on this is a personal letter from Ronald Lippitt. Lippitt was one of Lewin's closest collaborators, and indeed did much to promote Lewin’s reputation after his death, so he should be taken seriously. However, the suggestion of ‘independence’ is both intrinsically odd (it would be quite a coincidence) and untenable in the face of the evidence.

Lewin was a founding Vice President of Collier’s IEA, and in his autobiography Collier describes how the then Israeli Ambassador to the USA and his good friend Kurt Lewin met at his home in 1946 to plan ‘an action-research institute, or an ethnic affairs institute for the Middle East’ (1963: 334). That the reference
to Collier is made by Lewin, and that this relationship did exist, suggests that an understanding of what Collier’s ‘philosophy’ was might provide hitherto unrecognised insights into the genesis of action research. This is even more the case once Collier’s claims to have been an inventor of action research, rather than just an influential friend of Lewin are established.

In an article published in 1934 (therefore before New Britain even took place), Collier claims, and is supported by evidence elsewhere (Philp, 1977) to have been carrying out action research from 1933 onwards. Collier lists a number of principles which underpinned his time with the BIA.

[Principle seven] I would call the first and the last; that research and then more research is essential to the program, that in the ethnic field research can be made a tool of action essential to all the other tools, indeed that it ought to be the master tool … We had in mind research impelled from central areas of needed action … since the finding of the research must be carried into effect by the administrator and the layman, and must be criticized by them through their experience, the administrator and the layman must participate creatively in the research, impelled as it is from their own area of need. (1945: 275)

Also noted was a land reform/soil conservation action research project with the people of Acoma, where:

no divorce was created by the old lasting life, its concentration, its hopes, and the new life; instead, the old life created the new, and no dichotomy arose at all, no split in the community organization, no conflict between fundamentalism and science, and no conflict between world views. (1945: 285)

**Action research as a tool of indirect rule**

Cooke (1998) claimed Collier as an early development practitioner on the basis of these statements. Not recognised was that Collier’s period as a practitioner (1933–45) ended almost as the development era is said to have begun. Consequently Collier’s work is not properly situated within its time; more specifically, Collier’s self-proclaimed status as a colonial administrator is not mentioned, let alone addressed. In addressing this omission, and in so doing identifying the continuity at the centre of this article, there are two sets of resources which provide particularly important insights. First, there is a set of histories of Collier’s Commissionership written from the perspective of American Indians (eg Biolsi, 1992; Hauptman, 1981; Parman, 1976) and analyses which have developed from these, particularly Hauptman (1986). Second there are the words of Collier himself, in his publications, and also in the substantial microfilm collection of Collier’s own papers.

In the preface to *The Iroquois and the New Deal*, Hauptman (1981: ix) explains how praise for Collier’s commissionership began to be qualified from the 1960s onwards as evidence suggesting his paternalism, authoritarianism, and a failure to recognise American Indian institutional and cultural diversity began to be taken seriously. According to Hauptman, for ‘many Native Americans today the New Deal years … mark an era … of non-Indian tampering with existing tribal systems’ (1981: x). This, he goes on to argue, was the case with Iroquoia, parts of
which saw its sovereignty being infringed by BIA interventions. Costo (1986) makes a similar point, asking by what right Collier intervened in sovereign nations with rights and relations with the USA established by treaty.

Some of these revised histories do see positive aspects to Collier. Thus Hauptman praises the BIA for reviving Iroquois language and customs, reinvigorating some tribal governments, and for its homebuilding and infrastructure provision. Biolsi (1992), referring to the Lakota, sees Collier’s legacy as paradoxical. Under his rule BIA actions actually contradicted its official discourse of empowerment, through the use of what Biolsi represents, via Foucault, as various technologies of power and surveillance. Nonetheless Biolsi argues that Collier changed power relationships, ‘opening up the political space for all Lakota people of all political stripes’, and that the ‘postcolonial culture of Indian affairs is [an] important legacy of the Indian New Deal’ (1992: 85).

However, as we will see Biolsi is also among those who subsequently point out that there is more that is problematic with Collier when it comes to action research. According to Hauptman (1986) Collier’s espousal of American Indian self-government was always within the limits prescribed by the idea of indirect rule. The evidence supporting this is strong. Hauptman points out that Collier’s memoir quotes the paragraph from Huxley’s Africa View (1963: 345) reproduced above, and that Africa View was required reading for BIA staff. Collier also proclaims himself a colonial administrator at the BIA, and discusses his links with British colonial administrators. Specifically named is HAC Dobbs, who had also been a lecturer on Colonial Administration at Oxford University. Collier is far from uncritical of certain manifestations of indirect rule, not least its manipulation by white settlers. He is quite explicitly an advocate (as late as 1963) nonetheless. Collier’s position on decolonisation, endorsed by Lewin in Action Research and Minority Problems, and hinted at by Lewin’s use of ‘gradually’, was that ‘British responsibility to the Africans will take a century’ (Hauptman, 1986: 367). Elsewhere, in a very brief article Biolsi (1991) accuses Collier of trying to co-opt potential opposing forces using participatory methods.

Thus far it can be argued that there is only a contextual implication that action research was developed as a tool of indirect rule. But there is also circumstantial evidence linking Collier, colonial administration and action research. Collier (1963) notes that Dobbs reported on ‘Action Research throughout the Vast South Pacific’ in the IEA newsletter in 1950. The IEA had also published a paper by Dobbs entitled Operational Research and Action Research in 1947 (the date of which qualifies it as one of the first articles on action research). Hauptman also cites a BIA employee in Collier’s time, claiming Collier set up participatory experiments because ‘he believed that students of group activities among exotic peoples might demonstrate some skill in manipulating them’ (1986: 371).

Confirming evidence of action research’s role as a tool of indirect rule is provided in the words of Collier himself. In his 1945 article, as he reinforces his case for action research, he writes:

in ethnic matters … government intervention can be harmful or benign. In any field of human relations, when the government tries to do the whole job authoritatively and monopolistically, the result is baneful. But when government makes research an inseparable part of its ethnic operations, eschews monopoly, acts as a catalytic and
coordinating agent, offers its service through grants-in-aid to local subdivisions and yet holds in reserve a mandatory power sparingly used, then government can be decisively benign, as the recent Indian record also demonstrates (1945: 301).

This paragraph all but specifies action research as a tool of indirect rule. There is, however, a final piece of confirming evidence. Collier’s archive contains drafts of a series of chapters, possibly for a never published book on action research, dated 1950 and 1951. A section of one of these is headed “THE (sic) “Under-developed World” and Action Research” (microfilm reel 53 item 1130). The section begins by arguing for action research in development, and for setting up British indirect rule in Fiji as good practice.

Action research in the ‘developed world’ is important not less than in the under-developed world. But in the under-developed world it is more practicable. A single instance may make this proposition more clear. When Britain accepted responsibility for Fiji, a crisis of de-population was under way. In those years the colonial service had to be financed out of the colony being serviced. Hence in Fiji the administrator faced a gigantic task, pressing in time, with almost no money. From this situation developed, 60 years ago, the concept of indirect administration. The white administrator functioned through the Fijian native society. One consequence is that even today ... the Fijian social order functions richly, smoothly and almost autonomously.

Collier then goes on to argue that the training of Fijians as ‘sub-professional’ health workers was an action research project where, the implication is, ‘the white administrator functioned through the Fijian native society’. This he compares with the USA and Native Americans, whereby

After 1933 a sustained and complicated effort resulted in achieving somewhat the pattern of ‘white–native’ relationship, and the consequences were strikingly productive in social and vital energy among the Indians.

As with Biolsi’s analysis, it can be argued that Collier’s concern for not just adequate, but better health provision reflects well on him, and Collier certainly was more liberal than either his predecessors or immediate successors as Commissioner of Indian Affairs. His association with Roosevelt, and the New Deal, and his left-wing politics also attracted all kinds of unjustifiable criticism during his office and after, and he and the IEA were to fall victim to McCarthyism (Collier, 1963). It might also be argued that his argument in 1945 for a non-monopolistic, catalytic and co-ordinating mode of intervention has resonances in Brinkerhoff and Coston’s initial representation above of contemporary development management having moved away from the monolithic state as a vehicle of development.

Likewise, Collier’s uses of ‘mandatory power sparingly used’, and ‘almost autonomously’, and Lewin’s attribution of the word ‘gradually’ with respect to colonial independence, not only make clear the true and real nature of indirect rule but might be seen to be no different to conditionalities which donors still impose, or the situation acknowledged by Brinkerhoff and Coston where development management is a means to foreign assistance agendas. Here Collier is at least honest about the power relationship; but this does not change its
PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

essential character. For all the claims of participation and empowerment, action research was still a means of controlling what the colonised did, according to the priorities of a colonial power, in this case, the USA.

Conclusion

There is an irony in the renaming of development administration as development management. Renaming is often about concealing links with the past, as Williams (2000) points out. This renaming has had the opposite effect, and unwittingly aided the revelation of a continuity. DAM’s choice of the word ‘management’ as opposed to ‘administration’ may be taken as an attempt to signify an ongoing modernisation of the field itself, while also maintaining an image of technocratic neutrality. This neutral meaning of the term is that supported by the managerialist orthodoxy of management more generally, but not by CMS scholars, whose attention is drawn to DAM by its adoption of the word ‘management’. These scholars are only recently and tardily beginning to assess the significance of imperialism and colonialism to understandings of management (Prasad, 2003 is groundbreaking in this respect); and indeed it can be argued that they have a lot to learn from, and catching up to be done with, those identified in the introduction who have for some time recognised continuities between colonialism and development. This is particularly the case since management’s own origin stories (critical as well as orthodox) identify its emergence as a consequence of the development, in its broadest sense, of capitalist modernisation, but pay no attention to imperialism, and its organisational and managerial complexities, in that emergence (Cooke, 2002).

Insofar as this last argument comes to be seen to be the case, development management will find it more and more difficult to define itself as historically separate from colonialism and colonial administration. This may invite a defence that DAM is no different from any other field of Western knowledge and practice in this respect; and the significance of the particular continuity identified in this paper may therefore seem diminished. Anticipating this, this continuity is still particularly telling. This is because the very claims made for participatory management in DAM are that it gives voice to the hitherto voiceless, and is a readjuster of power relationships in favour of the previously/still colonised. What is revealed here is that this means of readjustment was at its very birth intended to sustain imperial power.

References

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PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT