

## 5 Towards Responsibility. On Development Administrators' Fantasies and Field-Level Workers' Anxieties<sup>1</sup>

*Pieter de Vries*

This chapter is concerned with the multiple and contradictory effects of state development programmes. Special reference is made to the implementation of an Integrated Rural Development Programme in the Atlantic zone of Costa Rica. It is argued that development intervention entails the production, transformation and appropriation of particular models of intervention, by which state functionaries conceive of their role as representatives of the state and as agents of development. The view is adopted that, rather than taking the rhetorics of planned development at face value, we have to study in detail how bureaucratic actors deploy discourses of intervention in social situations in which differing interests, views and commitments are at stake. In so doing, the various ways in which government officials devise and deploy views about farmers as lazy and unreliable, in short labelling them undeserving, will be analysed and presented. It is also argued that labelling is the result of the need of state officials to deal with complex situations arising out of the contradictory character of state intervention.<sup>2</sup>

In developing the argument, reference is made to recent works which are highly critical of the role of the state in development programmes, highlighting the 'hidden' agendas of state bureaucrats and the instrumental role of state intervention in establishing effective modes of social control. However, while agreeing with the critical thrust of such works, this chapter criticises their implicit assumption that bureaucratic activity is underpinned by a specific logic of state penetration or social control. By adopting an actor-oriented approach, the analysis centres on how bureaucratic actors hold onto ideologies of intervention in order to deal with the conflictive and contradictory character of state intervention. It is argued that such ideologies are not grand mental schemes or manifestations of false consciousness, but rather loose sets of beliefs and practices geared to resolving very practical problems in very mundane administrative contexts. This dismissal of 'externalist' explanations is important since it enables us to tackle the issue of responsibility for the deleterious effects that state intervention often has for large groups of beneficiaries.

### The Critique of Development Intervention

The practice and discourse of planned development intervention has recently been the subject of a thorough demythologization in the fields of development sociology and administration. Thus Long and van der Ploeg (1989) argue that the discourse of 'development' conceals a number of interested practices by administrators and academics which have little to do with the theories they put forward. In their view, planned intervention should best be viewed as an ongoing process of social construction in which bureaucrats, beneficiaries and third parties are involved. Although highly critical of the administrative models by means of which development programmes and projects are prepared and evaluated, they retain a belief in the capacity of social science to improve the practice of development intervention. Thus, in the conclusion of their article they argue for new kinds of impact studies which take into account the contrasting – and often conflicting – interests of the different actors involved.<sup>3</sup>

Authors such as Apthorpe (1986), Schaffer (1984, 1986) and Wood (1986) are highly critical of the role of development intervention in upholding old and new modes of political hegemony, and they draw upon post-structuralist (and, in the case of Wood, perhaps also on Habermasian) insights in their concern for how policy languages, techno-administrative rationalities and administrative access systems are shaped by alliances between bureaucratic systems and scientific knowledge. They argue that development intervention is accompanied by forms of labelling which stigmatize people – as 'poor,' 'resourceless' and 'dependent' – and hence reduce their capacity to engage in local forms of organization. In their view, the administrative project model mainly serves to legitimize state intervention while concealing the interests of the state in imposing a bureaucratic order. Thus, bestowal of an identity as 'clients' on entire categories of people obscures the 'hidden agendas' of planned state intervention. This is apparent when individuals are forced as 'clients' to adopt the discourse of bureaucrats in order to express their needs. The science of development administration, then, cannot be viewed as external to the problem of 'development' but is itself constitutive of it. It has indeed been argued that it has a significant function in depoliticizing the relationship between people and the state.<sup>4</sup>

Others have gone further in their application of poststructuralist themes to development thinking by conceptualizing the power of the development bureaucracy in terms of techniques of subjection and 'normalization,' by which poor people are transformed into state-subjects and eventually transmuted into docile bodies, or passive agents (Escobar 1992; Ferguson 1990). Such a perspective is, I think, highly suggestive since it teaches us to be suspicious about development discourse, with its tendency to make invisible what are in fact ways of deploying power invisible. However, my view is that the claims of poststructuralist theories are formulated at such

a general level that they become an obstacle to detailed analysis of complex social relations between different sets of actors. Here I shall discuss critically one example (Ferguson 1990) of such work.

Ferguson, in his study of a World-Bank funded Integrated Rural Development Programme in Lesotho, sets out to demonstrate that deployment of current development discourse, produces a particular representation of the 'development problematic,' is produced which has nothing to do with the 'reality' of Lesotho, and even blatantly contradicts mainstream academic discourse. Yet, as he argues, this simplified understanding of the 'development problematic' is not accidental since it underpins actual practices of intervention, as in the case of the IRD Programme he studied. Such projects, he argues, have distinctive 'instrument-effects' in practice, namely the expansion of state power and the depoliticization of planned intervention.

Ferguson borrows the notion of 'instrument-effect' from Foucault's discussion of prison reform to account for the paradox that development failures are so readily replicated.<sup>5</sup> An 'instrument-effect,' as he defines it, is the *unintended, yet strategically coherent effect* of planned intervention which comes about through the deployment of what he calls 'the development apparatus.' He concludes that it is not accidental that planned intervention so often leads to failure. Indeed, failure is a logical concomitant of planned state intervention, which he graphically depicts as an 'anti-politics machine.'<sup>6</sup>

Despite its conceptual innovativeness, Ferguson's perspective has, in my view, serious limitations since it presents us with a basically linear model of state intervention. It will be argued below that the uncritical adoption of poststructuralist views in which state intervention is conceptualized in a quasi-conspiratorial way, as the source of all evil, is an analytical strategy which adds little to our understanding of the contingencies of localized struggles between bureaucrats and beneficiaries. Another point of criticism is that it obscures a number of issues pertaining to the issue of responsibility, and thus of agency.

I elaborate my critique by concentrating on an Integrated Rural Development Programme – the 034 Programme – as a case study of a colonization and banana plantation area in the Atlantic Zone of Costa Rica. The gist of the argument is that, in addition to conceptualizing intervention in terms of sets of (discursive) practices of governability geared to converting rural people into bureaucratic subjects (the poststructuralist argument), it is important to study what intervention comes to mean to different actors in particular power contexts. Labelling devices, it is argued, reveal their limitations when officials encounter villagers in non-bureaucratic settings. This, in short, implies developing a notion of intervention as ideology.

## **The 034 Programme**

### *The Failure of the 034 Programme*

The 034 IRD Programme was designed and funded by the United States Agency for International Development, USAID. It was intended to be a response by the Costa Rican state to a highly disturbing set of events: the invasion by militant leftist peasant unions of a number of large cattle ranches – often belonging to the banana plantations – at a time when the revolutionary aspirations of radical political sectors were at their height, owing to the seizure of state power by the Sandinistas in the neighbouring country of Nicaragua. These invasions, which took place in 1978, were the last in a series of sometimes very explosive land occupations during the '70s. Bananas being Costa Rica's major export commodity, it is not surprising that these peasant mobilizations were seen as a threat to the economic and political interests of the state, the (foreign) plantation owners and the US state department.

The major goal of the 034 Programme was 'to develop lower cost, more effective mechanisms for establishing productive, profitable, and environmentally sound *campesino* farms on former *latifundios*.' Its major components were 1) the establishment of three model settlements on the 'invaded' haciendas, and 2) the strengthening of overall administration of the Land Development Institute, IDA, through the introduction of a computerized data management system and a cadastre. Here I concentrate on the first and largest component, the establishment of 'model settlements,' and particularly on the oldest and most conflictive settlement, Neguev. It must be stressed, however, that the establishment of settlements was part of a wider, unspoken, goal of rationalizing the workings of the Land Development Agency by eradicating clientelistic relations – and thus politics – from its functioning.

To cut a long story short, the 034 Programme was a failure. By the time it finished in 1987, most settlers/beneficiaries were deeply in debt while many others had been compelled to sell their plots. Moreover, only a small minority of the farmers could live off their farm while the large majority depended on off-farm work (for a detailed description of the programme see de Vries 1997). The outcome of the programme was not only disastrous for the farmers, but also left an imprint on the way in which administrators and extensionists conceived of the 'agrarian question' in the Atlantic Zone, and especially on their views regarding the capacity of settlers to become entrepreneurial farmers. Furthermore, the implementation of the 034 Programme went together with a series of bureaucratic practices by which settlers were labelled recalcitrant, uncooperative and opportunistic, if not outright lazy and parasitic.

The way in which the 034 IRD Programme was executed could certainly be analyzed in terms of Ferguson's notion of 'instrument-effect,' as

being geared to 1) the expansion of the state-bureaucracy in order to ensure a degree of control over the settler population, and 2) the depoliticization of the relationship between peasants and the state with a view to debilitating the role of independent peasant unions. Programme failure in this view was simply a financial cost of bringing about these 'instrument effects.'

Ferguson's analysis is, as argued, powerful for its clarity and conciseness. It also has strong political and policy implications. Interestingly, it coincides with the analysis of radical settlers and peasant leaders who argued that the 034 Programme had been intended, from its inception, to create a pool of poor and indebted settlers in order to force them to sell the land to city speculators. In this way the social basis of independent peasant organisations would be disarticulated, while the power of the state bureaucracy was strengthened.

Although there is no doubt that the 034 Programme was directed to depoliticizing the relationship between peasants and the state, and that it led to an enhancement of the power of the bureaucracy, it is in my view simplistic to argue that these were 'unconscious' effects. The issue is not only theoretical but has also political importance since it touches on the attribution of responsibility concerning the failure of the 034 Programme. To begin with, there is, in my view, something wrong in assigning responsibility to some impersonal 'development apparatus.' Blaming some abstract 'anti-politics machine' for the marginalization of the settlers absolves a number of actors who might, rather consciously indeed, have been in favour of such an outcome, and others who did not care very much about its consequences. The policymakers, planners and front-line workers involved in the design and execution of the programme were not naive since they were aware of the political character of intervention, and the necessity to control a 'difficult' social situation. Failure did not occur beyond the powers of human agency. As Schaffer (1984) argues, there is nothing inevitable in policy. Things could have happened differently.

Second, blaming the 'anti-politics machine' for the failures of state intervention unnecessarily reduces the options of peasant organisations to two possible alternatives: that of engaging in political action against the state by forming organisations ready to confront it; and that of submitting to it. This, in fact, is not the political strategy that radical peasant unions in the Atlantic zone follow, as they are always ready to negotiate with some state agencies while attacking others. The radicalism of peasant unions had its limits, and for good reasons. State intervention through the 034 Programme had been massive and highly repressive and the peasant union which organized the invasion, UPAGRA (the union of Small Producers of the Atlantic zone), came to the conclusion that confronting the state head-on was too painful. As a result UPAGRA changed its strategy and decided to spend much effort on establishing connections with nation-

al and international NGOs as well as with some state agencies. There was some room for manoeuvre left, indeed.

Concerning the issue of attribution of responsibility for the failure of the 034 Programme, it must be noted that other explanations were offered, both by the settlers and the bureaucracy. Some settlers, who had been able to establish a preferential relationship with the state, were ready to share the responsibility with the bureaucrats dismissing the radicals' arguments as communist propaganda. In defense of the bureaucrats, the following arguments could be put forward. Technical errors were made in the process of implementation; there was a lack of training of the extensionists; there was little knowledge of agronomic and economic conditions; the programme managers were pressed to spend the funds in a short period of time; there was major opposition to the Programme from conservative sections at the Land Development Agency. However, these contingencies do not absolve those who were in charge, for the simple reason that even when they knew that the programme was heading for disaster they did not take steps to stop it. In the case of the policymakers not only were their reputations at stake, since they also saw the Programme as a stepping stone in their professional careers. The 034 Programme, in becoming an arena of struggle between different institutional factions, acquired an importance that was far removed from the objects of development, the settlers. Furthermore, those responsible for the programme did not want to partake in failure and, indeed, those in charge never admitted that it was a failure. As evidence for this viewpoint, they adduced that it had had positive 'learning' effects. It is not surprising, then, that critical evaluations concerning credit recovery and production levels were concealed or even destroyed.

The issue of attribution of responsibility is, I think, important. Not because it might change the behaviour of bureaucrats, since I think that they had strong reasons for acting as they did, but because it might help us to identify a series of beliefs and practices underpinning state intervention, which might have very deleterious effects for peasants. Thus, instead of viewing bureaucratic actors as determined by external forces, I am intent on inquiring how they shape, adapt and transform particular administrative models with a view to making them fit their own socio-institutional activities and commitments. I call such a set of beliefs and practices an ideology of intervention.

But before continuing I want to add a caveat. Ideology is not used here in the sense of 'false consciousness.' Yet it is conceptualized in terms of an illusion which makes it possible for us to accomplish a multitude of mundane activities. In other words, 'knowing' that our actions do not correspond with our ideals does not necessarily stop us from continuing to engage in the same kinds of social practices. We may come to the conclusion that our views are false, but it is much more difficult to discover what is false in our practices, since this requires that we should

recognize that these are structured by ideology. Or, as Eagleton (1991) drawing upon Zizek (1989) puts it,

'One traditional form of ideology critique assumes that social practices are real, but that the beliefs used to justify them are false or illusory. But this opposition . . . can be reversed. For if ideology is illusion, then it is an illusion which structures our social practices; and to this extent 'falsity' lies on the side of what we do, not necessarily of what we say. Ideology, in other words, is not just a matter of what I think about a situation; it is somehow inscribed in that situation itself' (p. 40).

This was exactly the paradox of the large majority of policymakers, administrators and front-line workers involved in the 034 Programme. Although they knew that their actions contradicted a number of views which were dear to them, such as that of improving the lot of poor peasants, they continued drawing upon the same ideological beliefs and practices by which a great diversity of farmers with different backgrounds, aspirations and commitments were labelled traditional, dependent and incompetent. Intervention was not ideological because the bureaucrats were unable to distinguish between the truth and the falsity of the discourses they deployed, but rather because it structured their intervention practices. Next, I want to analyse the ideological fantasy which structured these practices.

The remainder of the chapter is organized as follows. First, the administrative context wherein practices of labelling are sustained is examined. Second, the genealogy of a particular model of the ideal farmer – as a client who has the right to state services and goods in return for his commitment to, and active participation in his transformation into an entrepreneurial farmer – is presented. It is shown that this model stems from Programme planners' attempts to depoliticize institution-client relations. Finally, it is argued that the model is transformed by front-line workers into a protective device for dealing with unruly beneficiaries.

#### *The Local and Administrative Context*

Neguev, before becoming a settlement, was a *hacienda* devoted mainly to beef cattle breeding and fattening, and was of the largest ranches in the Atlantic zone. The hacienda was invaded in 1978, and a year later UPAGRA and the IDA reached an agreement to purchase the *hacienda*. In 1980, when the 034 Programme started, the IDA's presence became widespread all over the settlement. The IDA's intervention was massive and, as argued, was directed towards converting the settlement into a demonstration project.

The Neguev administrative office is located in the Neguev settlement which comprises a total area of 5,340 ha. Later, in 1987, it became a

regional office covering five settlements with a total area of 12,724 ha and 1,294 settlers.

Activities in the administrative office basically consisted in the following: 1) promotion of agricultural development via the supply of credit and the provision of extension, and 2) achievement of effective control in the settlement through the regulation of access to land. This, it must be noted, was a generally accepted, though not openly admitted objective of the 034 Programme. It was never explicitly stated in IDA or 034 Programme documents. However the IDA's and USAID policy makers made no secret of the fact that the Programme was also directed to the normalization of social relations between squatters and the state in conflictive areas such as Neguev.

For reasons which I cannot explain here but which had much to do with the contradictions of state intervention at the local level, the administrative process in the Neguev office was characterized by little work motivation.<sup>7</sup> Work activities were little structured and front-line workers were allowed considerable freedom to carry out their tasks as they liked. This resulted in a situation characterized by few work incentives and no reward system. Accordingly, one recurrent field of dissatisfaction in the Neguev office concerned what was perceived as 'the arbitrary character of policy.' As one extensionist put it,

'at Neguev there is no stimulus. If you get promoted it is because of your political connections, not because of your capabilities. Successes at the technical level are always claimed by the chief. For example, when presentations have to be made about the goals achieved by the administrative office it is always the chief who does it. There is anyway no acknowledgement of your role.'

Yet this provided the context within which a large number of important decisions were taken, including who would and who would not receive credit and how problems over land-adjudication would be resolved. The way such decisions were taken appears to have been quite arbitrary since there were no clear criteria, for example, for allocating credit. What is interesting, then, is that issues of service delivery were dealt with within an administrative context of generalized distrust. It is not surprising that front-line workers showed little inclination to reflect on the reasons why the 034 Programme resulted in increased poverty among the settler population. In fact, when discussing problems of individual settlers, they drew upon an impersonal and bureaucratic language by which the settlers were transformed in administrative cases. In this way front-line workers were insulated from the contradictory and contingent character of state intervention.

Indeed, it struck me when talking with front-line workers that reference was always made to a particular, very negative, set of views of the farmer: he was seen as an individual who was not commercially minded, not

entrepreneurial, and incapable of running a farm. Indeed, in spite of their divergences and dissatisfactions, and the feeling that their work was not much valued, they all shared this way of talking about the beneficiary when dealing with everyday service delivery issues, in what was basically a form of labelling.

Next, I contend that labelling was not a local invention, but that it was a local adaptation of the USAID planners' model of the 'client' by front-line workers and administrators. To that end I shall describe how the model of the 'client' was fabricated by USAID planners as a result of their problematization of prevailing institution-client relations in the IDA, and how it was appropriated by bureaucrats at regional and local levels.

### *The Genealogy of the Model of the 'Client'*

As already argued, one of the two components of the 034 Programme was the strengthening of the operational capacity of the IDA. The USAID advisor to the 034 Programme argued that political clientelism was a fundamental problem in Costa Rica since it generated patterns of transactions between politicians who used state institutions in order to obtain electoral support from groups of beneficiaries. In his view, the political use of institutional resources thwarted their effective utilization for development purposes. This emphasis on institutional efficiency and administrative reform, it must be noted, was coupled with the view by USAID planners that some mode of social control in rural areas, directed against organisations such as UPAGRA, was required.

In a context of increasing land scarcity and budgetary constraints in the IDA, the agrarian problematic came increasingly to be perceived, under the influence of USAID, as a problem of effective institutional intervention, in which administrative reform was viewed as central to a 'modern' approach to land reform. This entailed that the solution to the problem of landlessness and rural unrest was conceived by the USAID programme designers in terms of the 'depoliticization' of institutional developmental activities, rather than in terms of the need to accommodate oppositional political groupings within the mainstream political system.

It is not surprising, then, that the agrarian problem in Costa Rica was conceptualized in 034 Programme documents in terms of the effectivity of particular types of institution-client relations. Thus it is argued that in the past IDA-client relations were permeated by 'paternalist and clientelist practices.' We see, in effect, that the farmer is referred to as a 'client' in the project document of the 034 Programme which, prior to the 034 Programme, had not been the case. We also see that the term 'client' appears in different forms: when a classification of the clientele is made, a description of the 'total client pool' is given, or when reference is made to particular types of institution-client relationships. Paternalism is men-

tioned as a danger which has to be combatted through the 'rational choice of a clientele.'<sup>8</sup>

The problem, then, was conceptualized by USAID planners as that of how to establish a type of institution–client relationship which would eschew the customary patterns of political clientelism while maintaining a certain capacity to exert social control on particular populations, such as politically motivated squatters. The answer was to institute a mode of institution–client relations in which the beneficiary was viewed as an individual with certain rights, but also with distinctive obligations towards the state. In contrast to the practice of political clientelism, these rights and obligations did not entail a political transaction, but a commitment to a particular pattern of smallholder 'development.' Thus central to this model of the 'client' was the conferment of a distinctive institutional, as against a political, significance on the relationship between the institution and the beneficiary. The client was treated as an individual who had the right to state services and goods in return for his commitment to, and active participation in his own transformation into an entrepreneurial farmer.

The essence of the model of the 'client' was that s/he established a relationship with the IDA as an individual, not as a member of a larger group. This was a very different policy for the IDA from the previous one of engaging in negotiations with organised pressure groups. Hence, by allocating resources such as credit to individuals only, and refusing to engage in negotiations with groups, the power of organisations such as UPAGRA was undermined.

As for the 034 IRD Programme, the individualization of the relationship between the IDA and its clients was reflected in the following sets of activities.

- 1 A beneficiary selection system geared to choosing potentially entrepreneurial farmers.
- 2 A system of guided extension by which the beneficiary received credit on an individual basis.
- 3 A focus on individual farm development plans.

In effect, through these individualization practices all kinds of negotiations with independent peasant organizations could be avoided.

In the remainder of the chapter, I argue that this model of the 'client' worked out in a rather special way during the process of implementation. The model was endowed with a different, 'local' meaning by front-line workers and administrators, with the result that it became an element in a local ideology of intervention. The view of the 'undeserving client' was, in effect, employed by the Settlement Head in order to force settlers to comply with the IDA policy. For front-line workers, the view of the 'undeserving client' became a tool for explaining the contradictions of state intervention as well as a 'labelling device.' The transformed view

of the '(undeserving) client,' then, became an instrument of social control at the local level.

*The Ten Commandments of the 'Real Entrepreneurial Farmer'*

The model of the client reflected the various ways in which front line workers differentiated between good and bad farmers. The independent, entrepreneurial yeoman of the central plateau came to function in practice as a standard measure. Deviations from this model were seen as pathological and originating in a deleterious way of life. Thus, it became common to explain the problems of the 034 Programme in the settlement by arguing that alcoholism, lack of commitment and indiscipline were major problems among settlers. Extensive conversations with front-line workers about how an entrepreneurial farmer should be, enabled me to discern the following rules:<sup>9</sup>

- He should live on the farm, and not engage in off-farm work outside Neguev.
- He should not grow traditional crops such as maize.
- He should show the devotion and commitment of a 'real farmer.'
- He should show respect for IDA officials.
- He should follow the advice of the extension staff.
- He should be imaginative and able to improvise.
- He should not be an ex-plantation worker.
- He should not drink.
- He should not participate in activities organised by leftist groups.
- He should not be an evangelical (because evangelicals spend too much time in church).

These ten 'commandments,' to be followed in order to conform to front-line workers' views of what a 'real' entrepreneurial farmer was, in fact composed a powerful labelling device. Given the failure of agricultural development programmes in Neguev, and the fact that no more than 10 percent of the farmers were able to derive a sufficient income from their farms without engaging in off-farm work on some banana plantation or other farm, it was quite impossible for farmers to conform to the model. Moreover, the only three settler families in Neguev who did conform to this model according to the front-line workers, and who could thus be considered real entrepreneurial farmers, had never received IDA credit or extension.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, those settlers who were viewed as the best in Neguev did not conform to this model either; of the three, one was an ex-plantation worker, one an occasional alcoholic, and the third a Jehovah's Witness.

Ironically, the integrated rural development programme had, instead of creating wealthy smallholders, created a pool of poor, indebted and

dependent clients. Settlers, then, were labelled, virtually by definition, non-entrepreneurial or traditional farmers; and in this way they got the blame for the failure of the 034 Programme. But labelling also had a more practical function as it became a device for excluding 'troublesome' settlers or *problemáticos*. Indeed, labelling a settler as a *problemático* signified that it would be difficult for him to gain access to credit.

### **The Model of the Client Transformed into a Labelling Device**

The question to be addressed now is 'how is this mode of labelling related to the model of the 'client' which was introduced by USAID'? This latter model, which was employed by top level officials and programme designers, conceived of the settler/beneficiary as a client who had to be provided with the necessary conditions – land, credit and an appropriate technological package – to become an entrepreneurial farmer. As argued below, this model became transformed at the level of implementation into a labelling device through which the client was viewed as undeserving. Thus, the model of the 'client,' which was originally meant to depoliticize institution–client relations, became an instrument in the hands of the local administrators for fighting 'undeserving clients.' And since, as we have argued, most farmers were seen in one way or another as troublesome – since they did not conform to the ten commandments of the ideal farmer – the view of the 'undeserving client,' became a central element within the local official's discourse and imagery.

As we noted, the 034 Programme had two main goals: that of providing settlers with the necessary conditions for becoming commercially minded and that of overcoming what was perceived as a politically delicate situation in Neguev. Indeed, it can be argued that one of the 034 Programme's major contradiction lay in the fact that it was designed to confront a very conflictive situation in the Atlantic zone, by combining a policy of careful beneficiary selection with an approach geared to transforming settlers into entrepreneurial farmers, in order to fight the influence of leftist organisations such as UPAGRA. At the same time, a large number of UPAGRA sympathisers passed the beneficiary selection system. This produced a major problem for front-line administrators, which can be formulated as follows: 'how could unruly clients, such as UPAGRA followers, be transformed into entrepreneurial farmers'? We will see next that the Settlement Head viewed this as a contradiction in terms.

#### *The Model of the Client as Transformed by the Settlement Head*

The Settlement Head had a distinctive theory of how a peasant should look. This conception of the beneficiary was not unique to him, though,

and I later learned that it was quite characteristic for many administrators in the area. He once confided to me:

'If you want to tell a real farmer from someone who is not, look straight into his eyes. A farmer will lower his sight, and become shy, for he is not accustomed to dealing with people from the city; they are humble and speak with respect. A banana worker is something else, direct in his conduct, insolent. That is the result of the plantation culture and the ideology of the unions, which always stresses the negative aspects of everything.'

According to the Settlement Head, union leaders on the plantations would tell the plantation workers that they were poor because others were rich, that they were stupid because others were intelligent, and that they were ugly because others were beautiful. In his view plantation workers developed an inferiority complex which expressed itself through envy. And he warned me:

'If you meet them they will try to mislead you and tell you stories about their extreme poverty. But the truth is that they are ex-banana workers, people who cannot manage a farm autonomously. They are accustomed to receiving everything from the boss, a cheque every month, a house with water and electricity. They dress well and drink and do terrible things to their wives and children. It is really awful. In return they work a few hours, from 6 to 11 in the morning. They have a lot of free time. They become conceited, rebellious, have no respect for authority. Instead a real farmer works the entire day. And if necessary also at night. If the cow is sick he will not sleep at all.'

This 'cultural problem' had played a central role in the 034 Programme, according to the Settlement Head. He commented that the squatters had received beautiful schools and meeting centres, excellent roads, even a housing programme had been initiated. Yet they had never shown any gratitude. Hence he complained that 'unfortunately that is the human material we have to work with in the settlements.' At the same time, he had a clear theory, with a strong social Darwinist bent, of a settlement's growth and development in terms of stages. Once he explained to me:

'You see in Neguev, like in so many other settlements, that after the political situation has been normalized, a mechanism of natural selection sets in. Settlers who are not real farmers are forced to sell out because they accumulate debts. Although they receive credit and extension, many of them, maybe a majority, do not have the ability to develop the enterprise. So they are forced to sell out. Others take their place, often people with more resources. They are obliged to take on the debts their predecessors incurred. So they are better motivated to develop the farm. In fact they have a more entrepreneurial outlook. The result is that after some years a majority of the original population will have disappeared.'

Only then will the conditions for achieving the objectives of the institution be fulfilled. This process is irreversible, it is a law of nature. The only thing we can do is to alleviate the lot of those who suffer most.'

According to the Settlement Head, the problem was that peasant unions such as UPAGRA targeted particular type of individual who, due to his plantation mentality, was unable to become an entrepreneurial farmer and therefore prone to enter into clientelistic relationships with radical organisations and eventually with the IDA. The question of 'how to transform unruly clients into model beneficiaries' was viewed by him as a contradiction in terms. Such 'human material' was not fit to become entrepreneurial farmers. In fact, we see in the case of the Settlement Head that he sustained a genetic conception of the farmer which, it must be emphasized, was not shared by front-line workers.

The upshot, then, was that for the Settlement Head the model of the 'client' was transformed into a core element in an ideology of intervention which was meant to confront 'unruly clients.' In effect, the model of the 'client' was transformed by front-line administrators from a device for depoliticizing institution-client relations into an essentially political instrument for marginalizing 'troublesome' beneficiaries.

Next, I want to show that the view of the 'undeserving client' was more than a cognitive construct intended to marginalize radical settlers. My argument is that this view was part of an ideology of intervention which also included practices of labelling. It is expedient now to provide a definition of what I understand by an ideology of intervention.

An ideology of intervention can be seen as an action-oriented set of beliefs associated with specific practices of social control (labelling, legitimization), rather than as a coherent normative framework. Ideologies are pragmatic insofar as they serve to shape an understanding of the world: that is useful within particular social contexts, in the case of front-line workers, that of implementation. An ideology of intervention is not so much false in that it obscures the complex reality of the farmer, but is rather an interested simplification of the conflictive nature of state intervention. That becomes clear to the front-line worker him/herself when confronted with the contradictions of implementation, compelling him/her to develop an operational style for dealing with conflicting social and moral commitments. The force of the ideology of intervention, then, is that it is able to produce useful interpretations for the ongoing problems of implementation, as well as practical ways to handle them, without being able to mask the power relations underlying such problems.

Next I discuss the workings of this ideology of intervention as manifest in the front-line workers' dealings with beneficiaries' within the administrative domain.

*The Model of the 'Client' as Transformed by the Técnicos*

The 'client' model played an important 'protective,' role with respect to radical leftist settlers. It should be noted that interaction between officials and radical settlers was rare and, when it did take place, was for the most part in the fields. Indeed, the *técnicos* or extensionists in charge of agricultural development programmes had evident difficulties in coming to terms with the peasant union UPAGRA, and displayed a curious ambiguity toward them.

The *técnicos* would stress that they respected and even admired the role of UPAGRA as a peasant union in its efforts to defend farmers' interests, and that they found it totally legitimate and even necessary that such an organization existed, although they recognized that the IDA's interests were not necessarily those of the settlers. At the same time, they argued that they did not agree with UPAGRA's means and intransigent position, indeed, they were highly critical of their mode of operation. As one extensionist put it:

'UPAGRA has its own ways of dealing with *técnicos*. When you visit them they receive you in a very polite manner, and by telling you a lot about themselves they try to get information out of you. They are aware that you might write a bad report on them. However, they do not seem to mind. When they attend meetings they are surprisingly friendly, while seeking ways to criticize all the institute's ideas. They hope that the official will lose his temper in order to create a conflict, so that they can transform the character of the meeting into one of a tribunal against the institute.'

They were remarkably negative when referring to individual activists. Thus they would account for the 'negative attitudes' of the UPAGRA leaders by referring to personality failures, like drinking habits and smoking marijuana. This view of UPAGRA leaders and sympathizers as irresponsible settlers was general among the *técnicos*. Settlers who indulged in collective actions like marches and blockades could not be good farmers: they were almost never at their farms, and thus there was little sense in visiting them. UPAGRA, in their view, channelled the feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction of settlers arising from their personal inabilities. The extensionists, then, would select unproblematic settlers and not UPAGRA followers.

It must be stressed that this fear of UPAGRA on the part of most *técnicos* was not so much a political stance as a result of an attempt to keep delicate political issues out of their direct relationship with settlers. The *técnicos* were perfectly able to consider general explanations of settlers' life conditions in terms of a wider political framework. Yet, these explanations were of little use within the implementation context. Although officials would, outside the administrative domain, readily recognize the

general validity of 'radical' claims, such views were experienced as annoying within the day-to-day context of service delivery.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

It has been shown how a model of the 'client' – or the model of the farmer as a client who has to be serviced and provided with a package in order to encourage him to become an entrepreneurial farmer – was used by different groups of actors in differing ways. For USAID it was an element in a strategy of depoliticizing the functioning of the IDA and eradicating client and paternalistic politics. The model of the 'client' was used by front-line administrators for combating the influence of leftist organisations such as UPAGRA. And finally, when the programme proved to be a disaster, this view of the '*undeserving* client' served as a 'rationalization' for failure, and a way of shifting the blame onto the farmer.

The model of the client, then, changes from being a core element of an attempt by planners to change the current pattern of client–institution relations into an element of an intervention ideology serving to conceal the contradictory and conflictive character of state intervention, which was reflected in major errors made in design and implementation, and the impossibility of denying the political character of state intervention in a plantation area such as the Atlantic zone of Costa Rica, where resources such as land and capital are monopolized by the banana transnationals and state intervention serves as an instrument for social control.

Thus the failure of the 034 Programme was ascribed to the fact that the settlers were not entrepreneurial farmers. In this way, it was unnecessary to inquire into the major errors in programme planning, implementation and technology transfer.

It has also been argued that the administrative process consisted of an intrinsically fragmented and conflictive reality in which a host of petty struggles took place. Yet it is important to stress that it is precisely within this administrative reality, and in response to the daily problems and conflicts in which front-line workers are engaged, that an intervention ideology is sustained.

It is important to emphasize that the ideology of intervention was not imposed from the top upon the thinking of the front-line workers and administrators responsible for programme implementation. It did, however, bring together different worlds of experience and forms of socio-political commitment: of front-line workers, administrators and institutional managers. In effect, it provided various actors operating within institutional worlds a common language for talking about and assessing intervention problems.

An ideology of intervention, then, is not false in the sense that it clouds the thinking of the actors drawing upon it. It derives its power from its

usefulness for accomplishing particular bureaucratic tasks, even when the actors themselves are constantly confronted with the fact that they are simplifications, if not caricatures, of a more complex reality.<sup>11</sup>

It has also been argued that the ideology of intervention in Neguev encompassed a particular view of the '(undeserving) client,' and practices of labelling. The world of the 'clients,' amongst other things, was kept apart from that of administrative life, through the intervention ideology. This was because settlers were seen as clients who had to be serviced, and not as individuals who often shared the same local preoccupations as the officials. But the ideology of intervention was also instrumental in achieving quite practical effects, such as protecting front-line workers from 'troublesome' settlers. It also served as a guide for selecting cooperative beneficiaries. We can, then, identify five different ways in which the ideology of intervention worked:

- 1 In achieving a neat separation between the administrative and the field domains. In this way front-line workers were insulated from the conflicts in the 'field.'
- 2 In concealing the contradictions of state intervention by providing easy explanations for current and ongoing problems concerning programme implementation.
- 3 As a way of rationalizing programme failure. Thus it was argued that the 034 Programme failed because of the lack of an entrepreneurial mentality on the part of the settlers. Major factors in the programme failure, such as errors during implementation and the use of credit as an instrument of social control, were concealed.
- 4 As a way of protecting front-line workers from 'troublesome' settlers, such as *Upagristas* who were out to politicize what the front-line workers viewed as 'technical issues.'
- 5 As a way of selecting 'cooperative beneficiaries.'

A final conclusion is that conceptualizing state activity in terms of bureaucratic logic may obscure the issue of responsibility. This chapter has pinpointed the ideological illusions by which bureaucratic actors deceive themselves when carrying out their duties which, though contradicting their views, are instrumental for carrying out very mundane tasks. Paying attention to these ideological fantasies points to the fact that development intervention is, by definition, a contested domain of activity. In other words, it is an ongoing process of social construction.

## Notes

- 1 This is a slightly revised version of a paper published in *The Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law*, number 36, 1996, Special Issue.
- 2 In other articles (de Vries 1992b, 1995) emphasis is placed on the strategies farmers develop in order to delegitimize the discourses of state intervention.

- 3 A number of recent articles argue that everyday encounters between bureaucrats and villagers play a significant role in shaping popular representations and notions of corruption, and of people's rights and obligations (Gupta 1995; Orlove 1991; for a theoretical rationale for such an approach from an actor-oriented perspective, see Long 1989).
- 4 Thus Schaffer (1986) argues that scarcities are constructed through discourses of development along with social practices of administration, and that they lead to a specific mode of social control and legitimacy.
- 5 As Ferguson puts it, Foucault (1979) argues that the instrument-effect of the prison, as a correctional institution, lies in the fact that it does not lead to the rehabilitation of transgressors but, on the contrary, to the constitution of delinquency as a mode of subjectivity disconnected from its social origins. Prison reform, then, appears to be an element within a set of techniques of exercising social control, a part of a strategy for 'taming 'popular illegalities' and transforming the political fact of illegality into the quasi-medical one of pathological 'delinquency'' (p. 19).
- 6 Thus he argues, '. . . because 'failed' development projects can so successfully help to accomplish important tasks behind the backs of the most sincere participants, it does become less mysterious why 'failed' development projects should end up being replicated again and again. It is perhaps reasonable to suggest that it may even be because development projects turn out to have such uses, even if they are in some sense unforeseen, that they continue to attract so much interest and support' (p. 256).
- 7 For lack of space I cannot go into the institutional struggles which had a marked effect on the administrative process in Neguev and which led to a sharp division among the front-line workers along ethnic, residential and functional lines. Elsewhere (de Vries 1997) I argue that these divisions were an expression of the contradictions of state intervention at the level of implementation.
- 8 This 'project paper' was published in 1980 as an unclassified document. It provides a description and appraisal of the project as well as detailed project analyses (see project paper 'Agrarian Settlement and Productivity in the Atlantic zone of Costa Rica).
- 9 A female in the front-line workers' view was not capable of running a farm. Women who did not have grown-up sons who could take care of the farm had difficulties obtaining title to land.
- 10 I do not want to go into the analysis of why the programme ended a failure. It suffices to mention that to a large extent the soils in Neguev were not suited for agriculture. In addition major errors were made concerning extension and technology transfer.
- 11 As Zizek (1989) puts it, 'the illusion of [ideology] is not on the side of knowledge, it is already on the side of reality itself, of what the people are doing. What they do not know is that their social reality itself, their activity, is guided by an illusion, by a fetishistic inversion. What they overlook, what they misrecognize, is not the reality but the illusion which is structuring their reality, their real social activity. They know very well how things really are, but still they are doing it as if they did not know' (p. 32). 'The fundamental level of ideology, [then], is not of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself' (p. 33). In fact, what I have designated the ideology of intervention functions as Zizek's ideological fantasy.