

“BUREAUCRACY KILLS
SO MANY THINGS”
A CONVERSATION BETWEEN MAIA GREEN
AND MARJA-LIISA SWANTZ

Professor Emerita Marja-Liisa Swantz is a scholar both in Social Anthropology and Development Studies, whose connections with Africa date back nearly six decades. Her special research interests are the anthropology of religion, and women and development, but one of her greatest lasting achievements may prove to be her pioneering work in participatory action research in Tanzania which she began back in the 60s.

As mentioned in the editorial note, the following exchange took place when Maia Green (Professor of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester) was in Helsinki as opponent to a dissertation on female infertility among the Sukuma Nyamwezi in June of this year. The conversation came about because Professor Green had been asked to evaluate some development projects in Tanzania and she encountered a Tanzanian policy whereby development planning starts in villages, and participation by villagers has been introduced in several ways. Green became interested in the role Marja-Liisa Swantz had played in the original introduction of this policy and in her thoughts on the different modes of getting the villagers' voices heard in local government (see Green's contribution to the Forum, this issue). They were mutually interested in the relationship between the initiatives, participatory action research (PAR) and mainstream anthropology which has generally eschewed PAR because of its uneasy fit with academic and scientific standards. The conversation has been abbreviated due to space considerations, but this final version has been approved by both participants.

MG: What decided you personally to move towards action research? Because what really interests me, as you've commented yourself, is that academic anthropology is not open to this way of thinking. It surprises me that even now, when we are supposedly so concerned with ethics in anthropology, you can't get colleagues to really open up to collaborative research... It's still about the sole authority of the researcher. And I find that uncomfortable. I'm not saying that I do a lot that's different, but I seriously question it.

Can we go right back to the beginning of your research in Africa?

MS: I first went to Tanzania—Tanganyika as it was then—in 1952, as a teacher. Later I returned with my husband—a Lutheran missionary—and three daughters, and witnessed the country travel through to self-determination and independence. I spent much of the second half of the 60s—while doing my research as a fellow at Dar es Salaam University—immersed in the life of Bunju village, about 40 km from the centre of Dar where we lived. It was during this time that I wrote my book *Ritual and Symbol in Transitional Zaramo Society with special reference to women*; in 1970 my dissertation was approved by Uppsala University. I returned to Dar es Salaam for the autumn term in 1972 and got a position as a Senior Research Fellow in BRALUP¹ for 1972–75. The university did not have anthropology as a discipline as it was considered a colonial subject. Rural sociology and

theatre arts were to take its place. Foreign anthropologists were employed as sociologists or, as I was, in research institutes. For me it meant moving toward development research, which had no common theoretical framework with anthropology at the time. However, those five years in Bunju had taught me about the wisdom people have, the necessity to listen to them, to create knowledge *with* them and not only about them. My participation in the life of people totally different from my own sphere convinced me that any efforts to involve people in development require participation in their life.

As a staff member I had the privilege of having university students as research assistants during their long holidays and I had considerable freedom to choose my own topic of research. I decided to relate my first project, in 1972, to the needs of the youth who did not get more than basic schooling, a problem I had noticed back when teaching in Ashira in 1955. I couldn't make any mark on the topic just doing research and writing a report about it and I decided to get the university students involved, combining work and research with the village youth in such a way that they would learn to get a living after they finished primary school—as hardly any had a chance to continue beyond that level. I prepared the university students for this participatory kind of approach to research in the two months before their vacation started, which gave me my first experience of putting into practice what I had been developing: something I first called Research in Action and then the Participatory Research Approach. I did not want to say it was a method.

The university students worked in teams of two or three. I had students in five villages in the districts of Rufiji, Bagamoyo and Mzizima. First they had to research what activities the young villagers could potentially do. In some villages they initiated youth gardening, in others carpentry, in one village fishing. They all had to live in the villages and work with the young people. I drove around in a big Land Rover and visited all the villages before and during the study, also assisting in contacts with village leadership. The students wrote interesting reports after finishing.

MG: So they were doing a study on the situation of the youth in these villages?

MS: That's right, and the opportunities they would have when they left school. As a result, some of the school leavers actually became apprentices in a local carpenter's workshop and university students learned about the difficulties in starting practical work, such as buying wood for carpentry! We got some assistance for tools from several NGOs.

MG: And these were just ordinary young people?

MS: The university students did action research with the Standard Seven leavers in villages where I had done some preparatory work. The story was written up as a BRALUP Service paper titled *Research in Action as a Programme for University Students*. When you compare their reports with other student assistants who went out on their own, you see how living with the villagers and taking part in their life had changed their attitudes. It made a big difference.

MG: So that was the key thing?

MS: The change of attitude was a key thing, but also learning to do research with action. In 1974 and 1975 I continued advocating that research has to have some concrete meaning. A developing country cannot afford research which only produces a written report. Professor Kimambo, as the Chief Academic Officer, got acquainted with the student reports and was so impressed by them that he sent a letter to all the departments proposing this as the way for the students to do their research tasks as teachers' research assistants. I don't know whether there was any follow up.

MG: How did you train them? What were the main things?

MS: As reading material for them I had written four Service papers on my preparatory findings in those villages—one of which was Bunju—and the first paper on the Participatory Approach to Research. We discussed the approaches to research in villages and the difference it makes if the researcher actually stays with the people she or he studies and works with, and learns from them. They were also to study the village and district development plans.

I organised a programme of lectures on youth studies, education by correspondence, planning in the Coast Region, youth opportunities in the field of health and fishing as a possible youth activity. I gave three lectures on the basis of my earlier acquaintance with the area and Budd Hall² lectured on Paulo Freire's work; there were also a number of field visits to relevant ministries and so on. The students were especially doubtful about going to Rufiji, which they knew as a place of witchcraft so we got into deep discussions about their belief in witchcraft. A crucial point, however, was the value of people's knowledge and their understanding of their own situation. When the students went to work with the village youth they were not to claim expertise in the practical choices the young people made.

In the end, only one student left a village saying he could not sleep in a half-open house. I went and slept in that place so that the hosts were not hurt. One of the students moved into a school building,

MG: Yes. That's what we found: the elite NGO Tanzanians do not want to sleep in villages. They will take taxis in, even if it's very expensive.

MS: And now they want per diems. That is because they are not trained to be with their own people in the right way.

MG: Exactly. As you say, the attitude is important. Did Budd Hall stay on in Tanzania?

MS: He did not stay on, but he was there for some years, planning countrywide adult education radio programs for villagers to participate in, in groups. He then left and went as a guest to the Institute of Development Studies in Sussex. Budd had been exposed to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* by Paulo Freire, who had visited the University of Dar es Salaam when I was not there. I hadn't heard about him, so I didn't know that I was exploring similar ideas. Although Freire was not oriented to research but education, after his death he was honoured in an international PAR conference in Carthage as a pioneer who had influenced the orientation of South American social scientists.

Meanwhile, I was elaborating the Participatory Research Approach, adjusting it to the research situations at hand. I did studies with women students in several women's projects and then wrote the book *Women in Development—Creative Role Denied?*

MG: I remember that.

MS: The study on malnutrition on the slopes of Kilimanjaro was an important one. The female students shared life with those families which had difficulties with malnutrition, rather than measuring what people ate as was customary in nutrition research. They slept in their own homes for their long holiday, each working with five families with problems in close enough proximity. They also got acquainted with five neighbour families with no nutritional problems and made comparisons, to investigate why some had problems and others did not. They worked with quite extensive questionnaires, which they filled in little by little for both kinds of families, so we had comparative material for writing later reports. This project opened the eyes of the Chagga head of the national institute of nutrition, who could not believe there was such a problem in his wealthy home area. It also connected me with Norwegian nutritionists who modified the approach for their use in Sri Lanka.

Another BRALUP study was a project with the Ministry of Planning, financed by the ILO in 1974. The aim was to map the educational level and the skills village people had and what training needs there were. The study was commissioned by the Manpower Department of the Ministry for Development in cooperation with the Ministry of Labour and Adult Education at the Dar es Salaam University. Simon Mesaki took part in this project.

We did it in three wards in different parts of the country: in Ntebela division in Kyela district along Lake Malawi, in Usangi division in the Pare Mountains, and as a preliminary test case in all the villages of Msoga division in Bagamoyo district. It was participatory in that the village committees had a central part in it. They held village meetings to start with, discussing what skills they had and what more they needed for the further development of their villages. They selected coordinators, often teachers, to supervise distribution of the questionnaires to the houses and to offer assistance, if necessary, in listing the skills and level of education of each family member and what they would need to improve. People were selected to go through the results which were then returned for discussion to the village meetings.

In all 62 villages took part though results from only 46 were processed. However, the accuracy of statistics was not the main goal; activating the people and training leaders was even more important.

It was amazing what the villagers discovered for themselves: "Why don't we, in this village, know how to saw logs? Why do we have to get the labour from neighbouring villages?" They started thinking: "We have some iron. Why don't we use it..." and so on. There were real discussions going on in the villages. We wrote the project up with Jan Rudengren, a Swedish researcher from BRALUP. But unfortunately, when ministries come up with a good thing, instead of refining it further they can as easily decide it is too complicated, or that accurate statistics are more important than the results with the people. That is why it is important that the research in itself is beneficial to the participants. The action is more important than the paper. I wrote an article about it, "Research as an Educational Tool for Development".

MG: And what about Jipemoyo research project?

MS: Jipemoyo, Development and Culture, was the first big development studies project financed by the Academy of Finland. It was carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture and Youth in Tanzania, which paid the salaries of the Tanzanian research staff. It was based on my participatory research approach. Two Finnish and two Tanzanian researchers formed the core, but the number kept on growing, with three Finnish and four Tanzanian associate researchers... Kemal Mustafa and Bernhard Kiyenze were the Tanzanian researchers with fresh Master's degrees. We were fortunate to be pioneers for the Academy project; this kind of a research could never have happened later.

MG: What was the aim of the programme?

MS: To study the relationships between development and culture. To be exact, the expressed aims were to analyze the role of culture in the process of change; to participate in the process of development and to experiment with methods of development research which incorporate people from all the levels, in order to give them an awareness of their own resources; to collect, document and study cultural material and systematize it; to assist in training Tanzanian and Finnish scholars in methods of development research and to create models of field training for cultural officers, and other officers working in villages.

MG: Is there a report on this?

MS: There are many reports and publications. If we had time I could elaborate how the different aims were tackled and the degree of success and reasons for failures.³ For the evaluation seminar, 26 participants came from 16 different countries in addition to the Finnish representation. The director of the Academy of Finland opened the event, the director of research acted as chairperson and representatives came from ministries and high-level institutions. It drew a lot of interest as a pioneering effort.

The project officially lasted four years but it continued in one way or another until all the five dissertations had been published. The initial plan was mine, but it became modified and each researcher followed his or her own plan. The discussions about the course it took never ended. I am tempted still to revisit Jipemoyo. The five doctoral theses are those of Taimi Sitari, Arvi Hurskainen, Ulla Vuorela and Helena Jerman from Finland, Kemal Mustafa from Dar es Salaam and Bernard Kiyenze did a licentiate [Master of Letters] thesis in Helsinki University. The theses describe only a little of the research approach itself, but the *Development and Culture* publications series 1–8 and mimeographed final reports give information about the research process.

The research vision of building on people's knowledge and later the more focused participatory development research were in line with Nyerere's politics of self reliance and building on people's own initiatives, rather than those of experts. I communicated my research results regularly to the President, especially when I was alarmed about the consequences of moving people away from their villages to unprepared locations. He encouraged us to continue such research even after he retired, when I visited him in his village Butiama.

MG: Was Anacleti⁴ involved?

MS: Anacleti was the Tanzanian director, who later worked for Oxfam, and I was the Finnish director. He made an important contribution mediating between different theoretical positions. The difficulty with the Jipemoyo project was that although all the researchers were convinced that participatory research was the best approach, the main researchers thought I had no proper theory as I did not have a base in historical materialism. Marjorie Mbilinyi was an associate researcher and on the advisory committee with anthropologist Peter Rigby, who was doing research on the same Parakuyo pastoralists. Rigby developed the theory of materialist phenomenology. I never understood what materialist phenomenology is. I just could not.

MG: (Laughing) I don't know, either.

MS: Anyway, the theoretical differences were the reason I have never written Jipemoyo up as a proper publication; only some articles, while the non-published work waits for revisiting. But if you want to look further into it, writings exist.

Academically the project actually produced the main Africanist professors we have. Ulla Vuorela is a Professor of Anthropology in Tampere, Arvi Hurskainen was the Professor of African Studies in Helsinki, Taimi Sitari is a docent and senior assistant in geography at the University of Turku and Helena Jerman is a senior researcher in the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Helsinki. Philip Donner as an ethnomusicologist has taught the *selo ngoma* to many Finnish dance groups and has promoted folk music in Tanzania. Kemal Mustafa did his doctoral thesis in Dar es Salaam but he and Kiyenze have not continued academic work.

There is much more to Jipemoyo than there is space here. Professor Lauri Honko came to train cultural officers in oral history work, and seminars organized with and by the people gave people a platform they had never had before. It was the first large research project financed by the Academy of Finland which was not related to the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Most of the later projects tend to deal with development cooperation and get much of their funding from the ministry, which also influences the selection of the study topics. The use of the participatory approach to research developed into tools for participatory development planning in villages in Tanzania. There has been little follow-up in Finland.

MG: How did you design the participatory tools or the methods for involving village communities in designing intervention?

MS: To explain the designing of the participatory tools for development intervention we need a bit of history. We had a long project with the Ministry of Health in Tanzania, which dealt with participatory training of health workers from all levels, not based on research. We had become acquainted with the two southern regions of Mtwara and Lindi when a team of IDS [Institute of Development Studies, Helsinki] development researchers had evaluated the water project there as part of a research project on transfer of technology between Finland and Tanzania. Consequently two researchers were asked to make the initial plan for RIPS [Regional Integrated Project Support]. In its second phase in 1992, the Ministry then suggested that our participatory team would be part of the new RIPS administered by a consultancy firm. A Swede was asked to head the team. He had taken

part in Robert Chambers's Participatory Rural Appraisal event in a United Nations Development Program project in Tanzania. I joined the team for a one and a half-year long preparatory phase during which we worked out the plan for the next phase of cooperation. That is when we first experimented with how to do participatory planning in villages. When the implementation started, Chambers' team came to give a training course to the government planners and cooperating members of RIPS.

MG: What did you think of that training?

MS: I was not there at that time.

MG: Because that would seem, to me, to be what happens in the circle. You have this more open-ended approach, which you guys are following in Jipemoyo and so on, which allows you to produce quite interesting research. But the Chambers approach seems to me to be quite mechanistic and based on a checklist of tools.

MS: I know. But you have to see the difference between research and the policy implementation of the country. That is what happened. From research, the use of the participatory approach was transferred to development planning and implementation that was utilized by the political district and regional staff as well.

MG: At what point, do you think, does it become a mobilization tool?

MS: It should not become mobilization. That would be against the whole idea of people's participation in their own planning, which is the aim. Both the Lindi and Mtwara regions decided that participation was the approach they were going to have in their village planning. The main district officers studied the participatory approach to village development planning. First they had a course for several weeks, but the learning process continued all the time. The researchers call it a toolkit, but I went along with it. I realized that the government officers needed a kind of tool kit in order to manage the planning with people.

MG: What year was this?

MS: It must have been 1994. But before the toolkit approach we had started training the district officers in one district together with the villagers using a more interactive approach. Some of that planning and implementation was in process—such as youth involvement with cashew trees in a couple of villages—when the tools were introduced. The training in which the villagers learn to make their development plans in cooperation with the government servants from different levels is not mobilization. The regional commissioners got really interested in the participatory planning in the southern regions.

MG: Which ones were for it?

MS: Colonel Tarimo, the RC for Lindi who now is RC in Mtwara, and Colonel Nsakaisi in Mtwara. He was later moved to President Mkapa's office as a special advisor; I am in contact with them still. Nsakaisi himself attended when people were doing their participatory

analysis. He wanted to demonstrate that he gives his full support for it. Finland continued to support RIPS till 2004. In the final seminar in Dar es Salaam for representatives from many regions, the top government official in development planning declared that participatory planning was to be the policy for villages across the whole country.

Many districts sent planning officers to Mtwara to study the participatory mode of village planning when it was adopted as the countrywide programme. But when my friend Salome Sijaona was the principle secretary in local government, some expert, I am sure, advised her to simplify the method into O&OD, Opportunities and Obstacles to Development. Many of those who had been doing participatory planning find it too abbreviated. But for instance in Iramba district they still use participation. When you go to the villages, you can see they have some parts of the plans on their office walls.

MG: I have seen many districts with the O&OD. Even TASAF [Tanzania Social Assistance Fund] is using the same method.

MS: The World Bank started using participation in the 90s. They had a project investigating why the shallow wells they were promoting did not work. Finland took part in it, because it had followed the WB method of building shallow wells in the southern regions. The study discovered that the main cause for failing wells was that people's participation was missing. The World Bank called all kinds of PAR experts to New York to learn about participation. I wrote a paper on the approach for that meeting on behalf of the World Institute for Development Economics Research where I was as a visiting professor at that time; they should have sent me there, but it was not in their interest. The World Bank adopted participation along with poverty surveys. TASAF might have switched to the simpler way in planning with the villagers.

MG: Yes, TASAF is using it because TASAF is a part of the district planning system. But yeah, it is interesting. It is just fascinating how this has become embedded in the Tanzanian political system. It is really good to hear the story. You should write it up.

MS: I intend to write some kind of research history. I don't want to make it sound like I am such an important person in all this. But in some ways I have my share in the process. You have to have been part of the development to be able to write about it. But it is strange the way that a great deal of academic knowledge is created. I find that many scholars have, for example, gone to Bunju, some even know me, but they have not read my writings about Bunju. Development scholars refer to those in the same field as themselves, while anthropologists depend on their own colleagues. Trans-disciplinary work is rare.

MG: Yeah. It's bad.

MS: In a few years your work just disappears. People follow the times and only a few want to learn from the earlier experiences and from history.

MG: I think it is important to put this back on the map, and also in terms of understanding Tanzania: the local and national ownership of participation. It is not just something imposed by the donors. That is what I find interesting, although the donor discourse dovetails with it.

MS: It really has developed with the people and they clearly have taken it on. And they have been able to take it on in Muslim areas like Lindi with people who had little schooling; it is so interesting that all of the people have the capacity, when they are given a chance. We never came to any village where there would not have immediately been a person ready to draw a map of it...

MG: Exactly.

MS: Their capacities are there. That is why I am so convinced that becoming conscious of what is going on in your own culture is what needs to happen. You have to have an educational system which touches also the cultural aspects.

MG: I think the limitation of O&OD is—as you say—that it is so premised on the sequential use of tools. It does not allow people to get this critical awareness through discussion. And that is what the ready-made toolkit project was. So actually you are losing the potentiality for that kind of intellectual distance which allows you to see the problem. The system closes it down with O&OD and the toolkit approach. Because the problems in the sectors have already been decided. There is no space for something new because of the standardization.

MS: That is where the bureaucracy comes in. Those of us sold on participatory action research dislike the *a priori* categories, but I accepted them as the first stage for planning because the bureaucrats require tools they can use. The other approach requires more imagination and not all have it. But I think that now when the country has ruled that villages have to make their own plans there should be another planning phase introduced to train the planners. Bureaucrats look for the easy way out but they can also learn new things if the trainers have the vision.

MG: Absolutely.

MS: Bureaucracy kills so many things.

Transcription edited by Marie-Louise Karttunen

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¹ Bureau of Resource Assessment and Land Use Planning, now IRA, Institute of Resource Assessment.

² Currently Dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Victoria.

³ The evaluation, conducted in 1980 after the participatory period was over, gives the first reactions by a theorist of the participatory Research Approach and specialists in each subject area of the researchers (*Jipemoyo, Development and Culture Research* 4; 1981).

⁴ Odhiambo-Anacleiti was formerly attached to the Research Division of the Ministry of National Culture and Youth. At present he is working with the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Dar es Salaam and is a member of the Tanzania Society Committee.