Doing Anthropology at Home, in Chad

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Introduction

The three authors of this paper are situated in academic and institutional contexts in Chad and Germany, and each of us is involved in international academic and research contexts in Europe and Africa and beyond. Our collaborations reach back more than fifteen years to the time when we inaugurated the *Centre de Recherches en Anthropologie et Sciences Humaines* (CRASH) together with researchers from Chad, Europe and the US. In this paper we connect the decolonisation paradigm to practices of collaboration in research projects based on our personal experiences together and with other research partners. Our focus lies therefore on collaborations between so-called Global South and so-called Global North[1] researchers, but it also goes beyond such collaborations to look at the situation of anthropology in Chad, specifically. We do so because we think that the ways CRASH deals with the multiple contextual constraints it is facing can illuminate how and why we need to develop a decolonising perspective on methods, outcomes and avenues of anthropological research, with a particular focus on the possibilities for supporting young researchers.

1 We are aware that the use of the terms "Global South" and "Global North" is problematic in attributing vague spatialities to globally unequal access and regulation of funding and research (as in the case of this article). Following Ndlovu-Gatsheni (personal conversation), we assume "Global South-related thinking" to also happen in what is perceived as the "Global North", and vice versa. The connection of geographic spheres through a coloniality of suppression and extraction cannot be put into simple dichotomies but needs to be analysed in the complex entanglements that colonial regimes and their aftermath produced. In referring to these notions in this paper, we want to allude to the continuing existence of power differences and postcolonial dependencies, but to avoid drawing clear boundaries about where such differences and dependencies are currently produced.

Constraints range from lack of funding for local researchers, to the need for producing applied research in consultancies, and to the lack of appreciation of such work in global academic circles. The Chadian researchers have found solutions to navigate these constraints – but they lack full appreciation of their work by academic institutions in the Global North. We maintain that this lack of appreciation is a result of colonially based forms of knowledge production and dissemination that needs to be revisited in order to establish new forms of valuing academic work.

To decolonise involves looking at all aspects of academic knowledge production and use, such as research funding, data collection, analysis, writing and publication of findings. It also requires actively engaging with methods in ways that do *not* reproduce existing power differences that become visible not only through the direction of money flows within project work, but also through forms of project management. Our contribution takes a closer look at the uses of project results, and the way they come to be valued by all project partners, but particularly by the funding agencies. We maintain that collaboration between scholars from African and European countries is of great value when proposing projects: this applies to the extent where a project that is devoid of such established or aimed-for partnerships and collaborative methodologies lacks credibility and risks failure to secure funding. This focus does not, however, give any information about the value and later use of the collected data. We maintain that while European, and particularly German, funding agencies rate such collaboration very highly, the usual expectation is that contributions from collaborative projects will later enter academic debates that are specific to European and Northern American interests. Similarly, ranking practices according to the citation indexes that are applied to publications arising from collaborative project work, result in a preference for dissemination in prestigious journals mainly produced in the Global North. Non-academic outcomes such as applied anthropology that aims at producing justice in relation to inequalities of access and contribution – often within the country where research has been undertaken – do not attract much appreciation in European or Global North academic institutions and in project evaluations conducted by funding agencies. We argue for the establishment of an appreciation of various, and independent, forms of usage of research data – or, in other words, to decolonise anthropology through acknowledging that the value of data is not exclusively produced through highly rated (Global North) conference presentations, journal or book publications. In this paper we promote the idea that considering and appreciating different forms and means of using research data

are equally important. Such independence is of considerable relevance in any effort at decolonisation. After all, decolonisation is an abstract term and only the practice of producing and using data can invest the project of decolonisation with practical and meaningful life.

This connects to the realisation, that even if individual collaboration practices are as symmetrical as possible under the given structural constraints, the actual necessities and configurations around social science research are not equal. Research funding is usually low in most African contexts, and the need to produce data "on demand" for applied purposes is not always a researcher's primary goal, but more often a means to survive professionally (Behrends 2015). In our example, we look at the workings of an anthropological research centre in Chad, which has to navigate the demands of both academic and consultancy work – with the declared aim of rendering academic careers possible for anthropology students who have attained their MA degree at the University of N'Djamena, in Chad's capital city. We maintain that the recent and much wider acceptance of "applied" or "activist" research in European contexts, as well as the ever-growing incentive of forging symmetrical collaboration between researchers from the Global South and the Global North, has changed the Western, formerly negative, perspective concerning the applicability of academic research results. We begin by giving an example from our own experience to demonstrate the different perceptions of project work. Following this, we consider the prospects for the establishment of a specific Chadian anthropology by discussing the particular constraints and challenges affecting the discipline in the Chadian context. We outline a preliminary solution for overcoming these challenges. In our conclusion we revisit the idea of independent and equally valued research contributions and assess their prospective uses.

To illustrate different understandings of the outcomes a project might produce, we start with an example from our own experience. From 2006 to 2011 Remadji Hoinathy (as PhD candidate) and Andrea Behrends (as project coordinator) collaborated in a project with the title "Travelling Models in Conflict Management", funded by the Volkswagen Foundation. The project focused on how ideas concerning the "good" management of conflicts that were developed in one place become translated through human and non-human mediators and are subsequently received, and often changed, in another. In this project six German researchers and six academics from various African countries participated, supervising together a group of seven PhD students from six African countries. Why do we begin with this memory of a project? The point we want to make is about varying expectations directed at the outcomes of research.

Looking at models to manage conflict was, from one point of view, an exercise in understanding translation processes (Behrends et al. 2014; Hoinathy and Behrends 2014; Rottenburg 2009). How do ideas develop? How are they transferred and put to use in another context? Whose interests, whose knowledges are relevant – and how do contingency, politics, and the situatedness of actors interfere in the process of transmission? In most of the individual research projects (about, for instance, "power sharing", "mediation through elders", "freedom of speech", "neighbourhood watch" or "fair revenue distribution") the result was disillusioning: most of the models did not reap the anticipated results. Most did "not work". However, according to the project's setup, the models' usefulness was secondary. But we did have discussions about exactly this point. Why do we study conflict intervention if we do not want to make models better? If we find out how they fail to achieve what they were originally designed for, why not suggest ways of making them more understandable? Why waste the energy and the financial means to develop conflict intervention models, study them, and then come out with the same result? Namely, that they often do not work. Full stop. We found that the answer to the question of *why* a model of conflict intervention does not work was considered secondary or even unimportant to the question of *how* it does not work. The second question was considered academically relevant, while the first one was considered as "applied research", with a tint of development aid or policy orientation. Our contribution to this book not only revisits such assumptions of relevance and hierarchy but seeks to actively argue for a multiplicity of outcomes and forms for academic work that would make it possible to decolonise by giving room to creativity and context-relevant adaptations of our work so that it can receive the appreciation it deserves.

This paper is an adapted version of a presentation by Remadji Hoinathy on the situation of anthropological teaching and research in Chad, a country where the subject has only very recently been introduced, in 2014. Djimet Seli and Andrea Behrends have, in different ways, contributed to the paper – Seli providing background information on the development of the university institute of anthropology at the University of N'Djamena, and Behrends on the collaboration between the Chadian anthropological research institution, CRASH,[2] and international partners. In general, the chapter aims at contribut-

2 The *Centre de Recherches en Anthropologie et Sciences Humaines* (CRASH) has been established as an internationally accessible research centre. It is led exclusively by Chadian anthropologists but has an international board of directors.

ing to the extension of Law's and Lin's (2017) suggestion that it is time for anthropologists to "provincialise anthropology" in the way the Dipesh Chakrabaty (2000) proposed to "provincialise Europe" – a source to whom the two authors explicitly refer. While Law and Lin write about the different intentions and uses of anthropological research in a European (or more explicitly, British) and in a Chinese context – so quite close to our intentions in this chapter – Chakrabaty addresses the particular difficulties of Western trained Southern anthropologists whose awareness of actual asymmetries of knowledge makes them deeply uneasy when considering the different forms of knowledge they should prioritise (Law and Lin 2017: 3). Anthropology (and Science and Technology Studies), so Law and Lin maintain, would need a "postcolonial version of the principal of symmetry", one in which "the traffic" between different locations "would be lively, two-way, and contested" (Law and Lin 2017: 4). Their approach speaks to the story we started out with, as it looks at whose priorities count, and how to deal with differential requirements geared towards academic research – without valuing one higher than the other. To guarantee symmetrical collaboration, for instance, Law and Lin underline that besides empirical research and theorising, "some pretty matter-of-fact institutional practicalities" (Law and Lin 2017: 7) should be well thought about. This coincides with our objective of seeing what chances a Chadian anthropology has of being heard and introducing changes worldwide. Ideally, this venture would avoid the strengthening of national boundaries precisely because it is directed towards overcoming barriers. It is, however, necessary to understand historical, current and future oriented perspectives on anthropology in the history of Chad and to realise how these factors influence not only the possible impact of studies, but also the demand for anthropologically derived knowledge. Importantly, particular attention needs to be paid to the practicalities of conducting research in a place where anthropology is (to put it mildly) not a discipline held in the highest national regard. The question we ask in this paper is about the possibilities of defining an anthropology that covers matters of concern within the Chadian context and, at the same time, aligns with international academic fora. We argue for the need for a model forged via practice and the contingencies associated with that practice in the Chadian context. Prospectively this model would be capable of "de-stigmatising" the combination of consultancy (applied research) and academia (considered to be "fundamental" research). Rather than turning their backs on each other, these practices can mutually enrich each other, as the turn to "public anthropology" has

also shown in recent years.[3] We will first set the scene of anthropology's history in the Chadian context and then move on to describe its present situation and its possible (that is, desired) future.

Anthropology has been one of the latest subjects to be introduced into the Chadian higher education curriculum and was achieved with support from the University of Aix en Provence (France). This late entry, in 2014, reflects the perception of the discipline and its importance in Chad. Indeed, compared to other countries in the Central African sub-region, Chad has been the last one to introduce anthropology into the academic curriculum, and exclusively at the University of N'Djamena, in Chad's capital. Creating public interest for this discipline is therefore far from being achieved in a country where, in general, academic research, especially in the humanities, is very undervalued. In addition, Chad is among the countries least visited by foreign researchers since successive periods of dictatorship and deprivation of liberty have not encouraged the emergence of neutral and free scientific activity. In such a context, anthropology in general – but especially for Chadians (i.e. "at home") – is indeed a real challenge. The process of change is a winding course dotted with many obstacles. However, it is also a journey full of opportunities to be seized. How to stay on course despite a great number of difficulties and how to seize opportunities without going astray is, thus, the question.

This paper is based on the authors' experiences and professional trajectories, but it also describes the experiences of other anthropologists who have worked in Chad or elsewhere. This experience has been developed over more than a decade of what might justifiably be called an "academic adventure" in the specific context of Chad. That said, the "adventure" has always been undertaken within a context of close international academic collaboration – a feature which played a key role in this particular experience. The three authors have followed different pathways in their anthropological careers. Remadji Hoinathy pursued an MA in social sciences at the Catholic University of Central Africa in Yaoundé, Cameroon, before embarking on a PhD at Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg, funded by the Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology. Djimet Seli received a scholarship from the University of Leiden for his PhD, after having studied history and communication at

3 See, for instance, the Public Anthropology Working Group of the German Anthropological Association, which was founded in 2021 and has as its mission to "practice publicly accessible, intersectional and decolonized anthropology" (http://publicanthropology.de/).

the University of N'Djamena and anthropology at the Yaoundé I University. Andrea Behrends studied anthropology at the Free University in Berlin, where she also obtained her doctorate. She is now professor for social and cultural anthropology at Leipzig University.

Setting the scene

Chad, an unstable African hinterland

Located in Central Africa, Chad is a vast area of 1,284,000 km2, covered in its northern part by the Sahara and the Sahel regions. It is inhabited by about 16 million people, of which 52% are women, and 50.6% are young people. Most of the population live in rural areas and depend on the agro-pastoral sector. The area-to-population ratio gives a density of 13 inhabitants per square kilometer. It is therefore a sparsely populated country, where most people live in the central and southern parts. Politically, Chad is known for instability, particularly after the country's independence from French colonial rule in the 1960s, with long periods of civil war and other crises. The country has experienced successive authoritarian political regimes. Despite the official start of a democratic era in 1990, freedom and democracy are still far from being guaranteed. Economically, the country, for a long time, depended mainly on agriculture (especially cotton) and livestock (with a livestock population of at least 100 million head), before it embarked on producing crude oil in 2003. From then on, the country's economy has almost exclusively depended on this particular resource (Hoinathy 2012; Hoinathy and Behrends 2014; Behrends and Hoinathy 2017). The chaotic governance of oil resources (Hoinathy and Janszky 2017), combined with the rapid decline of oil prices from 2014, has led the country into its current and, in this form, unprecedented economic and social crisis, drastically reducing the state's ability to meet social demands and household purchasing power.

Chad is also undergoing a difficult socio-political situation: the population suffers from the plights of Islamist extremism, the presence of armed gangs and the recurrence of rebellions in the north of the country. In April 2022, President Deby (who had been in power for 31 years) was killed in fighting between the national army and the rebel group Front pour l'Alternance et la Concorde au Tchad (FACT). His son, Mahamat Deby, has taken over the leadership of the country and of a transitional military council, a body which is hardly in a po-

sition to bring the country back to constitutional order (Hoinathy 2022). Currently, inter-community conflicts are also rising in a large part of the country's territory. Chad's central location puts it at the crossroads of the political and security dynamics at work in neighbouring countries. Like other Sahel countries, Chad has, for more than a decade suffered the consequences of the highly volatile situation in Libya, resulting in chronic instability in its northern part. On the western front, Chad, along with the other countries bordering Lake Chad, is suffering the wrath of factions of the violent extremist group Boko Haram. In the south, the Central African Republic's lack of control over its northern part is also fuelling dangers on Chadian soil. Finally, the situation in Sudan poses huge humanitarian and security risks (Hoinathy and Yamingué 2023).

One single university, then several, but without clear funding

In Central Africa, excepting Cameroon, which created the University of Yaoundé in 1963 (three years after independence), the other former French colonies did not set up universities until much later: the Central African Republic, with the University of Bangui in 1969, Gabon, with the University of Libreville in 1970, and then the Congo and Chad, with the Universities of Brazzaville and N'Djamena respectively in 1971. As with these other countries, Chadian officials had to train mainly in France, but also in Soviet universities and later in the Middle East (Ramoupi/Ntongwe 2016).

For several decades, higher education exclusively meant the University of Chad,[4] located in the country's capital, N'Djamena. Inaugurated in 1971, this university aimed to educate young Chadians who aspired to be leaders in the development and governance of the state. It was at this time that Chadian university teaching was first implemented. During the colonial era, Chadians went to study at the Ecole Normale William Ponty in Dakar, Senegal, or in Brazzaville, the capital of French Equatorial Africa. After independence, Chadians also went to France as a preferred destination for higher education. Initially, the University of N'Djamena consisted of only two campuses: 1) Ardep Djoumal, dedicated to humanities, management, and law; and 2) Farcha, responsible for instruction in the "hard" sciences. From the 2000s onwards, other universities and institutes opened, bringing the number to eight different universities located in the country's seven major cities. These

4 Turned into University of N'Djamena at the beginning of the 2000s.

are N'Djaména, Abéché, Moundou, Sarh, Doba, Mongo, Ati and Pala. Apart from N'Djaména, Abéché, Moundou and Sarh, the other towns have relatively little basic infrastructure and remain relatively rural. The oil boom of the 2000s made it possible to start investments, but unfortunately these proved to be inadequate for raising the level of development of these cities.

In 2012, the government also opened a third campus in Toukra, on the outskirts of N'Djamena. In addition to these universities and campuses, seven institutes of higher learning and four teacher-training colleges are under the administration of the Ministry of Higher Education, Academic Research and Innovation in Chad.

The King Faisal University is one of the first private universities in Chad to promote scientific research and innovation. Created in 1992, it teaches in Arabic only. Originally housed in the central mosque of N'Djaména, it later had its own campus and obtained the status of a public university under governmental supervision. The other private universities are notably the Emi Koussi University, the Université la Francophonie, the Université Hautes Etudes Commerciales-Tchad and the Université Africaine de Management et de L'Innovation, all based in N'Djaména.

The quantitative, but above all, the qualitative challenges of higher education in Chad

Collectively Chad's universities teach about 57,443 students (Alwhilda Info 2023). Each year, only 25,000 students are accepted at universities to receive higher education – a number that is far below the actual demand, and largely composed of young men. Indeed, women's enrolment remains lower than that of men and, in addition, the dropout rate of women is higher, reducing their numbers in higher education even more in comparison to men.

In addition to the challenges related to the inability of the Chadian university system to meet the demands of young Chadians, the quality of teaching and research remains equally deplorable for the following reasons.

- The quantitative and qualitative insufficiency of human resources: all eight universities share about 1,346 staff, the majority of whom (68%) hold a master's degree or other equivalent degrees. In recent years, very significant efforts have been made not only in terms of increasing the number of new doctorates, but also in the advancement of the capacities of the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES). This implies a greater

number of teaching staff authorised to supervise students enrolled in the master's and doctoral cycles.
- Insufficient financial and material resources (infrastructure, equipment, research laboratories, etc.): by 2022, the budget of the whole Ministry of Higher Education was approximately 2.36% of the national budget.
- Teaching conditions: it is generally observed that the indicators relating to teaching conditions are not favourable. Some of the institutions, especially in the provinces, do not have their own rooms but work in rented premises.
- Low use of ICTs in teaching and research: Internet access remains expensive despite the latest price cuts. At the same time, none of the campuses have free access for students and teachers.
- Poorly supported research characterised by insufficient infrastructure and a lack of a relevant programme oriented towards sustainable development. The government is developing relatively little funding to enable sustained research. In fact, there is no consistent and permanent mechanism for funding research projects carried out by teacher-researchers at the various universities, which necessitates searching for research funding outside the national context. Consultancy work is one avenue that allows Chadian researchers to pursue research work, however, not always in the direction of their own interests. Based on this necessity of outside dependence, Hoinathy has developed a plan to give young researchers a chance to qualify not only in good consultancy, but also academically. We develop this idea below.

Anthropology in Chad, like sowing seed in a dry land

The latest subject taught at the University of N'Djaména

For a very long time, the social sciences were ignored in higher education in Chad. Sociology made its entry in 2003, but it was more than 10 years later that anthropology was introduced, following an initiative of the late French professor Bruno Martinelli. His proposal to open a new and independent anthropology department that would rely on French financing and technical support from the University of Aix-en-Provence was at first heavily disputed and refused by the sociologists at the University of N'Djamena who wanted to graft anthropology onto their own department. Although the department has worked quite well, with the support of professors from the Universities of Aix-

en-Provence, Leiden, Halle and elsewhere, the university's administration has continued to keep a suspicious eye on the discipline.

When it first opened, the Department of Anthropology only taught up to the levels of Master 1 and 2. On the basis of an application and a competitive examination, this master's degree programme accepted students with a bachelor's degree in the social sciences and humanities in general (sociology, geography, history, linguistics, philosophy, law, literature etc.). For the last three years up to 2022, the bachelor's degree cycle has been introduced in addition to the master's course. Master's students come from all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences, but mainly from sociology.

The main subjects taught at the department of anthropology are:

- Social Anthropology of Development
- Anthropology of Communication
- Anthropology of Kinship
- Social and Cultural Anthropology
- Legal Anthropology
- Natural Resources and Governance
- General Ethics
- Research Methodology
- Project Evaluation
- Epistemology of Anthropology
- Anthropology of Religion
- Anthropology of Health
- Anthropology of Organisations
- Anthropology of Gender
- Economic Anthropology
- History and Purpose of Anthropology
- General Sociology
- Academic Work, Pastoralism
- Major Anthropological Theories
- Anthropology of Chad
- Anthropology of Central Africa etc.

The curriculum is inspired by the Cameroonian and French models. The staff consists of a total of 12 members: ten nationals and two foreigners. Among them, there is only one woman. There are eight PhD holders and four master's degree graduates.

Anthropology is a subject that young Chadians have embraced as an opportunity to not only study their own country and see it from new perspectives, but also to learn about methods of engaging with pressing issues. Having started with 17 master's students, the department has expanded to include about 450 students working at bachelor and master levels. To date, over thirty anthropologists at master's level, (four women and 29 men), have already defended their thesis on topics as varied as:

- The Chadian prison system (anthropology of bureaucracy)
- The governance of petroleum resources through global transparency initiatives
- The challenges for health care provision in rural areas
- The question of food and nutrition
- The management of natural resources around Lake Chad
- The dynamics of livestock farming and pastoralism

Some of these students have entered foreign universities to pursue a doctorate. Other former students have found work in the development and humanitarian sectors, and some have joined CRASH. Among those who joined CRASH, one defended his PhD thesis in France in 2022, while three more are still in the process of completing their research degree. Other graduates are engaged in making applications for research projects and / or in search of funding. In general, a demand for anthropological expertise and research obviously exists in Chad and the usefulness of well-trained researchers is well recognised, especially by the development community and humanitarian organisations.

Although the initiative for the creation of the department came from Professor Martinelli with the support of French cooperation in Chad, Chadian teachers were, from the outset, deeply involved in curriculum development, thus ensuring that realities and needs at the Chadian level were considered in terms of both teaching and research content. Importantly, the intention of creating the department was to provide an opportunity to train a new generation of researchers able to investigate, report on and understand the complexity of the local region in relation to the global situation, thereby strengthening the capacities of national research and development organisations. As the department's staff also have the responsibility of supervising students for their research, they contribute to the training of autonomous and emancipated Chadian anthropologists. Despite these features a persistent problem

remains, namely the lack of means for enabling these anthropologists to have an autonomous research agenda.

With the opening of a bachelor's degree in 2019, the department ventured to hire more students and, above all, to better supervise them from the first year of their university study. This change offers the future prospect of recruiting young graduates who have already defended their master's degree and embarked on careers as lecturers.

Little known and not always understood

"What do you do for a living? Anthropologist? What is that now?"
"Anthropologist? Okay, you're the one who discovered Toumai?" (a spectacular archaeological discovery).
"Anthropologist? Okay, you're the ones looking for the skulls here?"

This is a non-exhaustive list of questions that all colleagues at the department have had to answer each time we introduce ourselves as anthropologists. Even when people seem to have heard of anthropology, they understand it as a backward science, locked in the past and focused on the study of the cultures and customs of so-called traditional societies, as was the case under colonisation. The fact that anthropology is the academic discipline that captures the dynamics of our current societies and therefore advances with them is poorly recognised. Hence questions such as, "But what does an anthropologist do in researching about oil?" – imply that the researcher should instead be in a remote village studying customs. Anthropologists face this common misunderstanding not only in Chad, but everywhere. We argue that the public notion of anthropology being the discipline that preserves supposedly "traditional" cultural values originates in the discipline's origins as a colonial endeavour with a canon built on the experiences of (mainly) men who travelled around the world to "discover" cultures. Regarding anthropology as a discipline that actively engages society and its various "matters of concern" (Latour 2004) is only slowly entering public understandings, if at all.

These misperceptions mean that, in general, anthropology remains an academic discipline that is not very popular in Chad since the subject's usefulness and relevance are not obvious to decision-makers or the general public. As anthropology's use as a fully-fledged scientific discipline capable of contributing to the country's development is not clear to the authorities, they continue to be reluctant to devote a place to it in the study programme. Compared to sociol-

ogy, it is true that anthropology has struggled to establish itself in many other African countries. Onyango-Ouma (2006) clearly documents how in Kenya, a president who is himself an anthropologist, has been reluctant to support the opening of a department or faculty. Chad is the last country in the sub-region to open its doors to the discipline. When we see the small amount of interest that the international academic community has so far taken in anthropological studies on Chad, we also realise that the country has not been the most visited one in the sub-region.

The problem of limited international interest

As in most other landlocked former French colonies, anthropological work in Chad was first carried out by colonial missionaries and administrators and researchers from institutions dedicated to the study of overseas societies and later by the French *Centre National de Recherche Scientifique* (CNRS). Currently the number of international researchers working on Chad is still very limited: consequently publications about Chad are sparse. Factors including long periods of civil war, successive dictatorships and the control they exercised over the knowledge community have obstructed any significant revival of the interest of foreign anthropologists in the country. In the mid-1990s, some international anthropologists cautiously returned to Chad, but in far fewer numbers compared with other countries of the larger region.

Regarding Chadian anthropologists, some, like Remadji Hoinathy and Djimet Seli who are two of this article's authors, have been trained in neighbouring countries, in West Africa and also in Europe. To date, there are still only three Chadian anthropologists who hold a PhD, a figure that clearly indicates the extent of the task to be covered not only in terms of teaching, but also in the production of independent and critical scientific knowledge, and in action research for larger scale political decision-making.

The adventure of CRASH

When the French anthropologist Bruno Martinelli helped to open up the anthropology department in 2014, a professor at the University of N'Djamena advised him to turn to the only anthropologists of the country, that is, to the researchers at CRASH who then became the first to teach in the new Department of Anthropology. Following this, CRASH put its full energy into building

up and running the university institute. But before we speak of the university institute, we want to outline the history of the centre. CRASH is a multidisciplinary research centre based on anthropological methodologies that aims to promote research in social sciences and humanities for development purposes. It is a partnership between Chadian and foreign researchers who all work in and on Chad, or the Lake Chad Basin, and who are committed to supporting and advancing academic research in the country. Thanks to this partnership the centre came into being in 2005 and was officially recognised by the Chadian Ministry of Interior and Public Security on 11th September, 2007 under folio No.2696 as a private institution outside the university.

Thanks to the support of its international partners such as the Max Planck Institute of Social Anthropology (Halle, Germany), the African Studies Centre (Leiden, Netherlands) and the University of Bayreuth (Germany), the centre has gained increasing visibility and established a solid reputation in fundamental and action research both locally and internationally. This opened space for new partnerships and scientific collaborations. Between 2005 and 2023 CRASH has achieved the following:

- CRASH researchers carried out a large number of international collaborative research projects;
- They gained a number of international excellence scholarships and fellowships;
- They conducted and successfully finalised several local and regional action research projects for local and international development agencies;
- CRASH trained a group of Chadian researchers: three PhDs and, three PhD candidates and eight master's degree students;
- CRASH integrated into international research networks;
- CRASH researchers have published in numerous peer-reviewed books and journals;
- They set up a multidisciplinary documentary database on the various issues covered by the centre and its experts and a website (http://www.crash-td.net);
- CRASH researchers contribute essentially to the Department of Anthropology at N'Djamena University through lecturing, supervision and offering internships to students.

The centre thus established anthropology and has been practicing it since 2008, when Hoinathy and Seli joined it with the dual agenda of doing a

doctoral thesis on one side and developing the centre on the other. Initially Remadji Hoinathy worked on natural resources, especially oil, and then moved on to cover a variety of topics such as security, migration, and civil society. Djimet Seli's research first focused on the impact of mobile telephony in relation to the connections between diasporas and their locality of origin (Seli 2014). He then focused on the dynamics of pastoralism, migration, gender-based violence and conflict. Basic research has been made possible through collaboration with international academics, including collaborative projects with the Universities of Halle and Leiden. The Volkswagen Foundation's Excellence Scholarship has been a major contribution to the development of Remadji Hoinathy's work. Andrea Behrends has been part of the centre's advisory board from the beginning. Her research on oil and social change in the south of the country as well as on displacement, emplacement and aid, particularly in eastern Chad, was supported by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, the Volkswagen Foundation and the German Research Foundation. Importantly, CRASH's staff and infrastructures provided her with documents to be able to travel and do research in the country, and she continues to engage with the centre and its researchers.

While the university and public policy makers in Chad were slow to realise the importance of the work conducted within CRASH, international collaboration has made it possible to establish a solid reputation for CRASH and its researchers. This has resulted in progressive and regular solicitations from development and humanitarian action communities for action research. Thus, researchers working both within CRASH and individually, have conducted more than twenty studies on topics as varied as:

- Migration
- Violent extremism
- Public Health
- Intercommunity conflicts and cohabitation
- Security governance
- Climate Change
- Evaluations of various development projects

These studies were commissioned by various United Nations bodies including the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Further commissions came from the European Union or other financial

partners such as SWISSAID, the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ), and national NGOs.

Implications and challenges

We now would like to address lessons learned from such development, as despite the very successful trajectory we have described, anthropologists in Chad continue to face a number of challenges.

Reflexivity and the challenge to remain neutral

At the epistemological and ethical level, the question arises of the ability to work on questions and problems that are directly related to the researcher's own history and daily life. Because, most evidently, whatever competences are possessed by the individual researcher, they are always speaking from a specific position. The very nature of the subjects and issues studied can add to the precariousness of the anthropologist's work. Let us contextualise this challenge with an example: a study about social changes brought about by the oil industry in rural areas of southern Chad. Knowing that oil has been the essential resource of the Chadian State, authorities, communities and citizens (including the researcher) expected oil to be *the* factor for development, modernisation, and general wellbeing. Social science research on oil or mining has documented the great aspirations that these strategic resources created in the contexts where they have either been discovered and/or prospects for exploitation were announced (e.g., Coronil 1997; Apter 2005; Fergusson 2005; Reyna and Behrends 2011).

For Chadian researcher[5], studying this question is both exciting and risky. Indeed, at the same time as the researcher is making observations on the ground, he has also been observed and his movements more or less controlled through the obligation to pass through the office of the regional governor, the prefect, the sub-prefect, the cantonal chiefs and their subordinates, every time he ventured out to a new locality. He had to deal with this reality until the end of the field research, taking precautions such as always traveling with official

5 As the next paragraphs on researching oil in southern Chad has been written (and the research has been carried out) by Remadji Hoinathy, the masculine pronoun is used because the description gives a first-hand account of his experience.

authorisation, discreetly using his field equipment (the camera in particular), having a representative of the canton chief accompany him on long journeys in case he would meet an oil security patrol. In such a context, making the anthropology of oil "at home" makes contact with the populations in the field easier, but it also exposes the researcher to sometimes very restrictive control in the field, thanks to a better understanding of the context and less of a linguistic barrier.

Controversial debates that began at the beginning of the negotiations on the Chad-Cameroon oil project have made the relationship between the actors involved in the issue quite complex. In Chadian public opinion, the oil project is far from having achieved its initial objectives. Except in circles close to the authorities, this opinion, which is also conveyed by NGOs and local newspapers, is quite widespread. In addition, for the government, someone who conducts research in oil is always regarded as being aligned with the position of NGOs, who had been very critical of the project and its management from its early beginnings. So how can a researcher work on oil without taking sides, without letting himself be taken over by one party or the other? As a native of Chad, aware of all these debates and controversies on oil, the researcher had to find a way to propose an anthropological discourse on the issue. In addition, in the cantons and villages of the oil zone, the populations seem disillusioned and hold very negative opinions on oil. How can the researcher share the lives of these populations, their difficulties and misfortunes without taking a stand? Especially since in most cases interlocutors seemed interested to know what concrete and immediate results the researcher's work would provide for them. He was to abstain from any predictions and let himself be guided by the field. Having left for the field without preconceptions, he was to formulate his questions according to the observations made, trying as much as possible to speak with all the actors concerned by the oil issue so as to take into account the controversies as they unfolded in the field. He also tried to remain as critical as possible of the data collected in order to identify a position that could be empirically defendable. To do this, the researcher constantly questioned the data, trying to triangulate them with repeated fieldwork trips, and taking up and deepening certain points. Undertaking research work on issues such as security, governance, migration civil society, citizen dynamics, often brings the same challenges to the table.

Freedom of speech and professional pressure

In addition to the challenges of research, the publication of results and speaking out in public debate on these issues is equally sensitive. The researcher who assumes such responsibility will be considered to be either an opponent to the governing regime, or an activist and, thereby subject to various pressures and obstacles in the development of their career as a teacher-researcher in the public sector of a country where private education is embryonic and of low quality. Here we reach a central point that we wish to make, namely, that the situation described above reinforces the temptation to switch definitively from research to consulting which is much better paid and morally rewarding since the researchers' skills and results are, if not locally, then most certainly internationally valued.

A rewarding journey but ...

Having had the opportunity to work on so many themes, with such diverse partners and in such diverse contexts, the few local anthropologists had the unique opportunity to discover the depth of Chad and the dynamics that have prevailed there in the last decade. Examining these dynamics has greatly contributed to strengthening all the participating researchers' anthropological understanding of the country.

Beyond that, such a journey has facilitated the development of additional skills of both CRASH's and the Department of Anthropology's researchers enabling them to interact with development and decision-making circles and thus, to contribute to knowledge production in a country where academic research has never received the attention it enjoys elsewhere. This leads us to raise the question of the usefulness of research in a country such as Chad. Do we do research because we are concerned about development? Or do we want to alert development actors to the need to understand social dynamics so as to better calibrate their actions? Should researchers accordingly improve their tools to better understand the impacts of their actions in the field? Obviously, in order to achieve changes in the spheres of development work, we need to move away from the principles of independent and disinterested fundamental research, not permanently, but at least in the near future. The challenge that has been taken up at CRASH is to take advantage of the fact that development actions create change and constantly bring new areas of interest on which to focus analysis. Like this, an enrichment occurs in both directions.

A model for combining action research and academic research

With this contribution, we underline how anthropology in Chad has, and continues to be, a non-linear journey as it is poorly institutionalised and lacks any real governmental support – consequently it is not easy to plan ahead. Such a journey requires not only great flexibility, but also a certain ability to adapt and become attuned to what is at hand. In particular, combining academic research with consultancy work brings the temptation of taking on too many tasks at the same time, and ending up doing them badly.

Dependence on external sources of funding and consultancy leads to a certain thematic nomadism, which, if not controlled, prevents further theoretical development. Unfortunately, our research so far remains tightly constrained to the factual demands exerted by external funders, particularly when it comes to moving from empirical findings to attempts at complex theorisations. Therefore, bearing in mind the dilemma of poor funding in Chadian academia and no governmental support on the one hand, and high international interest in quality surveys and qualitative expert reports on the other, we suggest a practicable model. We see that being able to specialise on a limited number of topics and themes becomes difficult unless we can work together in a larger group of well-trained scholars. As soon as that situation is achieved, it would allow different researchers to gradually identify appropriate and more specific research fields. Currently, we are trying to establish this kind of specification at CRASH, by recruiting more and more of the best students from the master's programme. We also orient students towards particular themes as soon as they have chosen their subjects for a master's thesis. Additionally, we recruit Chadian students from other fields of the social sciences who work on themes of interest to CRASH and its partners. Only by enlarging the team and developing specific interests and specialisations will it become possible to reconcile well paid action research and underfunded academic research. By making it possible for trained researchers to combine action research and academic interests following a specialized topic of research, the centre will be able to promote students from the masters to higher levels of academic achievement. A scholar who writes a thesis concerning the Internet and Communication Technology viewed in relation to development, might, for instance, later specialises on new markets and start-ups, or someone interested in public health would investigate exclusively within the medical and health related sector. Similarly, students of religious diversity, of conflict, or of gender issues, would have opportunities to attain the higher academic levels so that apart from writing re-

ports in consultancy contracts, they would also be able to publish their findings in academic journals, and thus achieve greater international visibility.

Conclusion

We started this paper by describing our own experiences within a collaborative research project, the "Travelling Models in African Conflict Management" project. Expanding on the varying expectations of young researchers from African countries, who were keen on "making models work for development" and their African and German supervisors who were interested mainly in "academic achievements and the advance of theory", we have tried to suggest creative ways of combining these two avenues. And even though this idea is born from the lack of research funding in Chad, and the need to find it through consultancies internationally, we also aim at rendering different ways of pursuing anthropology internationally accepted and valued. This accords with Law's and Lin's (2017) demand for a more symmetrical and multi-versed anthropology, one that provincialises the current domination of its western-based themes and representatives. In line with this is Ribeiro and Escobar's (2006) call for "World Anthropologies". Such anthropologies do not start out from any particular national standpoint, but develop across a heterogenous, democratic and transnational anthropological community. Many might consider this utopian – a means to do away with purely academic standards of doing research, of publishing and of passing through the eye of the needle to reach positions of highest reputation. CRASH's model of combining what is practical with that which is of the greatest meaning and validity requires the development of a group of engaged academic researchers and teachers who study and understand the situation in their country. Ideally, such a research community would work towards enlightening not only the international community, but also Chad's own youth and its governmental bodies. This tactic would amply demonstrate the usefulness of anthropological inquiry. But what would this model mean for the western based academic, eager to collaborate with Chadian researchers – and also for those who do not (yet) know of the rich political-religious-historical-social-cultural-economic fields of knowledge to be gained in this area of the world? A starting point would be to accept the different forms of becoming an expert, be it as a well-funded academic researcher or as a well-paid consultant. It would also be important to recognise the value of working hard to establish a specific field of expertise

whilst acknowledging and acting on the need to nomadically wander from theme to theme. With engaged and activist anthropology becoming more and more accepted, the practice and outcome-oriented research of consultant-academics needs to be accepted as a valid avenue of academic achievement, and everyone in academia should stop being disparaging about this route, now. If Chadian anthropology currently needs to be more "applied" than "purely academic" – and more concerned with justice then global traditions – this independence is of considerable relevance for any effort at decolonisation. After all, decolonisation is an abstract term, and only measures such as those we have described here can invest the project of decolonisation with practical and meaningful life.

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