

'Between a rock and a hard place': applied anthropology and AIDS research on a commercial farm in Zambia*

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Abstract

Fieldwork on a commercial farm in southern Zambia, which was aimed at designing an HIV prevention program for farm workers, gradually exposed the nature of sexual liaisons between young girls, coming to work on the farm from the surrounding villages, and older migrant men workers. Before completing fieldwork, the anthropologist voiced her concern about the implications of these liaisons for the spread of STDs and HIV with the local rural community, farm management and farm workers. The immediate outcome of her intercessions was the decision by management to sack under-age workers. Although some members of the local community, including local research assistants, and some managers and workers welcomed this decision, others were angered by it. Caught between interest groups and conflicting guidelines, the anthropologist, it is argued, was in a no-win situation, 'between a rock and a hard place'. The paper proposes that the application of anthropological ethics in AIDS research needs some re-evaluation.

An ethical quagmire

Fieldwork has a habit of challenging the ideal behaviour of social anthropologists, be it supposed detachment, implicit commitment to affective change or explicit recognition of the nature of anthropological authority. Faced with crises of one type or another in the cultures that we study, some of us pursue our 'chronic desire to be useful' (Wallman 1985) and discover that the cloak of attachment itself is not, after all, so easy to wear. If we try to apply our research findings to alleviating a problem, what existing guidelines should we follow? How can we identify the overlap between action and reflection and work towards a balance between involvement and self-criticism? This paper argues that if we accept that we are not value-free (Weber 1947) and we also decide that we are not going to tolerate a situation that

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appals us, we do not necessarily know what we should do to make things better. We find ourselves in a no-win situation, caught 'between a rock and a hard place'.

By focusing on an event during my own fieldwork¹ which involved sexual contact between young girls and older migrant men on a large commercial farm, the responsibilities of a social anthropologist are explored. The incident had all the elements of an ethical quagmire: a multinational company, a previously undeveloped rural area, a pool of seasonal migrants, employment of 'under-age' girls and evidence for the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The part that the AIDS epidemic plays in pushing us towards trying to intervene and forcing us to re-evaluate our ethics is, I believe, crucial.

There are parallels between the focus of my own work on issues that are problematic between labour and management and that of earlier social anthropologists — Godfrey Wilson, Epstein, Clyde-Mitchell, Powdermaker, Kapferer and Burawoy (based at the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute) — who did fieldwork in the mine towns on the Copperbelt from the 1940s to the early 1970s. In the context of a commercial farm or a mine the social anthropologist is caught between the goodwill of management and the needs of labour, between the men in power and the anthropologist's knowledge of labour conditions. She cannot afford to alienate any of the parties in order for the research to proceed. Powdermaker describes how she was careful to manoeuvre between races and between the 'top ranks' and the 'under-dog' during her fieldwork in Luanshya because she could not afford to 'exclusively identify with either' (Powdermaker 1966:249-250). In my own case, there is an added dimension since the local Chiawa community is distinct from the migrant worker population on the farm and thereby yet another party to manoeuvre between. Whisson, examining the potential roles of applied anthropology, reminds those of us acting as 'men in-between' or 'interpreters' of Monica Wilson's comment that 'Where the groups between whom they interpret are in conflict they are likely to be distrusted by both sides because they are negotiators between opponents' (Wilson 1972:20 cited in Whisson 1985:145). With the AIDS epidemic I feel this mistrust can be accentuated by people's anxieties about and denial of HIV infection. Mistrust of informants could invalidate a study (Burawoy 1972:240).

Analogous to Gluckman's situational analysis of the opening of a bridge in Zululand in the mid-1930s, which has 'provided a template' for anthropological work in Zambia (Schumaker 1994), in this paper I first describe the event and then abstract the relationships between the different groups involved (Gluckman 1958:2). In the final analysis, in connection with this specific event, the expectations and ethics of anthropology are re-examined.

The setting: a rural community and the commercial farm

Chiawa, lying in the middle Zambezi valley on the border of Zimbabwe and on the banks of the Zambezi river about 200 kilometres south of Lusaka, has its boundaries shaped by three rivers and the Mwinde hills. A ferry on the Kafue river connects Chiawa with Southern Province and a main road. The resident population number about 8000 and are a small ethnic group which call themselves Goba and speak a Shona dialect. Since 1993, the population has

¹ Although the applied research study, Intervention Study of Work Camps in Chiawa, involves other research colleagues, during the period of fieldwork related in this paper, I was alone in the field, except during two introductory meetings which Bawa Yamba attended. I worked on the baseline studies with local research assistants, who had been trained by the larger research project in 1991. The fact that I was mostly working on my own as a researcher, with local research assistants, has, I think, a bearing on my response to the event described in this paper. The presence of one or more of my research colleagues might have affected my choice of intervention. The other colleagues involved in the study are Elisabeth Faxelid, Solveig Freudenthal, Phillimon Ndubani, Paul Dover and Bawa Yamba.

been boosted by an annual influx of around 2000 migrant workers coming to work seasonally on a commercial farm.

The farm, owned by a multinational company, first established in 1988, grows marigold flowers, paprika and cotton. These crops need to be picked by hand for about six months a year, April to mid-September, and the farm is unable to recruit enough seasonal labour locally. Since 1993 the farm management has recruited labour from other rural areas and from town. The majority of the seasonal labour come from the adjacent river valley, the Gwembe, where overcrowding, severe soil erosion and persistent drought makes migration a main survival strategy for the local Tonga who reside there. Seasonal migrants working on the farm are called 'camp' workers by Chiawa people, owing to their residence in the 'camps' — farm compounds. Management on the farm itself is mainly Zambian, with one expatriate farm manager and some expatriate technicians. This extensive agricultural development, coupled with other tourism and environmental developments in the last decade (including the eradication of tsetse fly), has changed the local economy, infrastructure and demography of Chiawa, intensifying contact between local people and outsiders.

There are three categories of workers on the farm: permanent, seasonal migrant, and seasonal local. Senior management have their own compound and live in block houses with asbestos roofs. Other permanent workers are mostly housed in mud brick houses in the main compound, accompanied by their families. Local seasonal workers are transported to the farm on lorries or tractor trailers which reach the villages at 5 a.m. and leave the farm to take people home around 4 p.m. During school holidays, Chiawa school children often work at the farm to earn money or raise money for the school. The migrant seasonal workers live within the confines of three compounds during their stay. They are housed in mud and wattle dormitories, concrete dormitories, mud brick houses, canvas tents or temporary hessian sack, plastic or grass shelters. A few sleep outside. Most living (sleeping) spaces are overcrowded, with between three and five people sharing about seven square metres. There are a few communal toilets and showers but most migrant workers use the bush as their toilet and erect their own washing areas from hessian sacks. Every compound has water tanks or water points and some drainage channels. There are no provisions for rubbish disposal and rats are a problem. There is no clinic on the farm and to reach a health centre, workers have to travel 16 km to a mission hospital or 25 km to a rural health centre. The farm will often provide transport to the hospital. The migrant workers complain about poor housing, shortage and siting of toilets and lack of health services. They perceive diarrhoea, dysentery, chest-pain, headache and malaria as the most serious illnesses at the farm². The main focus of leisure and commercial activities is the area around a government-owned ferry, two kilometres from the farm boundary. Around payday, markets spring up overnight and local taverns and shops do brisk trade near the ferry. Some migrants travel home for a few days, carrying goods and wages with them, whilst others wile away the time and their pay locally.

The men employed at the farm outnumber the women. In 1994, 21 per cent of all farm workers were females. Their ages ranged from 8 years to 45 years, with 67 per cent under the age of 25, and 69 per cent unmarried³. The majority were local Chiawa women and girls not living in the camp compounds and employed on a seasonal basis who, in a survey, mostly

²The event described in this paper took place in 1994 when the farm was in financial difficulty. In 1995 and 1996, the farm finances have improved considerably and improvements in housing and sanitation have been made. A clinic has been constructed and is due to be equipped and staffed in 1997. Some of the improvements in health services and environmental health could be partly attributed to the presence of the research project.

³A repeat survey in 1995 reflected an increase in the number of women employed to 28 per cent of the workforce and an increase in the number of single women workers.

cited hunger and the need to buy food as the main incentive for seeking farm work. Forty three per cent of seasonal local workers were female. There were proportionately more single women than men working at the farm. The disparity between the number of men and women living in the compounds on the farm was as much as seven men to every woman. Other Chiawa women are involved informally in the economy of the farm, selling food, vegetables, game meat, tea, wine and beer to farm workers in or around the farm. Payday attracts women traders and prostitutes from outside to the area. This work environment is similar to early urban settings in Zambia.

In this paper, a distinction is made between women and girls, the latter denoting those under about 17 years who are not married and who were working on the farm during the months of July and August 1994. This distinction is not a reflection of sexual maturity or activity. My use is based initially on my concern for Chiawa teenage girls, most of whom are poor, coming into contact with older men and a cash economy which exposes them to potential sexual contact and exchange in a situation of great power imbalance, that could lead them to contracting STDs and/or HIV. The term 'girls' for the purpose of this paper also reflects labour laws in Zambia which categorize girls aged 15 and under as 'under-age', and HIV interventions which focus on adolescents in an attempt to save them from the high HIV prevalence rates found in women aged 20 to 29 years. The use of 'girl' instead of 'young woman' in the Chiawa context is based on local gender perceptions of vulnerability, moral infraction and control. Despite the fact that ideally a girl is considered a woman and sexually mature after her first period, Chiawa people still apply the term 'girl' in certain contexts to females who have started menstruating. Local discourse on connections between Chiawa girls and the farm often blames girls for spreading STDs and HIV and for being too licentious in their sexual behaviour. This criticism comes from all directions. Young migrant men complain 'These Chiawa girls are not steady'; 'These girls move with too many men - 10 or 15'. A young Chiawa man who is a research assistant says 'There is nothing you can do to protect young local girls from AIDS...I am telling you these young girls will die anyhow'. Married women on the farm will refer to 'girls' with whom their husbands have sex. There is the notion, expressed often by older women, that such girls are naive and vulnerable, 'having sex for nothing'. The implication is that these girls are not using sex as strategically as might older women. One elderly woman relates 'If a local girl gives birth, she cannot meet with men and make money'. Older migrant men at the farm comment that it is easier to get the attention of 'young girls'. A nun at the local mission hospital laments 'Our girls will oblige in exchange for money, food or clothes because the area is very poor'. School teachers also refer to schoolgirls who are working at the farm rather than being at school or schoolgirls who flock to taverns and the market on payday. A research assistant's diary records that on payday 'There were local girls aged 17 to 28 years in the store who the young men from the camps were buying beer for'. Hence these are adolescent girls who are not behaving as ideal daughters and schoolgirls should in the eyes of the Chiawa community. At the same time the community acknowledges the lack of maturity, the vulnerability and the importance to the community of these girls and expresses a desire to protect them. There are therefore similarities between my use and the local use, particularly in our special concern for this group⁴.

At the time that this fieldwork was conducted, the research project had not actually screened any of the farm workers for STDs. A review of 1987-1991 health records at the local

⁴I am indebted to Philip Setel for pointing out to me how I used both 'local girls' and 'local women' in my text without exposing either my reason for categorizing them as such or whether I was getting caught up in local categories.

hospital and rural health centre showed that out of 369 Chiawa people tested for HIV⁵, 138 were HIV-positive, and that the majority of these were from the farm area (Bond and Ndubani 1993). STD records are unreliable because so often STDs have been treated outside the government health system. In August 1995, in collaboration with the Epidemiology and Research Unit at the National AIDS and STD Control program, the research project tried to screen one-third of the farm workers for certain STDs⁶. Women workers were only screened for syphilis. The number of workers screened was 570, of whom 210 were women. The syphilis prevalence in women aged 15-19 years was three per cent; in women aged 20-29 years eight per cent; and in those over 30 years, six per cent of women had syphilis. Elsewhere in Zambia, results in 1995 from annual sentinel-site surveys show that HIV prevalence amongst young women (aged 15 to 29 years) is at least double that of young men of the same age. In 1996, a population-based survey in an urban, a peri-urban and a rural site showed prevalence rates of women aged 15 to 19 years out of school to be 17.9, 27.7 and 10 per cent respectively, with lower rates in the same age group attending school of 4.9, 11.1 and 7.7 per cent respectively, suggesting that attending school in urban areas may have a protective effect (Fylkesnes, Sichone and Kasumba 1997). Our observations of rising AIDS-related illnesses and deaths in girls and young women in Chiawa tally with these statistics of relatively high HIV prevalence in this age group.

Methods of enquiry

The research study on the commercial farm aimed to develop and evaluate a model for STD/HIV health education especially designed for migrant workers, based on a longitudinal anthropological study of the area. The study began in June 1994, the year in which the event described in this paper took place. A variety of methods were used over a period of five months to conduct the baseline study, including mapping exercises, timed observations, a register of all camp workers followed by a quantitative random survey of ten per cent of camp workers, a selected survey of key informants, focus groups with men and women of reproductive age, individual interviews, diaries kept by research assistants and my own observations. It is necessary to present the fieldwork practices in chronological order since each method threw a different light on the subject of this paper, namely the sexual contact between young local girls and older migrant men, and thereby gives the background to the specific event under analysis.

Fieldwork

The research project had conducted a socio-economic survey on the farm in 1991, and feedback meetings in 1993, and had had a continued presence in Chiawa since 1991, so the community, farm management and farm workers were mostly familiar with our work. The objectives of this particular study on the farm were outlined to management in meetings held

⁵The testing is erratic, dependent on availability of kits and government health policy.

⁶I would like to acknowledge Doreen Mulenga, Knut Fylkesnes, Zach Ndlovu and Calvin Kasumba from the Epidemiology and Research Unit, NACP, who carried out the STD epidemiological baseline survey at the farm.

in the town and farm office and, after the meetings, in a letter. Having obtained their consent to conduct our work, we (Yamba and I) held introductory meetings in the different farm compounds and with local workers to explain our interest in health promotion within the camps and the work we planned to do. We were careful to define our role, stating clearly that we were not advocates for workers' problems and encouraging them to continue to voice any complaints through their own lines of communication with management. We explained it was in the farm's interest to have healthy workers and we would pass on information to the company about health issues.

At these meetings the large number of men and their need for women were dominant issues. So too were the anxieties and queries about sexually transmitted infections and AIDS. These ranged from requests for diagnosis and treatment to worries about being infected with HIV. Some workers came privately to us after the meetings and confided that they had sexual contact with women who have since died from HIV.

After holding introductory meetings, we carried out mapping and observation exercises of the physical and social landscape of the farm. Of particular interest was the contact that migrant camp workers had with locals, bars, the nearby border post, prostitutes, their home areas and treatment sources, both formal and informal. The findings from these exercises highlighted the disproportionate number of men to women in two of the three camp compounds. Most men were unaccompanied by wives or girlfriends⁷. Our observations also indicated the sexual contact that occurred between some local girls and migrant men usually during the early afternoon or over the weekends and usually in the bush. There were a few incidents recorded of sexual intercourse taking place in the fields during work.

'We don't want to cut off our nose to save our face'

After we had registered all the farm workers ourselves in order to conduct a random survey, the register revealed that about eight per cent of the total workforce at that time were under the age of 16 years, of whom 68 per cent were local girls working on a seasonal basis and staying in surrounding villages. Their ages ranged from eight to 15 years. These figures confirmed our earlier observations that there were a number of young local girls working as seasonal workers at the farm.

These figures, generated from a database we had created for the register, stressed the possibility that young local girls, through their daily work and contact with migrants, might be entering into sexual relations which could expose them to STDs or even HIV. I started to speak to locals about the trend. Ever since we first came to the area in 1991, we had been aware of sexual contact of local girls and young women with the migrant men at the farm. As mentioned earlier, local perceptions link the farm and young girls and women working at the farm with 'movious' women or girls, 'hit and run' sex, STDs and AIDS⁸. One of the farm compounds is called *Chitabwa* which means 'to open your legs'. The origin of this name dates back to when a company came to clear the land for the farm in 1988 and young local women apparently lived in a mud and wattle dormitory and were, according to one informant, 'available to any man'. I interviewed one of these women who had moved to the farm in 1989

⁷According to a repeat survey in 1995 and farm labour records in 1996, more men are now accompanied by their spouses.

⁸'Movious' is a derogatory euphemism for people who have many sexual contacts, who are 'moving up and down' between partners. This term is also used in town. Weiss (1993), in an article titled 'Buying her grave' explains the symbolic significance of the link between women, mobility, money and AIDS in Tanzania. He proposes that the underlying connection is of danger, speed and the breakdown of control that men have over women.

with her sister. She recalled her serial and temporary relationships and unwanted pregnancies, and the death of her sister in 1992 from AIDS. She strongly feels that local girls are cheated by the men in the camp who propose love and promise money and gifts or favours at work in exchange for sex. 'Some have five or six boyfriends at the same time and they all cheat her. They say they will give her money, *chitenge* (cloth), soap or pants and then just leave'.

Older local people and local men of all ages tended to be less sympathetic about this sexual behaviour, labelling local girls and women working at the farm as prostitutes, *chihure*, and chiding them for chasing money to the detriment of their reputation and health. They described how old people feel powerless to stop girls behaving this way. Numerous local village *dare* (traditional court) cases, local government court cases and ill-fated attempts at abortion in Chiawa testify that such behaviour sometimes tends to be overlooked until the girl is 'damaged' — impregnated.⁹ Some families nevertheless refuse to allow young girls to either work or stay at the farm because they are afraid of the pressures on young girls to have sex. Some local teenage boys and young men also complain about the exodus of young girls to the farm because it makes it difficult for them to find girlfriends or wives, professing a preference for 'steady' and 'proper' girls who stay at home and are not seen with too many boys. They concede that boys without money have a hard time attracting girls (Dover 1995).

School teachers related that after working on the farm during school holidays, some of their pupils, particularly young girls, chose to continue working instead of returning to school. The teachers felt that parents were sometimes behind their daughters' decision to do piecemeal work at the farm rather than go to school. At least one headmaster had recently raised the problem with farm management and at Parent Teacher Association meetings, and there had been a verbal agreement made with management that all children should carry a letter from school before the farm agreed to offer them employment.

During the piloting of the survey questionnaire, one woman research assistant interviewed a local 14-year-old girl, who had been working on the farm for two months and had also worked the previous year on a seasonal basis as a weeder. She had left primary school in Grade 5; her motives for leaving were unclear. Her reasons for working at the farm were to raise money to buy maize, salt and soap and she was currently earning approximately US\$22 a month. She also raised money by selling bananas and scones, baked by herself. She claimed that she had had a regular boyfriend for two years, whom she saw at least once a week. He was a migrant worker who was employed not by the farm but by the European Union Tse-Tse fly project. Over the last year she said that she had had four other boyfriends and in addition she had 'moved with' (had sex with) two other men in the last three months. The girl's knowledge of AIDS and STDs was good. She knew local names for STDs and HIV, that such diseases were transmitted through sexual intercourse, where to seek treatment if infected (citing the clinic, hospital, antenatal clinics and traditional healers — the last as a second option), and that she could protect herself from STDs and AIDS by not sleeping with men or by using condoms. The interviewer said that the girl was quietly spoken and that she cross-questioned her because she was shocked by the girl's apparent sexual activity and she doubted that her answers could be true. Despite the role of this age group in the sexual behaviour of the farm, the research assistants strongly felt it was wrong to ask young girls and boys some of the questions included in our questionnaire and after some debate, we decided to exclude all workers under the age of 16 from the random survey.

⁹Long-term research in Gwembe, Southern Province, shows that in some rural households the only injection of capital in the lifecycle of a household is through marriage payments (Scudder 1995, personal communication). In Chiawa, families stand to gain financially if their daughter is 'damaged' since this adds another three financial transactions to marriage payments.

At this stage, my research assistants (all local people) and I were beginning to feel more and more upset about the apparent sexual contact between some of these young local girls and the migrant men, as well as about the level of anxiety about STDs and HIV. The girls were after all part of the reproductive future of Chiawa. One research assistant in particular, a young local man, felt strongly that 'these children should be in school'. I mentioned the trend to one personnel manager, who is himself a local man. He shared our concern and said that the reason he allowed single migrant women to come to the farm was that he thought it would keep the migrant men away from local women. 'What can we do?', he asked, 'There is hunger in the valley and people need to raise money'. I then raised the issue with the expatriate general manager in Lusaka, when I had a lift down to the farm with him. 'I find this hard to believe', he retorted, 'Two years ago we decided not to employ anyone under 16 years unless it was sanctioned by the schools during the school holidays. Maybe this has slipped through the net. We don't want to cut off our nose to save our face. After all we have a long-term commitment to Chiawa'.

Intervening

We started the random survey of ten per cent of the workforce: 159 individuals. Halfway through we started having problems identifying the selected workers, and encountered many refusals to participate. Investigating why, we discovered there were rumours that our survey was linked to recent redundancies made by management and a few informants said there were fears that individuals interviewed would subsequently be tested for HIV. There was also some confusion as to why although everyone was registered, only relatively few workers were actually being interviewed. Some whose names did not appear in the random list actually wanted to be interviewed. We had to approach the chairmen in the farm compounds and the management once more to reiterate that we had no intention to test any individual for HIV, and explain the logic behind the random selection. We asked management to repeat to workers that the farm was having to lay off some seasonal workers because it was the end of the flowering season and there were fewer flowers to pick. The local research assistants, the camp chairmen and management proved very effective at dispelling fears and misunderstandings, and we resumed the survey.

After we finished the random survey and before holding focus-group discussions, I showed the table of the age frequency generated from our register to the farm manager and another personnel manager. At first they doubted the validity of the data, suggesting that the children were merely accompanying their parents and not actively working. I assured them that the children were actually working. The following day they went around the fields and by the end of the day had fired 81 seasonal workers who looked under-age. Most of these workers were girls.

The farm manager and one personnel manager were surprised by the high number of apparently under-age workers and said that the children had been using their parents' 'ticket' to get paid and that the field supervisors had chosen to turn a blind eye to their presence. They said that last year they had a similar problem and had to go around the fields sacking under-age workers on at least one occasion. The other two personnel managers, one a local and the other an outsider who lived within the main compound, were not so taken aback. One of them was quite angry that under-age local seasonal workers had been fired. When some workers complained directly to this personnel manager about the management's decision, he blatantly said it was because of our research that the decision had been made¹⁰.

¹⁰The particular man is renowned for giving jobs to women in exchange for sex and has on occasion sacked women who refused his advances.

The same day that the management went around the fields identifying under-age workers and telling them to stop working, I talked to a small group of teenage girls as they waited for transport home. They said their ages were 17, 15, 14 and 14, though the oldest looked younger than 17 years. They had been working at the farm for between 10 and 18 months and all came from a village in an area of Chiawa where there is no schooling above Grade 3. They said their parents had let them come to work at the farm instead of sending them to boarding school in Chiawa. Some were encouraged by their parents to come, others followed their friends. Their monthly salary was spent on soap, salt, biscuits, sweets and shoes. Buying maize was not their responsibility, they explained. It was difficult to ascertain how much of their income contributed to household living. When I asked if they were bothered by men during their work on the farm, they giggled and said no, looking coy and embarrassed. My research assistant then asked where the tin rings and bracelets they all wore came from. They admitted they were gifts from men in the farm compounds. When we left them, they went in a group into a nearby farm compound and one of them was grabbed by her arm by a young man.

Implications of my intervention

Almost immediately after hearing of the firing of the under-age workers, I regretted having disclosed our register figures and my concern to management. A weekend in Lusaka gave me a chance to reflect on my actions. I felt uneasy about the rather spontaneous reaction both by myself and by management and, with hindsight, realized I should not have reacted so quickly to my findings. It seemed I had let my distress cloud my judgement as a researcher and jumped ahead to an intervention, without finishing collecting and assimilating data. It was not clear if the intervention was appropriate or not. What were the implications for the girls, the research and the planned intervention project?

I wondered what would happen to these girls now they were not supposed to work at the farm. Maybe they would continue to visit the farm anyway, having established contact there and learnt what it is like to earn money. The very worst scenario (and the most ironic) would be that losing access to casual work on the farm would push these girls into exchanging sex for goods. What are their other options in Chiawa? The labour of a teenage girl is important in a household since they are responsible for many household chores: drawing water, sweeping, cleaning pots and pans, caring for younger children, cooking. They have to work hard at home. Reynolds, in her study of Tonga children in the Zambezi valley, records the tedium of these labour tasks for young adolescent girls (Reynolds 1991:103). The farm would be a temporary escape from this boredom. Being at the farm would also allow them more freedom of movement than they had in the village. If they had remained working at the farm, it might also have been easier for any HIV and STD education to reach them. Boarding at a local primary school can also expose them to sexual harassment from teachers and local men since girls sleep together in a classroom, away from the supervision of their parents and guardians. A number of girls have been impregnated whilst boarding at the school. There seem to be no easy answers. Two weeks later I noticed one of these girls back at work on the farm.¹¹

The implications for my research were potentially serious. The trust established over the years with the study population might be jeopardized and the relationship between the research and management was now questionable. This could affect the data not yet collected, if respondents feared to speak openly because they felt that the information would be directly

¹¹ A repeat survey in August 1995 of the farm workers revealed that out of 1570 workers, 33 were under the age of 16 years, 19 of whom were girls, and the youngest 11 years. Thus in a year there was a significant reduction in the number of children under the age of 16 employed by the farm, from eight per cent to two per cent of the total workforce.

and immediately conveyed to management. On the other hand, management might see the research as subversive for exposing the employment of under-age workers.

After the girls were fired, partly because of the comments of one personnel manager, the farm manager's wife and one research assistant, some of the workers directly challenged the research assistants, accusing us of being involved in the sacking of the young girls. I had briefed the research assistants to dissociate us from the management's decision by explaining that we were only researchers and were not involved in management policy. They understood how important this was and kept reassuring me that no one in the community was denigrating us because of this incident. They simultaneously said that some older people were pleased because they too had been troubled by the apparent liaisons between their young girls and the young men in the camps. I told them that no matter what people said about the incident, they must consistently explain that we were not linked to management decisions.

Two personnel managers fortunately told any workers who complained to them that we (the researchers) had absolutely nothing to do with the young girls and boys losing their jobs. They explained that last year they had conducted a similar exercise and that it remained management policy not to employ under-age workers except during the school holidays. Around the same time as the under-age workers were fired, three primary school headmasters had directly approached the farm management regarding pupils dropping out of school to work on the farm. These interventions helped to diminish our role in the event.

A sequel to the incident taught me another lesson about the relationship between researchers and management. Soon after the under-age workers lost their jobs, I ran into the Operations Manager in Lusaka; he asked me to bring him up to date with our research. In response, I briefed him on the methods we were using and our timetable. He started to question me more closely on our findings and I said I thought the workers were anxious about STDs and AIDS, partly because of the context in which they worked, many of them staying away from their families. 'I hear you saying that migrant labour is not good for Chiawa because it encourages AIDS', he said. There followed a rather awkward conversation about the pros and cons of migrant labour, and the present and planned living conditions for migrant labour on the farm. 'I've lived in Africa all my life', he said. He said he had received no complaints about our research from the farm but quietly warned me to be discreet about our data, after saying that he found elements of a working paper we had written about the survey of migrant workers in 1991 'judgemental'. He was in particular upset about our description of a personnel officer losing his job after a riot at the farm (Bond, Ndubani and Macwang'i 1993:6). 'Stick to your subject', he said. He requested that he see copies of all our research from the farm and that we keep in closer contact. On a more positive note he offered to give me contacts for AIDS education programs for farm labourers in Zimbabwe. After this conversation, I wrote the Operations Manager a letter in which I tried to spell out our shared interest in improving the health of workers and the broader implications of our research.

As researchers on the farm we had encountered suspicions about our role from both management and workers throughout. The relatively low response rate in the survey (65%) is evidence of this. Nevertheless we found after this incident that our relationship with the farm population was not irreparably damaged. Many workers continued to confide in us their worries about health, especially STDs and HIV. Group discussions about sexual behaviour following the incident were mostly well attended, well received and very frank. Management continues to accommodate our research. The farm management in particular remains actively supportive and understanding, though at times still a little uncertain about our motives. To date we are still involved in research and interventions on the farm.

'Between a rock and a hard place'

I felt strongly at the time that the event related in this paper required some 'useful self-reflection' (Singer 1994:339). In the process of writing and presenting my experience this feeling has been justified as the complexity of the situation and the analogous experiences of other social anthropologists, either written or related upon hearing my own story, have been recapitulated and help direct my continued presence in the same fieldsite. Analysing and questioning the research design and process and the different interest groups involved has led me to examine my relationship with each group, the multiplicity of roles I was playing, the skills I have and the timing, nature and causes of my spontaneous intervention. This analysis of the practicalities of fieldwork has pushed me towards re-evaluating the ethics and existing guidelines in our profession.

In this study we set out to use our social anthropological findings to design interventions which may help prevent the spread of HIV and other STDs. Our involvement to instigate change in an attempt to save lives was implicit in the design. The event related in this paper conveys just how knotty an issue involvement can be (Wallman 1985:15). As Singer states, anthropologists involved in AIDS prevention have to respond and 'this kind of work often necessitates taking sides in a highly controversial atmosphere' (Singer 1994:339).

There are similarities, as mentioned before, between the experiences of the group of RLI social anthropologists carrying out fieldwork in the mines between the 1940s and the 1970s and my own more recent experience. They too came across situations of which they disapproved and information which management would rather not receive. Godfrey Wilson's work, for example, showed that wage levels of migrant workers were often inadequate, and dispelled the myth that there was no urbanization of Africans in the Copperbelt (Wilson 1941, 1942). The mine companies reacted to these findings by refusing to allow him any continued access to the mine compounds (Simons 1977: 262-263). My access to farm compounds is essentially also under the control of the multinational. The clash between the interests of the mine companies and the findings of researchers has some parallels with any researcher conducting fieldwork in 'an authoritarian type of society with sharp conflicts of thought systems and material interests' (Simons 1977:260). It is a difficult climate in which to do research since all sides doubt the political alignment of the researcher (Simons 1977:267). Schumaker (1997), in her book on the history of the RLI, points out that suspicions are also stimulated by interactions between white researchers and white management as well as by particular fieldwork practices, such as sensitive questions. Both I and the RLI anthropologists in the mines faced distrust and a reluctance to co-operate in surveys (Simons 1977; Schumaker 1994). The multinational that owns the farm asked to see whatever we write up about the farm just as Powdermaker was asked by the general manager of a mine to show him raw survey data (Powdermaker 1966:249). A review article by Palmer of a doctorate thesis which exposed the poverty, violence, squalor and insecurity of compound life for mine labour in Southern Rhodesia in 1900-33, serves to remind us that even if powerful groups hate criticism, we should not be bullied into submission and draw a 'discreet veil' over conditions (1976:150).

The potential politicization of research and researcher undoubtedly permeates data collection, pervades writing up and directs interventions. In my case, I have come to realize, politicization came from the research assistants, as representatives of the Chiawa community, too. What I initially distinguished as a triangle of tensions, between management, labour and researcher, is actually more like a square, since the community is another corner. The reaction of the research assistants to the interview with the 14-year-old girl and my own compliance with their wish to exclude those under the age of 16 years from the survey, was a precursor to my confronting management with the employment of this young age group and our concern about the health of Chiawa girls. For the research assistants, it was also an issue of morality,

of young girls behaving other than they should. By falling in with their concern, I was, in a sense, both constrained by and supporting their perspective and advocating on their behalf.¹²

How could tensions be dissipated without compromising the integrity of research? This event illustrates that in applied research, timing and accurate representation of the researcher is important (Wallman 1985; Preston-Whyte 1993; Wedel 1994). My role combined conducting research, analysing data, presenting results and making recommendations, designing and implementing interventions. My decision to 'wear a variety of hats and play a diversity of roles' (Gow 1993:391) is 'sticky' (Wallman 1985; Preston-Whyte 1993). As Johannsen comments, distinguishing roles is never easy and some of these roles can be viewed as 'a sum of skills' (Johannsen 1992:73). Whisson suggests that a social anthropologist immersed in development can act as a broker, an advocate or a collaborator. He says 'Each role has its place, and the same scholar can fill all three, if not in the same transaction, then in respect of a single project or people' (Whisson 1985:145). Perhaps I should have worked conveniently within the bureaucracy of the farm without rocking the boat until data collection was completed. After analysing our data adequately we could have played the role of broker, communicating our results to management, labour and the Chiawa community outside the farm in a manner which was inoffensive without withholding information (Burawoy 1972:241), raising, after some delay, the issue of under-age employment and its possible implications for the spread of HIV and STDs. Other anthropologists would label this role as 'translator' or 'interpreter' (Preston-Whyte 1993). In this role we would need to recognize that we cannot control the use of our findings (Van Velsen 1974:520-1). A step further into the advocacy area would allow us to be personally involved in promoting HIV prevention amongst this group of young women.

However in reality timing can be disrupted by our responsibility to our subjects (Barry 1988). In this situation we felt we were caught between conducting research and trying to protect young girls from sexually transmitted infection. When urgent problems appear it is sometimes necessary to make 'serious and quick research management decisions' about intervention (Preston-Whyte 1993). Simultaneously, it would seem that we need to define the limits of our involvement (Grillo 1985:3). As this event conveys, the horror and fear of AIDS can easily cloud reason in research. Preston-Whyte (1993) alerts anthropologists to the danger that while conducting research into AIDS 'the magnitude of the perceived threat may all too easily come to dominate over the achievements of good research'. As Strathern spells out, merely being involved in research that is relevant does not automatically mean that the research is good: 'the best type of policy research is that which is backed solidly by experience in the use of research skills in general and by good basic research data' (Strathern 1985:180).

Strathern's and Preston-Whyte's emphasis on 'good' research brings us to the question of different 'goods' or guidelines existing in anthropology and how they may be in conflict with one another. In my circumstance, 'ethical good' appeared, at the time, to be in conflict with 'professional good'¹³. This is best illustrated by concentrating on the conflict in local voices demonstrated by the event in this paper. Chirwa recalls a similar experience in conducting research on tea estates in Malawi where child labour is used. Management were unwilling to change the practice despite his results which showed that children were 'suffering' and many parents also wished their children to continue working on the estates (Chirwa, personal

¹²I am indebted to Philip Setel for pointing out how this decision was affected by local process.

¹³For this idea of different 'goods', I am indebted to Sandra Wallman.

communication¹⁴). Singer and Koffi suggest there should be some notion of 'common good' when faced with a plurality of voices and that the anthropologist would be justified to act on the basis of this 'common good' (Singer 1994:339; Koffi, personal communication).

Ethics is a Pandora's box in AIDS research. Ethical guidelines are laid down internationally and nationally and revolve around four broad categories: respect, beneficence, non-maleficence ('do no harm') and justice (Barry 1988; Ringheim 1995). For this research, ethical clearance had been obtained, both from the Karolinska Institutet in Sweden and from the University of Zambia. However, as Ringheim says, 'In practice the application of ethical principles is not as straightforward as the principles themselves may imply' (Ringheim 1995:1696). For example, is using our criteria to judge other societies appropriate? (Jarvie 1972). Schoepf (1991) points out that 'ethical imperialism abounds in AIDS research' and Preston-Whyte (1992) asks '...does our commitment have its origin in our own intellectual imperialism, what we construe as part of human survival?'. My concern for the health of young girls, for example, did not correspond with the concern of some of the young girls themselves. This paper demonstrates van Willigen's belief that ethical concerns are difficult enough to specify, let alone apply consistently in a relativistic framework and that 'different ethical issues are raised in the case of the applied anthropologist's relationships with research subjects, project sponsors, or fellow anthropologists. The somewhat different requirements of these relationships are sometimes in conflict' (van Willigen 1993:42). In anthropology, unlike some other sciences, there is no formal system for regulating proper anthropological behaviour (Johannsen 1992:73) although statements about ethics are made by various anthropology associations. In the field, a code of ethics is sometimes replaced by 'on the hoof ethics as you live' (Wallman 1997, personal communication). This is reflected in my description in this paper of the research process. At the time of presenting management with figures of under-age employment, I felt it was the right thing to do with my concern. With hindsight, I realized perhaps it was not. In addition, as I have continued to conduct research and interventions with women workers on the farm, I have come to understand more about their expectations of partnership and sexual practice, including their pragmatism in pursuing men for support. Any sexual relationship between women workers and supervisors, for example, is not necessarily a clear case of sexual harassment or exploitation since some women openly like their power to negotiate a favour in exchange for sex and would see this as a 'good' thing.

Clearly what anthropologists working with HIV prevention are dealing with is a combination of a commitment and a difficult task, or as Herdt put it, 'a road filled with bumps and potholes and probably landmines' (Herdt 1987:3). I hope to have demonstrated that in this area, theory and practice appear wanting (Preston-Whyte 1993) and there is a need for us to continue to redefine professional 'good' whilst realizing there are no easy answers or simple guidelines and that we can come across 'no-win' situations where ethical problems remain unresolved. Since presenting earlier versions of this paper, I have slowly gained confidence in my belief that it is important to discuss such fieldwork problems. Only once did someone respond that I 'owed an apology to my research subjects'. The most common response was sympathy for my dilemma and stories of similar fieldwork experiences.

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¹⁴Both Chirwa and Koffi made these comments when I presented the paper at the workshop on qualitative methodologies for investigating sexual networking, February 1997, Durban, South Africa.

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