Anthropology Book Forum
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Disciplinary Progress, Progressivism, and Professionalism: Re-politicizing D/development paths forward

Review by David Fazzino

Anthropology and Development: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century
By: Katy Gardner and David Lewis
Pluto Press, 2015

In light of two decades of changes within and outside the practice and study of development, Katy Gardner and David Lewis build off their earlier edition of this same book, *Anthropology and Development*, by adding a clear and accessible review of the pertinent literature published in the last twenty years. They revisit old debates within anthropology between the applied and academic aspects of the discipline in the contemporary context of neoliberalism and its cooptation of radical critique. This second edition of *Anthropology and Development: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century* provides an excellent overview of the ideology and materiality of development. There is a clear discussion of the evolution of the concept of development both within and outside anthropology, highlighted by the decision to include a glossary (separated into two sections: 1. "Development jargon" and 2. "Anthropological jargon") and a list of acronyms prior to the prelude of the book. Many of the issues, debates, case studies, theories, and ethical considerations raised in this book overlapped with the topics I addressed this past semester in my teaching of *Applied Anthropology*; it is clear the book will make an excellent accompaniment to many undergraduate anthropology classes that seek to demonstrate the value of ethnography to re-politicize economic development, progress narratives, and neoliberalism generally.

In Chapter 1, "Understanding Development: Theory and Practice into the Twenty-First Century", Gardner and Lewis sketch out the history of development and the changes that it has undergone since

1996. Amongst these changes are increasing management of development by the private sector and the, "rise of non-Western donor countries such as China that offer low-income countries new choices in relation to aid and projects." (p. 9). Gardner and Lewis consider the 'aid industry' as something that is not going away, and hence do not put too much credence in "simply condemning aid and development work", but rather focus on, "how anthropology might be used to critique, improve and suggest alternatives to it" (p. 18). They trace out various theories of development from Darwin to Truman noting the pitfalls of ethnocentrism inherent in evolutionary perspectives in Dependency theory which deny agency to supposedly "underdeveloped" countries. Gardner and Lewis note that neoliberal perspectives have shifted much development work, at all scales, including among NGOs, towards an increased emphasis on auditing, managing of resources, and collecting results-driven data for donors (p. 36-37).

Chapter 2, "Applying Anthropology", delves into the history of anthropology highlighting key concepts and discussing the relationship between academic, applied, and engaged anthropology, with special stress on the importance of ethical issues that arise in the practice of anthropology. Rather than reify the boundary between applied and academic silos, Gardner and Lewis argue that emphasis should be placed on, "building a critically engaged, ethically grounded form of public anthropology that can transcend this unhelpfully dichotomous way of thinking. (p. 47).

In Chapter 3, "The Anthropology of Development, the authors first revisit their analysis of d/Development from 1996 and then move on to consider how, from 2000 onwards, the anthropology of development has shifted in order to avoid what some critics had predicted would be its inevitable demise. Development, through its agents and agencies, has morphed time and time again since the success of the projects pursued in its name is superficial, or as the authors put it, "appearance of success is the actual outcome, a performance for a particular audience, for projects involve particular conceptual and linguistic devices which inspire allegiance and conceal ideological differences (Mosse, 2005: 12)" (p. 107). Gardner and Lewis also note the new directions in the anthropology of development that, in some instances, return to the core theoretical works of our discipline, such as those written by Mauss and Foucault.

Chapter 4, "Anthropologists in Development: Access, Effects and Control", considers the liberating potential, following Habermas (1971 [1968]), of anthropological work to reframe development in light

of three lenses: access (p. 127), effects (p. 135) and control (p. 140). Throughout the text, but particularly in this chapter, Gardner and Lewis provide the reader with numerous case studies to support their framework for an analysis of development projects. This chapter also includes boxes which indicate key questions to consider for each of the three lenses: access (box p. 134), effects (box p. 137) and control (box p. 140). These lenses are particularly useful frameworks for utilizing critical thinking in regards to project development at all scales, further illustrating the value of anthropological analysis.

Chapter 5, "When Good Ideas Turn Bad: The Dominant Discourse Bites Back", highlights discursive shifts driven by the proponents of neoliberal ideologies who seek to depoliticize development by maintaining a veneer of concern over social inequality. This terminological redefinition should remind us of the debates among anthropologists concerning the concept of culture after lay commentators increasingly hijacked its use for their own purposes. Correspondingly, some anthropologists sought to distance the discipline from our core concept, however as Gardner and Lewis point out, "simply because some agencies or organisations are misusing or abusing terms or practices does not mean that in other contexts they have lost their bite" (p. 151).

In their final words to the reader, "Conclusion: Anthropology, Development and Twenty-First-Century Challenges", Gardner and Lewis again note the synergistic potential of applied and academic works in anthropology. It is in this conclusion where the authors forcibly lay out their call to action for anthropology, stating, "While the study of 'schemes of improvement' and 'Aidnography' has been useful, it is time for a newly invigorated anthropology of development that places poverty and inequality at the centre of the enquiry." (p.180). Gardner and Lewis lay out the challenges we, as scholars, face moving forward: first, to document and explain continuing and deepening inequality at all scales; second, to identify, analyse and challenge the anti-politics of development; third, to challenge normative frameworks, for example of sexuality, gender, race, and Western secularism (p. 181); finally, to describe alternative ways of seeing and doing, which aim to improve the wider wellbeing of populations but move beyond growth, development, and modernisation. (p. 182). They call on anthropologists to continue our ethnographic work, whether this be in applied or academic contexts, to transform our approach to and outlook on development, and to move beyond the projects of development. Given the various and sometimes contradictory renderings of development by differentially situated organizations, entities, activists, and scholars this book is a useful overview of

key debates, theoretical predispositions, and actions in the world that should be read by those who are active in the fields associated with development. By introducing important anthropological works, it also serves as a primer and a key foundational text ideal for undergraduates but also suitable for anyone seeking to acquire greater familiarity with the concept and study of development.

Works Cited:

Habermas, Juergen. 1971 [1968]. *Knowledge and human interests* (trans.) J. Shapiro. Boston: Beacon Press

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