

Review

Anthropology and Development: Culture, Morality and Politics in a Globalised World

By Emma Crew and Richard Axelby. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

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Anyone interested in anthropology and the international development aid sector will benefit from reading this book by Emma Crew and Richard Axelby with the title *Anthropology and Development: Culture, Morality and Politics in a Globalised World*. Development means different things to different people. While economists may perceive development to represent economic growth, sociologists may perceive development as the extent to which people targeted in developmental initiatives actually benefit from this development. Political scientists and environmentalists have other perceptions of development. However, this book is a brilliant account of how anthropology as discipline could make sense of development, underdevelopment and poverty. The authors also apply an anthropological way of looking at the reality of development work, through ethnography and the narratives of both the agents of developmental work and the recipients of development aid, to illustrate how global agencies and national and local initiatives try to respond to these challenges of human existence and coexistence. They try to answer questions such as, How do aid agencies work and what do they achieve? How does aid appear to those vulnerable people who received it? Is there some lasting improvement in the quality of life of so many households? What are the intended and unintended consequences of development policy and practice?

Six key conceptions of development run like a golden thread through the book, namely *development as easy*, *development as modernity*, *development as control*, *development as empowerment*, *development as discourse* and *development as moving beyond discourse*.

The nine chapters are well grounded with boxes and case studies to link perspectives and theories on human development with actual policies and practices. At least three chapters deal with the “politics of development”, i.e. Chapter three, *The social and political organisation of aid and development*; Chapter five, *Human rights and cultural fantasies*; and Chapter eight, *The politics of policy and practice*. Chapter one, two and four grapple with key concepts of how development brings hope and despair, how anthropologists have co-contributed to the compromises and complicity associated with development through the years and how notions about the poor are always elusive. One chapter (Chapter six), *Hierarchies of knowledge*, deals with technology in development and we know that no book in international development would be complete if it does not deal with the moralities of the market and with issues of production and exchange, which is addressed in Chapter seven.

The book also aptly illustrates how development through the ages could also be a negative phenomenon and be used as a tool for exploitation. With the sub-title, *culture, morality and politics*, one can appreciate the fact that the authors adopt a normative and alternative way of looking at development and do not just present a descriptive perspective on the world of development aid, the dominant paradigm for at least the first four so-called development decades (i.e. 1950s – 1980s). During these years the dominating development perspectives were modernisation, functional and structural theories, dependency theories of underdevelopment and the basic needs development approach. The pre-1990s era is therefore characterised by conventional growth-oriented strategies that were all structural by nature. This book is an attempt to expose some Eurocentric and Western-centred concepts with conventional development theories and approaches. It challenges these concepts, with an interest in international development not to neglect the human factor in development as well as human dimensions of development, i.e. culture, values, meanings, interpretations and life experiences.

The book clearly illustrates that development theories of the past are by nature often too universalistic, not allowing enough for the peculiar characteristics and specific contexts of developing societies and underdeveloped communities. Crewe and Axelby also illustrate how ethnography could help scholars of development studies to enhance our ways of looking at international and local development and our manners of reflecting on western and non-western ways of responding to challenges such as poverty, inequality, human deprivation and human fulfilment. The book is also an attempt to reflect on the nexus of society, state and market. In fact, these are currently still the driving forces that will determine contextuality, relativity and inclusion when reflecting on international development, which has grown into a world-shaping industry.

I do found some seminal development studies texts lacking in the references; to name but a few: Mahbub ul Haq, 1999: *Reflections on Human Development*; William Easterly, 2006: *The White Man's Burden, Why the West's efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good*; Jeffrey D. Sachs, 2005: *The end of poverty: economic possibilities for our time*, Manfred Max-Neef, 1991: *Human scale development, conception, application and further reflections*; and Amartya Sen, 1999: *Development as Freedom*. These sources could have enriched the anthropological perspectives on international development further and conceptually situated the controversies and contestations even better in an attempt to deconstruct the concept of development.

Perhaps the conclusion on p. 228 of Chapter nine, titled *Imagining the future*, summarises the contribution of the book the best:

“Anthropology has done much to uncover the complex realities that lie behind simplistic representations. In this sense, anthropology's role has been to complicate development. To reveal its tensions and contradictions, to acknowledge that it is difficult, to probe and ask questions. Development is not a simple process: it involves the convergence and divergence of different ideas, technologies, bodies of knowledge, actors and interests.”