

Books

Katy Gardner and David Lewis. *Anthropology and Development: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century*. London: Pluto Press. 2015 (Second Edition). 240 page. Price £24.99 (Paperback).

The book entitled *Anthropology and Development: Challenges for the Twenty-First Century* by Gardner and Lewis (2015) is the second edition of their previous book entitled *Anthropology, Development and the Post-Modern Challenge*, which was published in 1996. This second book incorporates recent issues that emerged since the first edition was released two decades ago. As the world keeps on changing, there are always new pressing issues that exert a significant influence upon development work to which an anthropological perspective has much to contribute.

As discussed by the authors in the Preface of the second edition of the book, the relevance of this book is two-pronged. Firstly, it wants to fill in the void left by the scarcity of published texts addressing views and debates concerning development and anthropology. Secondly, it serves as a personal attempt by the authors to make sense of their seemingly variegated insights and experiences stemming from different roles they assume as anthropologists, researchers, and development practitioners. Taking off from this vantage point, the book offers fresh insights for a range of readers that may include academicians, development professionals, researchers, students, and even laypersons who are simply interested to know about development.

Chapter One (“Understanding Development: Theory and Practice into the 21st Century”) tackles two general development theories and the recent global development trends that have unfolded in the past two decades. Chapter Two (“Applying Anthropology”) fleshes out the debate on pure versus applied anthropology and gives suggestions on how to make anthropology an applied science, engaged in development through advocacy, protest, and action. Chapter Three (“The Anthropology of Development”) walks the readers through a review of the anthropology of D/development (Hart, 2001), which distinguishes Development (post-World War II intervention in the name of “decolonisation”) from development (uneven development due to capitalism). Chapter Four (“Anthropologists in Development: Access, Effects, and Control”) sets sights on core issues affecting contemporary development such as questions on access, effects, and control. Lastly, Chapter Five (“When Good Ideas Turn Bad: The Dominant Discourse Bites Back”) deliberates on concepts that are originally radical with the potential to make a massive impact on society but end up being watered down when introduced into mainstream development, turning them into “buzzwords and fuzzwords” (Cornwall & Eade, 2010).

Broadly speaking, the book treads exquisitely through the intersections of anthropology and development, arguing that anthropology of development is feasible

despite some contested issues. Before the turn of the century, Sachs (1992) and Escobar (1995) predicted development to be on the brink of its death. However, as the authors point out, despite the criticism that anthropology could be hijacked and be utilised as a tool to maintain post-colonial power, development has survived the waves of peril and is still very much alive even up to this date. It is along this vein that the authors propound that since development work continues to persist, the contribution of anthropology in development should carry on as well. Non-involvement is not the only response in the midst of a highly contentious political climate of the development discourse. As such, Ferguson's (1997) description of development as the "evil twin" of anthropology has morphed into what is described by Gow (2002) as the "moral narrative".

The authors maintain the position that the anthropologists, with their training and exposure to anthropological methods, can leave the door wide open to "new ways of seeing and doing" (Gardner & Lewis 2015, p.2) by doing what they are best at – "studying the everyday worlds and cultures of ordinary people across the globe, revealing realities that are otherwise largely ignored" (Gardner & Lewis 2015, p.31). Through the application of anthropology in development, the right questions could be asked, and the oft-marginalised actors and beneficiaries are brought into the centre of the debate. Since a development project/programme follows through a certain timeframe, it may happen that some things could be overlooked. In this regard that an anthropologist could remind the team how development could be interpreted within a nuanced context, embracing the myriad culture-sensitive ways. The anthropologist can bring to light what others fail to see. Given this perspective, the authors are able to show forth the invaluable role of anthropology in the contemporary world of development, a niche that can be sometimes downplayed.

The book tackles critical nodes of discussion in contemporary development literature. To unpack carefully the issues, the authors first trace the historical contours of development from its origin in the Enlightenment period up to the present times. The book then zeroes in on two theories of development that could be viewed to be on the opposite sides of the spectrum, the first one being liberal (modernisation theory) while the latter one being radical (dependence theory). Although understandably, the book is not specifically designed to solely tackle development theories, it may have been better if the authors had also included a brief discussion on non-mainstream and non-Western development theories. Although these theories may drift off from the usual development models that typically go between a capitalist or a socialist track, these may create an impact in the long run on development practice and discourse especially because there is a surge of new powers among the countries that were initially touted to be from the 'South' or the 'Third World'. Examples may include the development model espoused by Mahatma Gandhi of India, who draws inspiration from Hindu principles and advocates a "system of strong self-reliant village units that would avoid the ills of centralisation and excessive industrialisation" (Herath 2009, p.7). I think that by infusing discussion with these, the authors could tap other sources of riches for the development discourse, especially those alternative models and mentalities that are different from the usual discussion of Western hegemonic development, a stance that the authors are critical of albeit not too radically.

A laudable aspect of the book is its macro analysis of development issues with careful regard extended to internationally-encompassing issues, such as sustainable development, migration, conflict, and securitisation (post-9/11 era), global financial crisis, the rise of emerging superpowers like the BRICs, and development trends like philanthropy work, corporate social responsibility, and microfinance. This also resonates with how anthropologists in recent times have started to deal more with macro issues (for example, the works of Aihwa Ong fleshes out ethnography on globalisation in the case of Malay women). Although they take on specific case studies, they locate these within a larger socio-political-economic context through the anthropological lens. As quoted in the Series Preface, it is to study “large issues explored in small places.” In doing so, the authors are able to demonstrate how anthropology has also progressed with the changes that have occurred in the 21st century. With the rapidity and magnitude of how change takes place, the anthropology of development has been accommodated in a more welcoming manner into mainstream development.

Not resting upon the discussion on pure theoretical conjectures, the other edge of the book is the fine weaving of theory and praxis. The authors couple the theoretical underpinnings they discuss with concrete case studies and development experiences in order to situate these better within the purview of 21st century development work. Given this style, it makes the book more accessible and understandable to a wider range of readers, especially appealing perhaps to readers whose background may not be academic. It also makes the concepts and thoughts the authors discuss easier to grasp as the examples make these more visual, so to speak. By taking a cue from and interweaving the authors’ arguments with the latest ethnographic researches, the authors are also able to demonstrate the extent to which the discipline of anthropology is willing to traverse through in order to keep up with the pace with the world and to study these new frontiers in the development arena.

Another aspect of the book that is commendable is the clarity of the positions the authors assume *vis-à-vis* the development discourse. For instance, they clearly discuss how they deviate from the argument of Sachs and Escobar when the latter argued that development work is just but a means of the developed countries to maintain post-colonial influence among the developing countries. In my perspective, the balanced stance the authors take on – that is, merging anthropology and development – is a more feasible and healthy approach rather than disputing one discipline or the other, thereby creating a clear wedge between the two. In this world whereby the society is highly characterised by hybrid thoughts, syncretism, and interdisciplinarity, it might be better to come up with criticisms that are accompanied by more attainable alternatives because definitely there is much to learn from other disciplines. In doing away with the usual binaries, the authors are able to paint reality that is oftentimes replete with seemingly contrasting ideas but which are highly interconnected. Thus, separating anthropology from development (or vice versa) could lead to a one-dimensional way of seeing things.

One gap that I see in the discussion is perhaps the lack of depth on how new global trends could exert an influence on the development discourse. For instance, the authors only mention the rise of emerging powers such as China, but they do not go in detail on how these could influence the future unfolding of development. Although discussions on development are highly political within the ambit of core-periphery imbalances in which

the so-called Global North plays a central role, it is interesting to read how the rising superpowers, especially those that were categorised before as ‘developing’, may dictate the future of development. In this way, there is continuity in the discussion on neo-colonialism given the new geographies of power. It would also show how concretely these previously ‘victim’ countries are fighting for their agency towards autonomy in their decisions and actions.

To conclude, this book is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in 21st development practice and literature/work. The anthropological ponderings offered in this book would entice one to continue with his/her pursuit of development amidst frustrating realities at times. This tightly knit juxtaposition of anthropology and development is a very refreshing one.

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