

## Book Review

Emma Crewe & Elizabeth Harrison, *Whose Development? An Ethnography of Aid*, London & New York: Zed Books, 2002; 241 pp; ISBN: 1856496066

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Emma Crewe and Elizabeth Harrison are two experienced female development anthropologists and practitioners who have worked with different NGOs and multilateral development programs, such as the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Throughout their work, they have gained an enormous amount of experience and unique opportunities to observe the dynamics within development programs and the relations amongst the aid workers who belong to different backgrounds. The book offers a rich source of empirical materials for those who seek to have an idea of how these development programs function from within. The authors focus on the policy and practice of aid management amongst developers and their beneficiaries. They try to bring to our attention to gender issues that exist in development discourse and practices. The authors have succeeded in tracing the footprints of the inequalities that women face against masculine power, and male-dominated policies in development programs. The two authors have faced no difficulties in finding neutral high grounds to make this observation concerning genders despite belonging to the ‘other gender’ crowd. But the fact that they are both women working in male-dominated development programs prevented them from advancing a neutral stand, or in questioning the legitimacy or the real intentions behind the development programs and the political agendas of the imperial powers behind these development programs. Instead, they have chosen to resort to hiding behind the explanations and theories of some of the anthropologist who are ‘dubbed’ in their fields as radicals such as Escobar and Ferguson. Thus, throughout the book one will see a forth and back pattern in approaching the different issues. In fact, the authors’ assertion that their mission is not to take side or provide solutions undermines their epistemological standpoint.

The reader will not be able to find a deep discussion of development itself. The authors have skimmed the surface of development debate and chose to base their observations in two major development projects: Fish Farming and Stove Development in Intermediate Technology, as the two main case studies. The aim of Fish Farming was to improve nutrition and generate income, while the Stove Development program was intended to improve economies, preserve forests and lower pollution levels. Through an analysis of these two programs, the two writers have tried to portray the developers and their affiliates including policy makers and beneficiaries as a community that are “conceptually bounded” (p. 6) by distinct social relations, ideologies, assumptions and practices. By studying these

“conceptually bounded groups” (p. 6), according to the authors, ethnography of aid could be clearly discerned. By following this approach, the authors try to achieve two goals, as they claim. First, to show that development is influenced by ideas and assumptions but not in a predetermined way. Second, the authors aimed to introduce a less-polarized and essentializing view of development intervention (Chapter 1). It is arguable how the first goal can be achieved. It could be possible that some of the developers and their extensions have assumptions and ideas that influence development in a way that is not predetermined. But these “conceptually bounded groups” do not form the whole picture of development alone. Such a claim will show developers as independent agents who run these programs and are incommunicado with the donor super powers that stand behind the curtains. This is an attempt by the two authors to depoliticize the whole development intervention processes as Ferguson (cited in the book) explains in describing IMF interventions in Lesotho in this same book (p.17). This also shows that the authors’ claims to neutrality and their analysis of circumstances have been fortuitously undermined.

In this book there is a clear indication that developers seem to blame the culture and tradition of aid beneficiaries as “barrier to development” whenever the program fails at some level, and that this attitude is a reproduction of colonial denigration of ‘customs of the native’ (p. 15). The authors indirectly criticize both Neo-liberal and Marxist theories for sharing evolutionist presuppositions, especially social evolution that is seen as “fundamentally escaping the task of making sense of other worlds, and evolution itself justifies intervention of European colonialism and imperialism” (p. 28). Later, the authors indicate that there are traditions that set back development plans such as witchcraft in Malawi (pp. 45, 46). Then, ironically, they criticize the fact that there are traditions which, developers explicitly argue, they would not want to interfere with, especially traditions that involve gender relations and inequalities. Here, the authors find it difficult to reconcile development with (in)equality. Can development be achieved in an atmosphere where inequality is either reproduced or allowed to thrive? Thus, by default they legitimize the ‘so far criticized’ evolutionist intervention, because it is for the benefit of women. Cultural intervention would remain as intervention even if it was for the benefit of both genders and legitimizing cultural evolution is a mere act of Evolutionism.

Further, the authors refuse the “ecofeminist” claim that science is being used to dominate both women and nature and accuse it of being conspiratorial and simplistic and admit the existence of inequalities due to the male-centered nature of technology. This is because men are in charge of decision making and planning. The authors note that “the control over how aid is spent is disproportionately in the hands of men in bureaucracies, communities, and households (p.47) are another reason of the inequalities that exist. Yet in the end of the book the authors state that there are no heroes or villains among the units of analysis (case studies, development practitioners, donors) of this book because their aim was not to blame or flush out scapegoats (p.194).

Despite all these criticisms, this book remains very useful, and is rich with up-to-date data. It provides a unique way of looking at development from within. But the readers who seek answers to questions about politics and power schemes within development and question the development discourse itself will have to look elsewhere.