

Pottier, Johan, Alan Bicker and Paul Sillitoe. (eds.), (2003), Negotiating Local Knowledge: Power and Identity in Development, London: Pluto Press. 322 pp. £50 (cloth), £11.99 (paper). ISBN: 0 7453 2007 4 (cloth), 0 7453 2006 6 (paper).

Negotiating Local Knowledge: Power and Identity in Development is interesting, ambitious and at times frustrating. A collection of essays that critically deal with the role and place of indigenous knowledge in development practice, it tells us as much about the current concerns of the discipline of anthropology as it does about the continued failures of the development enterprise. The book contains several excellent, engrossing chapters while others are less reader-friendly, with priority given to esoteric jargon and infinite acronyms.

The book deals with indigenous knowledge as both a set of practices and cultural beliefs that are drawn from participatory research approaches and as trope within development discourses. Chapters focus on various elements of development, including disaster aid in Montserrat, construction work in Yemen, nuclear information in India, development aid in Bolivia, foreign military involvement in Eastern Zaire, conflict among development stakeholders in Papua New Guinea, environmental conservation projects in the Philippines, conceptualisations of post-traumatic stress disorder in Sri Lanka, competing land claims in Australia, the exit strategy of a multi-national oil company in Wales, Buddhist strategies for coping for modernity in China, narratives around a World Bank project in Uganda, and land claims over competing interests between local tourist developers and fishing communities in Portugal. What holds these chapters together, according to the introductory chapter, is their thematic commitment to examining the "knowledge interface" between "locals" and "outsiders" as well as a methodological commitment to exploring the role of the researcher in ethnography.

The term "indigenous knowledge" -- used also by contributors to the book as local knowledge, citizen knowledge, traditional knowledge, people's knowledge, folk knowledge, each with subtle differences as formulated in different contexts -- has provoked criticism from development "experts" as static, unchanging, bounded and as unscientific. In Pottier's introductory chapter, it is argued that that development cannot be meaningful unless indigenous knowledge is integrated into the development process. Pottier goes on to map out the escape plan for addressing the power imbalance between the knowledge of development brokers (outsiders) and the knowledge systems of locals, and the role of the anthropologist in bridging this divide. In doing so, concepts that are to be illustrated and discussed by the book's contributors are introduced. Notions of "translation", "disambiguation", "miscommunication", "strategic manipulation", and "local critique of development" are discussed as tools for problematising the local-outsider dichotomy. The book is structured around this clustering of concepts and attempts to respond to the central assumption that knowledge production in "interface" contexts should be seen as a process of negotiated power. Different categories of actors occupy different arenas of space, time and power, and as such negotiate in politically charged and unequal interactions. Many of the contributions, for example, illustrate the disambiguation undergone by "polysemic local concepts" when they are appropriated and operationalised by global actors, or as they become institutionalised into national politics.

This conceptual richness, and the possibility of speaking to other academic literatures, are undermined as several chapters adopt concepts not introduced in the introduction. Moreover, looking beyond the colon to the book's subtitle, several chapters do not discuss the relationship between power and identity, nor do the editors provide guiding definitions. Development is also left undefined, and unexamined. As a result, the claim that "the incorporation of external/global elements in local knowledges receives much attention in this volume" (p. 5) actually falls on deaf ears

without a careful reading of the endnotes. The contribution of Argenti-Pillen challenges this claim in arguing that, if by "global" we mean familiarity with foreign languages and cultures, then the category "global" is better used to designate local recipients of development rather than the so-called experts. Development experts, she goes on to argue, usually only fluent in one language and only willing to operate along ethnocentric schemes of thought, action and knowledge production, can be best described as "well travelled locals". Several chapters make use of concepts not introduced in the introduction, among them empowerment, disempowerment, power, hegemony, governmentality, entitlement, resistance, genocide and terrorism. It is in these chapters, in particular Pottier's on Eastern Zaire, and Skinner on Montserrat make the lack of conceptual precision around the main themes of the book -- *development, power, and identity* -- all the more puzzling. Each of these contributions are useful in that they provide historical and contextualised knowledge that global operations lack and locals possess, adding irony to the lack of credentials and short-sightedness of global actors whose decisions can mean life or death for locals. The theoretical importance of the book as one designed to integrate indigenous knowledge into the development process is undermined by this lack of conceptual rigour. The practical import is also limited when examples of the gap between international interventions and local knowledge continue to play out, as is currently the case with the work of the newly-created International Criminal Court in Northern Uganda.

Methodologically, the book falls short of its stated goal of exploring the role of the anthropologist in bridging the knowledge interface between global and local. Ethnographic research, by its very nature, is tied up in relations of power and identity. The opportunity to focus on the relationship between power, identity and anthropology appears to have been missed. We, the readers, are privileged to have the products of the ethnographic contributions but we receive no insight into the process of ethnography and the relationship between power, identity, and research. Fieldwork in all disciplines is by its very nature politicised and the silence of Negotiating Local Knowledge on the actual research encounter between global and local actors is disappointing; it also limits the methodological usefulness of the book. Adding insult to this injury is the fact that some of the contributions are brilliantly researched and presented, while others read like descriptive commentaries of personal experiences, paying scant attention to data collection.

More positively, the book does advance understanding of the importance of the knowledge interface between international actors and national and local settings. As such it will be a useful book to teachers and students of anthropology, cultural studies, development studies, sociology and political studies. Feminist research courses could adopt certain chapters as examples of what not to do. In addition, the geographic spread of the book, from Bolivia to China, Sri Lanka to Wales, and from Australia to Zaire provide good examples of the practice of local knowledges from all corners of the globe. This is a book, despite its shortcomings, that should be read by development practitioners and other international actors as they are the ones who would benefit most from seeing, hearing and listening to "locals" as they are rather than how they are perceived to be.

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