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## Book Reviews

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Sarah Michael, *Undermining Development: The Absence of Power among Local NGOs in Africa*. Oxford and Bloomington, MD: James Currey Publishers/Indiana University Press, 2004. xi + 206 pp. £12.95 paperback.

D. Rajasekhar, *Poverty Alleviation Strategies of NGOs*. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2004. xiii + 182 pp. Rs 400 hardback.

William E. DeMars, *NGOs and Transnational Networks: Wild Cards in World Politics*. London/Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2005. vi + 250 pp. £15.99 paperback.

Jim Igoe and Tim Kelsall (eds) *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: African NGOs, Donors and the States*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005. xvii + 309 pp. \$40.00 paperback.

Vicky Mancuso Brehm with Emma Harris-Curtis, Luciano Padrão and Martin Tanner, *Autonomy or Dependence? Case Studies of North-South Partnerships*. Oxford: INTRAC, 2004. vi + 207 pp. £16.95 paperback.

Alnoor Ebrahim, *NGOs and Organizational Change: Discourse, Reporting, and Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. x + 181 pp. £40.00/\$55.00 hardback, £19.99/\$34.99 paperback.

These six books show that the study of non-governmental organizations is alive and well; its subject matter, however, has fallen upon harder times. In the early 1990s, NGOs were seen as an alternative to corrupt states and a slow and increasingly marginalized UN system. They were, it was argued, close to the local population(s), efficient and innovative in service delivery, and driven by moral concern and solidarity. In former communist countries and dictatorships, they could even become the harbingers of a new and vibrant civil society. As a result, NGOs could play a central role in bringing about peace, democratization, and development. To some, NGOs almost became coterminous with civil society.

Currently, NGOs receive fierce criticism for imposing their own agendas, promoting institutional survival over the well-being of local populations, and undermining the state or other local institutions. In addition, post 9/11 security issues trump their agendas and advocacy activities. More donor monies are, once again, flowing to the coffers of state governments, many of which show less interest in human rights and democracy. President Bush has even clearly stated that US NGOs constitute 'an arm' of the US government, thus endangering the independence that many NGOs so cherish.

Beneath their differences, both earlier praise and current criticism share strong normative assumptions about the role of civil society and the state in political and economic development. This review first compares the contents of each book, then addresses their commonalities and differences and demonstrates how their normative criticism will influence research on NGOs in terms of ontology, epistemology, methodology and practical application.

Sarah Michael's *Undermining Development: The Absence of Power among Local NGOs in Africa* is exemplary for current criticism. Based on a comparative analysis of powerful NGOs in Asia and Latin America and more than a hundred interviews with local NGO managers in Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Senegal, Michael studies why African NGOs have remained so weak. On the basis of this research, she develops a fourfold strategy to help local NGOs gain power. First, they should create their own 'development space', by which she means their own area of expertise, or niche. 'NGOs need to find out what they are good at, build up their strengths, and stick with it' (p. 147). Following donor trends and demands frequently leads to a lack of focus and dispersal of resources. Powerful NGOs are often able not only to develop expertise but change the rules of the development game through new activities, publications, media attention and consultancies. Second, local NGOs should create alternative funding sources independent from donors instead of

using membership fees, executive boards, consultancies, training and other activities. Third, local NGOs should build extensive links with other development actors, especially non-operational Northern NGOs, because operational international NGOs often become competitors for funds. Local media, private enterprise, and in particular development conferences and forums can also facilitate establishing such links. Fourth, local NGOs are well placed to address local political issues that international NGOs hesitate to address. This does not imply engaging in party politics but rather taking on economic and social issues, because local NGOs often have formal and informal contacts with local leadership and different state institutions that international NGOs and donor institutions lack.

Whereas I appreciate that Michael offers practical advice for strengthening local NGOs, I felt increasingly uncomfortable with her book. She does not explain in detail how more powerful local NGOs would actually be able to foster development and stability. Why, for example, would local NGOs not be corrupt? How powerful should local NGOs really be to address the power imbalance between givers and recipients, as well as between governing elites and their constituent communities? Do NGOs actually possess legitimacy in the eyes of the beneficiaries they say they represent? Moreover, other parts of civil society, such as religious and labour movements, co-operatives, and traditional leadership may also play crucial roles. Michael takes an implicit neo-Tocquevillean view, assuming that NGOs can bring about voluntary association and democratic participation and that this will be enough to strengthen civil society and foster democratic development.

In contrast, Igoe and Kelsall thoroughly problematize the neo-Tocquevillean perspective on NGOs in their edited volume *Between a Rock and a Hard Place: African NGOs, Donors, and the State*. Using thick description and critical theory, ten ethnographers detail the functioning of NGOs and their interaction with local communities, state institutions, and donors in countries all over Africa. The authors 'reveal that African civil society is a murkier and less stable place than most civil society theories would suggest' (p. 3). It is not just that the lines between state and society have blurred, it is also that state and society are simply not as separate from each other as Tocquevillean theory expects. The authors thus explain how normative discourses surrounding NGOs have questionable purchase on local realities but nevertheless play a crucial role in shaping the environment in which NGOs are active (p. 20).

The authors describe the internal politics of specific NGOs and the struggle for resources in Zimbabwe, Cape Verde, Zanzibar and Mali, as well as the resistance of local people to NGO interventions (for example, in Guinea Bissau and mainland Tanzania). They observe the opportunistic pursuit of donor money by NGO leaders in the DRC, Tanzania, and Guinea Bissau and how NGO leaders brief their constituents on the rhetoric of donor-driven paradigms in Cape Verde (p. 21). They also reveal the widely differing perceptions and cultural meanings behind institutions and events in ways that most Western development workers will not expect. For example, they document the spiritual beliefs of different local communities and how these influence environmental protection: 'white people take away our protective spirits that live in our forests'.

The authors point out how different state institutions variously attempt to co-opt, imitate, obstruct, weaken and control NGOs and how these NGOs adapt and attempt to influence the state. Sometimes state institutions and NGOs vie for the same donor resources. In a similar vein, local staff members often opportunistically see NGOs and state institutions as either alternative or supplemental income opportunities. Local populations may perceive interventions by NGOs and states in agriculture, for example, as virtually indistinguishable. Some NGOs even inadvertently support the marginalization of minority groups, such as nomads, by the state. As a result, the outcomes from NGO activities can differ considerably from stated goals.

DeMars treats the 'inadvertent consequences' of NGO action very seriously as indicated by his title: *NGOs and Transnational Networks: Wild Cards in World Politics*. He argues that principled, normative claims about right and wrong, justice and injustice, frequently take attention away from how NGOs operate in networks to achieve results. DeMars shows that the outcomes of NGO action are determined less by the four common theoretical distinctions than usually assumed. First, the common distinction between international and grassroots NGOs actually obscures the influence of donors or state institutions. Second, the difference between advocacy and service

NGOs is less useful, because political elites will try to use both types of organizations to their own advantage. Third, the common distinction between issue areas detracts attention from side effects in other areas. Finally, attention to global norms as articulated in treaties and international conferences often fails to address how the impact of these norms differs from context to context. Instead, NGO outcomes are shaped to a far greater extent by local struggles to capture, deploy against others, or neutralize the political impact of NGO operations (p. 32).

In a highly original analysis, DeMars details how NGOs make causal claims about their activities that tend to hide their total impact and the particularities of the contexts in which they operate. As an alternative, he develops a structural theory of NGOs, showing that the stated goals of NGOs only partially explain their outcomes and obscure their political contexts. He perceives that NGOs operate not only in networks of donors, states and private enterprises but also of criminals, warlords, etc. These other 'network partners' often view NGOs as prizes to capture or threats to suppress (p. 43). All these parties, NGOs included, have their own open, salient agendas and their own hidden agendas. NGOs can gain autonomy if they are able to play these actors against each other, but they can also be co-opted by these actors. As a consequence, formal goals of NGOs and normative theory tell little about the actual outcomes of NGO activity.

DeMars's book is bound to raise controversy. His creativity lies in addressing side effects as the main outcomes and explaining how these come about, which makes him deviate from those scholars that take the normative assertions of NGOs as their starting point for analysis. Some may argue that he generalizes too much about NGOs. His elaborate case studies can also be criticized; for example, when he discusses the impact of NGOs on democratization in Latin America, he fails to mention the importance of land reform. Likewise, in his criticism of the technocratic character of international population policies, he overlooks the millions of unwanted births in the developing world. Nevertheless, this criticism is small stuff compared with the way in which DeMars sheds new light on the study of NGOs.

Vicky Mancuso Brehm also examines networks in her edited volume *Autonomy or Dependence? Case Studies of North-South NGO Partnerships*. But whereas DeMars focuses on networks of NGOs to study their less visible political aspects, Mancuso Brehm and her co-authors concentrate more on three Northern NGOs and their local counterparts.

Mancuso Brehm indicates that partnership is a contested concept. She also notices 'a lack of in-depth case studies of partnerships in practice' (p. 11). She and her co-authors address this dearth by comparing Northern and Southern perspectives on partnership. They find considerable realism in Southern NGOs, where staff members know and accept that they are in an unequal relationship, but find it important to work towards a more balanced relationship. Frequently, Southern NGO staff may lack self-confidence with regard to their Northern counterparts, but they nevertheless feel they have more to contribute than is acknowledged. Without generalizing too much, Mancuso Brehm gives useful advice to those practitioners who want to improve their relationships with local partner NGOs. Finally, her work at the micro level uncovers a positive tendency in development co-operation: 'the profile of North-South partnerships will show a gradual trend away from funding alone and toward joint working on specific themes, with a greater emphasis on advocacy and opportunities for policy dialogue across international borders' (p. 168).

With *Poverty Alleviation Strategies of NGOs*, D. Rajasekhar has written an interesting book about poverty in India. His central hypothesis is that 'while the poor must be central actors in any attempt to bring about a reduction in . . . poverty . . . the endogenous development of the poor by the poor is not possible' (p. v). He argues that the emergence of NGOs in India raises hope that these organizations can constitute an important channel for addressing the needs of the poor and discusses the activities of two NGOs. In very detailed case studies, based on participatory action research methods, he analyses the situation of the poor from their perspective. Rajasekhar also studies in detail the execution and impact of NGO poverty alleviation strategies and what other (local) organizations could do. Moreover, he describes the strategies the poor themselves develop, such as gaining leverage by organizing themselves for gang labour. Yet, the poor themselves do not realize that *panchayats* (local political bodies), government programmes and banks, for

example for small loans and credit, could also help, but frequently neglect the poorest of the poor. Rajasekhar describes how the NGOs would be more effective in poverty reduction if they could link up with those institutions. Implicitly, Rajasekhar, like many authors reviewed here, shows the importance of the political aspects of the networks of organizations that these NGOs must engage with. Of all the authors, Rajasekhar describes most fully the field situation and activities of NGOs; it is therefore a missed opportunity that he barely links his analysis with the internal functioning and decision-making of the two NGOs.

Alnoor Ebrahim also examines two Indian NGOs, but his imaginative monograph *NGOs and Organizational Change: Discourse, Reporting, and Learning* focuses more on the interaction between internal management and the international networks of donors. He shows that the traditional view of NGOs depending on donor monies should be revised to reflect the reality that the funders are equally dependent on NGO information and successes. In other words, there is a higher degree of interdependence between the two types of actors than usually acknowledged, which simultaneously leads to both co-operative and antagonistic relationships. In order to show successes to their constituencies, funding agencies usually prefer quantitative data on short-term and measurable outputs at the expense of less certain processes and outcomes concerning longer-term political and social change. This preference is reflected in the information demands and reporting systems they promote, including the logical framework. Ebrahim shows how such reporting systems deeply influence not only what NGOs do, but also how they think and learn about what they do. Even though NGOs often resist this donor impact, monitoring and learning systems are a core part of NGO–funder relationships. Yet, these systems often fail to take into account the broader long-term social and political changes and the roles that the NGOs can play in them, so that only one-sided technocratic learning occurs.

Although their methodological approaches to the study of NGOs differ considerably, the authors regularly touch on similar themes, such as the negative impact of donors, weak local counterparts, changing state–society relations and the negative consequences of NGO action. In addition, they also base their work on a relatively small corpus of authors, who have often written about both development and NGO management (such as Chambers, Edwards, Escobar, Ferguson, Fowler, Hulme, Sen and Smillie). Such a small corpus suggests that the field of NGO studies is still relatively young and small. In order to know current discourses — or get published — it pays to know these authors well.

Furthermore, the books reviewed all have a clear eye for paradoxes: NGOs raise high hopes, but rarely fulfil them. Normative theories may not fit local realities, yet they profoundly shape the environment in which NGOs and their counterparts are active. The word partner is often used among different types of NGOs, but obscures the actual power inequalities. NGOs may frequently not receive the results they want; they nevertheless still achieve important outcomes. Could it be that NGOs become part of a dynamic they rarely fully understand? If so, can we build on these six volumes to change the study of NGOs and their activities?

Given their high degree of criticism of NGOs, these books point towards a research programme that should cast a wide net encompassing different types of NGOs, their networks, and their contexts. Moreover, the ‘inadvertent consequences’ suggest that we need to look at NGOs in new ways to assess their less visible impacts. In particular these books suggest that we should reassess normative theory on NGOs and state–civil society relations. It thus seems logical that such research should combine ontological, epistemological, methodological and practical aspects.

## Ontology

Should scholars and NGO management revisit their basic assumptions about the nature of the world? Emphasis on lack of success and unintended side effects strongly suggests that NGOs get caught up in dynamics they do not fully comprehend. NGO goals and normative theory — which have in common that they elucidate how the world should be and, hence, which direction action

should take — fail to explain the behaviour of NGOs and their contexts. Failure to understand societal or organizational dynamics — change in direction over time — implies that assumptions of space (or in social science, spatial metaphors) need to be reconsidered.

Normative theory, such as neo-Toquevillean theory, frequently uses a spatial metaphor as it squarely places international and local NGOs within civil society. NGOs and other civil society actors are perceived to work from the bottom up, while government and UN organizations mainly work top down. In this respect, it is useful to note that NGOs are defined negatively, by what they are not — governmental organizations. Similarly, civil society is defined as the space between the family and the state — put differently, as neither government nor family. Both terms thus share an imaginary spatial position opposite to the state. Yet, just like NGOs and civil society, the state is hardly a monolithic entity in practice.

It is important to note the hidden normative assumption in these spatial positions; with the national level above, generally represented by the state or more specifically its government on top, with local NGOs operating beneath and the local population at the bottom. But this vertical view hides the many different directions in which organizational relationships can evolve. First, local NGOs can link up directly with international actors — as happened, for example, with human rights campaigns in Argentina — in a network that operates both under and over state institutions. Second, horizontal linkages with other NGOs become important. In addition, NGOs can also link up with different kinds of social or religious movements or other local actors. In sum, NGOs and their networks may simultaneously extend themselves in many different directions. They can be local and global at the same time. This multi-directionality is reflected in these six books by their frequent use of such non-hierarchical terms as networks and transnationalism, which suggest that the vertical relationship in society is increasingly just one among many other relationships, in which NGOs and other societal actors coexist or fight for space.

States are then 'better viewed not in opposition to something called "society," but as themselves composed of bundles of social practices, every bit as "local" in their social situatedness and materiality as any other' (Ferguson, 2004). The 'local' level may then, for example, partly consist of wily local NGO staff that know how to link up with international and other actors, who know how to mouth donor rhetoric, and it may in part still consist of 'authentic' voiceless poor that need support, or anything between. Likewise civil society may largely be made up of international organizations in some countries, while consisting of transnational networks in others, or governments may promote their own NGOs (Quangos or GONGOs). In addition, in humanitarian crises or countries with weak governments, the UN and large NGOs can take over many governmental functions. A crucial central research question is then not just how the state and civil society oppose each other, but how they simultaneously link up or overlap, compete or co-operate, or even constitute each other.

The central point is that NGOs engage simultaneously with many partners, and, as several authors reviewed here emphasize, power relationships within networks of organizations play a crucial role in achieving different results. NGOs cannot go it alone and are not complete masters of their own fate. They and their counterparts may have hidden agendas or positions, which normative theory and formal goals rarely acknowledge. For further research it will be crucial to analyse the evolving relationships and forms of transnational power that evolve in these networks, because these are central to explaining inadvertent consequences. Hence, the actual relationships between state and civil society, as well as the impact of NGOs, are first and foremost an issue of empirical research.

## **Epistemology**

The inadvertent consequences suggest that much of current analysis is incomplete. In different ways, DeMars and Ebrahim have both attempted to broaden the analysis of NGOs by including the politics of transnational multi-level networks. With NGOs it does not suffice to confine research to just one issue area or academic discipline. In addition, local perceptions and realities

may differ from normative theory, especially as it has been formulated in the North. Hence, new multi-disciplinary theory should be developed, giving more attention to specific contexts. In this respect, De Mars, Ebrahim, Igoe and Kelsall provide useful suggestions on how to understand the historical and cultural contexts of NGOs.

Further, the organizational sciences have deeply studied power in and around organizations and they have developed noteworthy network theory as well. Some organizational scholars do take historical and cultural perspectives very seriously. Yet, only Ebrahim, and to a far lesser extent Michael and Mancuso Brehm, have employed organizational theory. The ethnological, historical approaches and organizational theory may at first glance not seem natural bedfellows, but the study of NGOs could benefit from more interaction among them.

Finally, the complexity of the organizational and political dynamics in transnational networks can be so pervasive that scholars trying to enhance their understanding will often need 'an acceptance of things unfinished and a subtle envisioning of the contradictions of political engagement' (Igoe and Kelsall, pp. 284, 300).

## **Methodology**

Part of my discomfort with Michael stems from her research methodology. Her interviews concentrate on a large number of organizations, thus providing a snapshot of the NGO community. Her methodology, however, prevents detailed study of individual NGOs making it less easy to interrogate how the NGO interacts with the history of a region. Moreover, the people within the NGO are only examined as background detail (see Igoe and Kelsall, p. 37). Finally, such a methodology fails to capture the limited reach of normative theory and overemphasizes formal organizational goals, without showing the transnational network aspects or multiple hidden agendas that can lead to unexpected consequences. Hence, research on NGOs should ideally be comparative, longitudinal, with multi-site studies and heavy attention to contexts and local perceptions (in terms of resistance and co-operation) over time. Participatory action research, which Rajasekhar uses so well to understand local context, can also be applied more often, but it should be linked explicitly to the study of internal management of NGOs and the networks in which they operate.

## **Praxis**

It is perhaps more than an irony that the ethnologists in the Igoe and Kelsall book seem to know the local context and activities of NGOs best, but come up with the least advice. On the one hand, this may simply reflect the traditional view that ethnologists should not interfere with their traditional study object: other cultures. On the other, it seems that the more one knows about the local context, the harder it becomes to make general statements for either direct practical improvement or general normative theory. It may also be that critical theory and historical and ethnological analysis go well together, but are hard to instrumentalize for practice, especially when they emphasize structural aspects of NGO behaviour. Yet, action informed by theory, even if that is just knowing the limits of existing theory, may be useful. Moreover, practice can also help to inform theory. Scholars are thus likely to be as much participants as observers in future research.

In conclusion, the cliché that Northern NGOs should work themselves out of a job — so that local actors can take over — is refuted by current research, which suggests that NGOs, as part of multi-level transnational networks, are here to stay. Within these networks their roles and impact may shift, for example with Northern organizations focusing more on advocacy and international policy. Through transnational networks, NGOs can oil the wheels of international co-operation, but the question will always be how and for whom? NGOs will have to improve their work, but they may do so in ways not expected by more 'vertical' normative theory.

## Reference

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**Dennis Dijkzeul**

The Institute for International Law of Peace and Armed Conflict (IFHV), NA 02/29, Ruhr Universität Bochum, 44780 Bochum, Germany. E-mail: dennis.dijkzeul@rub.de

**Uma Kothari (ed.), *A Radical History of Development Studies: Individuals, Institutions and Ideologies*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2005. viii + 232 pp. £55.00/\$85.00 hardback, £17.95/\$27.50 paperback.**

**David Simon (ed.), *Fifty Key Thinkers on Development*. London and New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis, 2006. xii + 301 pp. £12.99 paperback.**

If it is agreed that development studies cannot claim to be a distinct and separate academic discipline, the question arises how to understand and teach the amorphous and rapidly expanding complex of ideas that parade under the label. Standard textbook presentations start with modernization theory, followed by theories of underdevelopment and culminate in neo-liberalism, all portrayed in time-bound periods of intellectual hegemony. This approach is increasingly seen to be problematic, if not unsatisfactory, as if ideas and contributions do not interact with each other and do not maintain their relevance in different periods of time or under changing conditions. Kothari in her introduction provides some useful starting points for developing a new approach.

First, development itself can be seen in different ways: as visions and measures of progressive change; as historical change processes; and as deliberate efforts at progress. The latter can be divided into studying: the structure of agency; the architecture of policy and governance; and the building skills and competences for development policy and management. In all areas the discussion can range interactively from local to global levels.

Second, it is useful to distinguish between types of knowledge and types of audience. Instrumental knowledge can be seen as professional work for an academic audience or for its policy implications for an audience outside the academic world. Reflexive knowledge for academia tends to be critical or public — for outside consumption. Moreover contributors can play different roles over time depending upon conditions of access to information (pure research vs. consultancy mode) or personal interest. Nowadays teaching and research requirements go hand in hand, often at the cost of long-term overseas work. Where a considerable part of the student body hails from developing countries in development studies institutes, teaching staff run the risk of being seen as increasingly out of touch with the real world.

Kothari's book is divided into two parts. First, Harriss, Kothari, Chambers and Hayter weave their personal history with institutions. Harriss capably reviews the history of individuals, locations and contributions in the field. A rough classification goes from early promise, to hubris and to, as yet doubtful, recovery. After extensive field work in South Asia Harriss has become an academic institution builder in East Anglia and London, and a respected journal editor.

Kothari looks more precisely at the colonial legacy and the dichotomy that has developed between colonialism — which was declared all bad, and development — which was all about doing good, even though there has been a good deal of continuity between the late colonial period and the early independence period in terms of personnel and activities. Chambers has always felt marginal as an academic (never lecturing and refused a professorship in Sussex), yet he is a past master and extremely successful in identifying and exploiting interstices between disciplines, in identifying gaps and in opening up new fields. He advocates more 'nomadism' for teaching staff to avoid repetitive teaching which becomes a 'catechism' that reduces reflexive self-criticism. However, the freedom to choose has become very constrained and without a firm institutional

base, younger staff may have to go into consultancy mode to survive, with attendant restrictions on the wider use of resulting output. Hayter's contribution to this volume is substandard, as she remains stuck in myopic views from the other side of the barricades.

The second part of the book focuses on ideas and ideologies. Bernstein deals with development studies and the Marxists. The early period saw big issues and big ideas. There is the example of the Soviet block and later of China. In as far as many developing countries opted for state-led development and the building of socialism, it is hardly surprising that many development practitioners had Marxist sympathies. That shifted with the rise of neo-liberalism and the several interventions of the Soviet Union in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the final collapse of the Soviet System itself. Many abandoned Marxism. With the discussion shifting towards globalization and environmental limits to growth, the broad issues of societal transformation may again re-enter the debates.

Cameron reflects on his own writings over nearly thirty years of work on pro-poor studies from a Marxist-leaning orientation. Over time he feels that his own work had to accommodate additional and wider perspectives, made possible through periods of field research interspersed with critical (re)thinking while at a safe home base. It is helpful and often sobering to have the opportunity to revisit places of fieldwork some twenty years later. Pearson sketches the rise of gender along with the rise of development. Despite achievements gender mainstreaming runs the risk of going no further than lip-service. New rhetoric on rights-based development seems to offer an inclusive statement of entitlements for all. This does not augur well for strategic concerns of the gendered development debate.

Woodhouse and Chimhowu sketch how nature and natural resources came into development studies and how narratives changed and discursive practices were influenced. It is here that the colonial heritage can be seen most clearly, torn as the administration was between commoditization of resources for development in the modern sector and heavy-handed resource conservation for the native sector of the populace.

Finally, Lewis looks at the trajectory of the 'non-governmental' in development studies. Why did it arise, what were initially assumed comparative advantages? This was followed by research on performance in service delivery and concern over the wider implications for governments and donors of (too) outspoken advocacy roles.

Overall, it is a stimulating book. As most articles are very well documented, it facilitates a retracing of the history of the field and it also highlights how individuals involved had to continually rethink or revisit what they had been doing. Though stimulating in principle, it must be said that not all teaching staff in social sciences have shown the necessary flexibility of mind to go with the debate and have shunned the intellectual effort to plunge into new issues and subjects, in particular those requiring cross-discipline involvement with those in the natural sciences. Staying inside involves dilemmas of sticking with acquired specialization even if the subject falls out of favour with donors for funding, and staff being labelled accordingly, or jumping onto something new where funding appears promising but where relevant intellectual background has yet to be acquired. Pressure to publish in one's area of specialization stands in the way of long periods of leave for intellectual retooling. When the overall funding climate deteriorates the process may seem like trying to jump from ice shoal to ice shoal under conditions of global warming.

The book edited by Simon collates information on what are called key thinkers on development. As development is not a discipline and there are different types of knowledge for different audiences, there are no clear criteria for selection of names and for assessing their main contribution. Of those included in the book, thirty-six of the forty-five were born between 1910 and 1940. Many thus came of age intellectually after 1945. Only Gandhi, Malthus, Mao, Marx and Myrdal date from an earlier period. Collectively they can be seen as leading lights in development studies. The vignettes attempt to provide some biographic background, which I found helpful in better understanding the concerns of the thinkers. The book lists major publications and ideas and offers a critique of these works and further references. There is cross-referencing between thinkers and an extensive index to assist the reader. While the editor notes the large number of refugees



from Nazi Germany included, I note that half the contributors are professional geographers — a network to fit the editor.

**Aart van de Laar**

Doornenburg 52, 2402 KE Alphen an den Rijn, The Netherlands.

**Robert Chambers, *Ideas for Development*. London and Sterling, VA: Earthscan, 2005. xxviii + 259 pp. £8.99 paperback.**

Imagine a publisher would ask you to write a selected anthology of all your academic writings in order to make an accessible book for a broader audience. You would be delighted and probably dig into your old files, cut and paste from earlier work, add an introduction, and you would be done in a couple of weeks. But imagine if this request were made to one of the key thinkers on participatory reflection and action, someone who has made ‘learning’ central to his thinking. In that case, one would assess all the earlier writings, include critical comments, and add a range of new perspectives to these earlier ideas. The result would be not only a brand new book but a complete self-assessment of three decades of thinking on participation and learning in development.

This fascinating approach was chosen by Robert Chambers in his latest book *Ideas for Development* written mainly for development practitioners and others who have had little or no time at all to read this critical stream of development literature. These readers can have a glance at the extensive bibliography of thirty pages, giving an impressive overview of the sources that inspired this key author on the PRA experience. In the rest of the book they will find in a nutshell some of the most creative and critical thinking on development that has been produced, predominantly by Chambers and his group of followers at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex.

Chambers is clearly upset about the continuation of unjust practices by the powerful and the repetition of errors by the international donor community in their efforts to counter this injustice. But far from having become cynical, he displays an infectious tone of optimism and belief in the creativity of the ‘lowers’ (the poor, oppressed and marginalized) to counter the greed and power of the ‘uppers’. Though he does not state this explicitly, Chambers often has the role of aid agencies in mind when he analyses the ‘Cinderella concepts and criteria’ such as continuity, commitment and irreversibility that are still often neglected in development practice. Along those lines he provides interesting suggestions, such as the principle that four years is the optimal length of term for being successful in a responsible post (government, local NGO or aid agency), as ‘a successful incumbent . . . tends to achieve more in a third year than in the first two together, and again more in the fourth than the third, by which time much has been learnt, and relationships and understandings have had time to mature’ (p. 19). The book abounds with this type of wisdom, which is sound despite being rather general.

The strength of the book often lies in the critical analysis of Chambers’ own personal experiences whilst working in Africa in the late 1960s. For example, he writes about a dramatic evaluation process of a Special Rural Development Programmer in Kenya: ‘With what I now recognize as political naivety and insensitivity, I sought to set up an evaluation organization with impatient haste. Its generous resources were resented by others and I did not manage it well’ (p. 64). I genuinely enjoyed reading these frank and revealing sections where we are witnessing the early development of a critical (Northern) paradigm on the distorting effect of external agencies.

Though I found the book inspiring and challenging, the last part was somewhat disappointing. Seven chapters provide short versions of earlier writings, complemented with comments and reflections based on current insights. Whilst this approach works very well, the last two chapters lack the crispness that is present in the rest of the book. Maybe in these last chapters, when Chambers looked at relatively recent writings, the contrast with earlier thinking became blurred. In this later work we can also sense a certain disappointment that his ideas for development were not massively reproduced.

An example is the concept 'responsible well-being' that he proposes as an alternative objective of development 'doing as well as being; it is "by" as well as "for"' (p. 194). The concept never 'took off' as compared with similar terms such as 'social capital' or 'sustainable livelihoods'. Here Chambers provides a political explanation 'responsible well-being discomforts and exposes those of us who are "haves" for what we do and what we leave undone' (p. 201), when a more self-critical approach would have been more appropriate. Notwithstanding this minor critique, the book should be compulsory reading for the new generation of development practitioners.

**Kees Biekart**

Institute of Social Studies, PO Box 29776, 2502 LT The Hague, The Netherlands.

**Sylvana De Paula and Gary A. Dymski (eds), *Reimagining Growth: Towards a Renewal of Development Theory*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2005. xii + 308 pp. £70.00/\$85.00 hardback, £19.95/\$27.50 paperback.**

**Raphael Kaplinsky, *Globalization, Poverty and Inequality*. Malden, MA and Cambridge: Polity, 2005. xix + 280 pp. £50.00/\$64.95 hardback, £14.99/\$26.95 paperback.**

**Anthony Payne, *The Global Politics of Unequal Development*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. xii + 304 pp. £18.99 paperback.**

**Richard Stubbs, *Rethinking Asia's Economic Miracle*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. xii + 276 pp. £18.99 paperback.**

These four books illustrate the unity and diversity of development. The authors present a very similar view of development in the early twenty-first century, although in some instances their desire to cling to the residue of old perspectives makes recognizing that similarity difficult. This is particularly the case with De Paula and Dymski's edited work. They acknowledge the diversity of development, arguing that social linkages are always complex and historically specific, and yet their principal concern centres on unpicking the absolutes of neoliberalism. Hence, we have Hodgson's contribution that institutional constraints on markets are crucial, Burlamaqui and Kregel's conclusion that some degree of economic instability is necessary for change and growth, Wilkinson's description of a symbiotic relationship between firms and consumers to reduce market uncertainty and Storper's argument that community building is an essential building block for democracy and economic growth. Yet despite all this unpicking, no 'another world' emerges. Bianchi's work on import substitution effectively reveals that there is 'no magic formula to resolve imbalances between and within countries'. Even Reinert's promotion of protectionism as a means for countries to avoid the low wage trap fails to escape the book's logic that if history and circumstances determine the viability of free trade, it must do also for protectionism. Certainly Storper acknowledges that today no single unified social order exists and yet Chang and Evans cling to the belief that a new alternative canon could emerge from the combination of mobilized social actors, economic crises, and new ideas and practices. Delgado and Romano's examination of the World Social Forum attempts to demonstrate such an emergence but concedes that its focus on resistance is an acknowledgement of the impossibility of constructing a parallel economy. For all its opposition to globalization, the World Social Forum's celebration of diversity is in reality a celebration of globalization.

Kaplinsky is similarly concerned to unpick some of the central tenets of neoliberalism. Although he acknowledges the diverse processes involved with globalization, his focus is on economic globalization — for many writers an alternative label for neoliberalism. His goal is to demonstrate that economic globalization is unsustainable as a means for development. Consumers may benefit as prices fall and products improve in quality but it is impossible for every country to succeed as an exporter. Indeed, he argues, China's phenomenal success is already squeezing out other low income exporters and threatening the trade balance of wealthy nations. Successful exporters may open up new opportunities for countries to supply raw materials and food, but they also generate new forms of inequality that could ultimately undermine the present wave of globalization in the same way that perceived inequalities generated rivalries and ended

the wave of globalization begun in the nineteenth century. To that list of concerns Kaplinsky adds the rising costs of energy and environmental degradation.

Kaplinsky's book is a warning about absolute values, that we should not regard globalization as simply good or bad, and that globalization must be managed. Indeed this is also De Paula and Dymski's message, although Kaplinsky's examination of different production sectors highlights the continued importance of skills and co-operation for a world that is still overwhelmingly unequal.

Inequality is also the central theme of Payne, although unlike the previous authors he is quick to claim that development studies is too often bedevilled by crude dichotomies and assertions of homogeneity. Refreshingly, he argues that development is a universal problem faced by all peoples. Globalization is structured by inequality and it is this which reduces the capacity of countries to develop, as he demonstrates through his examination of global institutions. Simplistic definitions of global complexity, he argues, deny us the opportunity to understand the dynamic nature of inequality.

The autonomy of states may have been affected by globalization, but, Payne reminds us, historically their autonomy has always been limited by different interest and social groups. In other words, there has been no sudden reduction in the autonomy of states, only another realignment in the nature of their engagement with different sets of actors. Nor is there a simple North–South dichotomy, especially in areas of trade and the environment. Global dynamics are much more complex and fluid. If anything, the scale of the global system makes dominance by one country or group of countries increasingly difficult, although in the area of global finance this appears not to be the case. Nonetheless there is no emerging alternative canon. Even with respect to trade, no coherent ideological challenge to greater liberalization has emerged. The problem, as Payne sees it, is that too often neoliberalism is painted as homogeneous whereas in fact it is far more flexible than its critics suggest. It has never been shaken by criticism but softened, a process of accommodation that Nederveen Pieterse more fully described back in 2001. Like Payne, Nederveen Pieterse does not believe neoliberalism is monolithic; in fact he argues that the one-time Washington Consensus is cracking, as a reform consensus grows and as the dynamics of global politics change (Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 165). Payne similarly reminds us that the formerly strong theory of modernization was not undone by opposing theories but by changes in the world order after the 1960s. The same fate might await neoliberalism or economic globalization. We need to be aware that the world order is changing, that despite the embeddedness of global politics of inequality, there is scope for manoeuvre. Understanding this also requires us to appreciate that development is universal, that it is complex and varied and that its frameworks of action are shaped by material capabilities, ideas and institutions.

Payne's conclusion recognizes the fallacy of one size fits all. East Asia succeeded because of global inequality — it was favoured by the political economic objectives of the US. Kaplinsky on the other hand sees regionalism as protection against the fallacy but fails to recognize that failures often have less to do with monolithic development strategies crowding out would-be players than with the neglect of players to transform old orders and institutions. Consequently he argues that East Asia cannot be a model for the rest of the world.

Stubbs' examination of eastern Asia results in a similar claim. The rise of its seven countries and city states is historically specific and unique. He rejects explanations for Asia's miracles which stress exclusively neoliberalism, statism, culture, or the role of Japan and the US. Instead he argues for a combination of specific factors: the effect of World War II in destroying old orders and creating space for new institutions and reform, the insecurities of the Cold War era which focused the minds of planners, and the injection of capital into the region as a result of wars in Korea and Vietnam and their impact on market access for new products and on key resource prices. Most importantly, even after the withdrawal of the US from the region in the mid 1970s, these factors were sustained over more than four decades by the re-emergence of Japan as a key regional investor and trader.

Stubbs is keen to demonstrate that there was nothing inevitable in this process. Indeed with the end of the Cold War and the strengthening of neoliberalism, eastern Asia lost many of its

geopolitical advantages, and with the diversion of FDI to China some of the weaknesses of developmental states quickly became apparent when markets for their exports weakened in the 1990s. However, with regional synergies so strengthened over the past decades, East Asia has been able to turn quickly to regional economic partnerships in order to offset many of those weaknesses.

Although Stubbs' analysis of eastern Asia denies universality, it does suggest to this reviewer some core features of successful development; namely the importance of transforming old orders, of establishing a strong development consensus and, above all, of substantial and sustained injections of capital and market access. It also suggests the importance of growth with equity, which Stubbs concedes had much the same impact as the welfare state in Europe in the mid twentieth century. We could in fact argue that these features (with the important exception of equity) are similar to those which assisted much of Europe to develop in the nineteenth century and after, although obviously the context and forms they took differ greatly, one reason perhaps why the European development thrust proved so disastrous. But at least it demonstrates a degree of unity within the specifics of diversity and shuns any sense of inevitability in the process of development.

Development needs to be contextualized historically if we are to understand processes of change. Above all we need to shun dichotomies and recognize the universality of development in all its complexities. This is Nederveen Pieterse's argument. Development is an open-ended process of collective learning with no rigid boundaries (see Nederveen Pieterse, 2001: 160). Our understanding of development has changed considerably over the past 100 years or more and in the process the field of development has become more complex and development politics more democratized as it accommodates agency, diversity, new disciplines and new concerns. Above all the unit of development has diversified. Many of these changes reflect changes in geopolitics and the growing reflexivity of development studies — hence the dangers in asserting the primacy of alternatives, especially if they dichotomize or essentialize development experiences and promote belief in separate development. They have the effect of denying the dynamic of development thinking and the importance of engaging with politics and ideas in order to directly confront the many inequalities inherent in world development.

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### Robbie Robertson

Professor of Development Studies, University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji.

**Kavaljit Singh, *Questioning Globalization*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2005. 192 pp. £32.95/\$55.00 hardback, £9.99/\$17.50 paperback.**

*Questioning Globalization* is an introductory summary of some of the major arguments against economic globalization. The book attempts to make these issues accessible to activists, students and the general public. Singh acknowledges that globalization is not only an economic phenomenon; it encompasses social, environmental, political, historical and cultural aspects. Without negating the importance of these aspects, Singh focuses the work primarily on economic globalization, although other facets, particularly politics, do get interwoven. From the outset, Singh argues that globalization is a process that creates greater inequality within and between nations, and that the discourse of hyper-globalists should be interrogated.

The introduction highlights the importance of situating globalization within the ideological shift towards neo-liberalism that occurred in the dominant capitalist economies from the 1970s onwards. In the first chapter, Singh introduces the debates surrounding financial liberalization,

and interrogates the links between financial globalization and development. He then reviews the problems of establishing rules of investment, and here Singh debunks myths about the effect investment agreements have on capital flows. NAFTA is used as an example to effectively show how the liberalization of investment weakens the ability of nation states to protect their own interests.

Singh moves on to examine how the current process of globalization relates to democracy, human rights and good governance. He examines the financially backed push by powerful nations towards creating US-style political democracy and the lack of democracy and good governance in international institutions such as the World Bank and IMF. The information in chapters 3 and 4 overlaps somewhat, at times to the point of distraction (the same sentence actually appears in both chapters). Perhaps this is because Singh intends each chapter to be comprehensible on its own. The final one provides strong conclusions about the relevance of the nation-state and the great imbalances in power that some developed nation states wield in the globalized world. Singh dismisses the oft-heard argument that nation-states are ineffective and powerless in the globalized world. Given this important point, there could have been a stronger argument about how the least developed nations could strategically intervene on behalf of their citizens.

Although the language of this text is generally more accessible than many economic books on globalization geared to less technical audiences, parts of the book will nevertheless be difficult for activists, students and the general public to understand, as the baseline of understanding that is assumed may be too high in places. For instance, the Southeast Asian Financial Crisis in 1997–98 is repeatedly discussed assuming the audience is relatively versed in its causes and consequences. In other instances, the significance of some individuals, corporations or events could have been clarified. Singh does do an effective job of distilling statistics down to easily understandable information, although the addition of charts and graphs in some places would aid the reader.

One important aspect of economic globalization that could have been interrogated more thoroughly throughout the book is the power relations among nations, corporations, institutions and individuals. Singh either simplifies or assumes the reader is versed in the immense power struggles that underlie and direct most of the relationships outlined in the book. For example, he discusses the implementation and impacts of structural adjustment programmes at three points in the book, but the reader is not left with an understanding of the depth of the loss of power endured by developing nations forced to submit to structural adjustments. The chapters on democracy and good governance address some aspects of power in the political process, but do not go far enough in interrogating the role of global financial institutions and capital in shaping economic and social policies in many developing nations. In addition, the book does not delve into the local scale, to examine how everyday people are involved in and disempowered by the global economy, most likely because of the complexity of adding another level of scale to the debate. However, providing a greater emphasis on how events were manifested locally could have strengthened some of the case study examples.

Despite these limitations, Singh has provided an important compilation and distillation of the key debates surrounding globalization for activists, students and the general public. This book would serve as a useful starting point for each of these groups and is ideally suited as an introductory text for university students.

**Erin Pratley**

Department of Geography, University of Western Ontario, London, Ontario, Canada. E-mail: [erpratley@uwo.ca](mailto:erpratley@uwo.ca)

**Melissa Leach, Ian Scoones and Brian Wynne (eds), *Science and Citizens: Globalization and the Challenge of Engagement*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2005. x + 293 pp. £55.00/\$75.00 hardback, £18.95/\$25.00 paperback.**

This book, the second volume in the 'Claiming Citizenship' series published under the auspices of the Development Research Centre (DRC) on Citizenship, Participation and Accountability

based at the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) in Sussex, is part of wider ongoing research and discussion between practitioners, academics and activists from the North and the South, on what participation means (beyond projects and tools) and how 'inclusive citizenship' claims challenge and are challenged by the social order.

This specific volume focuses on the relationships and interactions between science and citizens, between different epistemologies and ontology. The book is divided into four parts: an introduction which lays down the foundation of the book and defines the concept of citizenship; a framework section in which authors discuss and challenge the current perceptions of 'risk', promote the use of 'safety' as a more accurate and relevant concept and introduce the idea of cognitive justice. The other two parts 'citizens engaging with sciences' and 'participation and the politics of engagement' present thirteen empirical case studies from the North and the South.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the case studies include contentious issues in the fields of health, environment, biotechnology and genetics. These reflect increasing concerns which have become acute in recent decades in the context of globalization. Whilst science has historically been used to justify dominant models of modernity, the establishment all too often uses the concept of risk and rationality to brush off public concerns or challenges. Fear and lack of information are used to control public opinion, which may be effective until trust in the rationality of science breaks down, as shown in recent campaigns against genetically modified seeds for example. What most of these articles show is that using the concept of safety rather than risk allows the acknowledgment of the role of politics in science. Safety has pragmatic and moral dimensions which allow people to decide what is or isn't safe for them (p. 49). The ability to demystify scientific knowledge and the enlargement of access to knowledge encourage citizens to not just contest projects but more to reshape them. Social mobilization is often seen as rejection by those who are in power. However, what emerges from the book is the proposition that campaigns are the medium for promoting citizen rights to scientific knowledge, in order to redesign and reshape the agenda of science to fit within people's reality, rather than simply fighting against models per se.

I found the book useful for three reasons:

- It highlights the politics in science and how science has in the past been used by the establishment to consolidate its power — this is not new, but here I find the perspective on safety (as opposed to risk), cognitive justice and citizenship agency a useful and concrete way to move ahead in what are often presented as win-lose situations.
- This perspective pushes the concept of participation beyond an instrumental dimension and offers a viable pathway and framework to move on from the 'tyranny' period.
- The book is the result, I believe, of a number of ongoing conversations and meetings between the authors, which also gives it cohesion (as opposed to many edited volumes which have the tendency to be ad-hoc collections of thematically related papers).

Perhaps the editors can take some credit for this achievement, but I would also like to think that the book is an example of what a genuine ideological and intellectual commitment to the philosophy of participation can produce.

**Marléne Buchy**

Institute of Social Studies, PO Box 29776, 2502 LT The Hague, The Netherlands.

**Roderick Neumann, *Making Political Ecology*. London: Hodder Arnold, 2005. x + 213 pp. £19.99/\$39.95 paperback.**

Political ecology is a booming field of research, exemplified by the many textbooks and studies that have recently been published on the subject. From this perspective, *Making Political Ecology* by Roderick Neumann is 'just one out of many'. But this would not do the book justice. This

book is exceptionally well written and covers an impressive range of material one could cluster under the label of political ecology. The book is written as part of a wider series of books dealing with subsections of the discipline of geography, termed *Human Geography in the Making*, which explains the book's somewhat odd sounding title. The series set out to produce volumes that fill the gap between 'topically focused textbooks and narrowly defined scholarly studies' (p. iii) and surely *Making Political Ecology* lives up to that aim.

The book is divided into six chapters, covering the 'roots and branches' of the field, its conceptual and philosophical underpinnings, contributions and influences from both the natural and social sciences, current political ecology debates and possible future directions. Neumann argues that, like himself, more and more political ecologists depart from a critical realist philosophical stance, which recognizes 'the materiality of nature while maintaining that our understanding of nature is discursively constructed' (p. 11). Impressively, Neumann manages to capture the essence of critical realism and embed it within wider social theoretical and philosophical debates of historical materialism, constructivism, post-modernism and relativism, while always maintaining a link with the subject matter, something he was criticized for failing to do in his previous book *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles over Livelihoods and Nature Preservation in Africa*. From this solid theoretical base, the book proceeds to discuss more contemporary political ecology debates under the headings of sustainable development and biodiversity conservation.

Rather than giving yet another exposé on the concept of sustainable development, the book focuses on the specific political ecological contributions to debates around the link between conservation and development. From 'small is beautiful' development populism of the 1970s to more discursive analyses of development intervention in the 1980s and 1990s, Neumann shows how political ecologists have entertained concepts such as tenure, common property, (gendered) property rights and discourse to highlight the political in relation to nature and discuss power relations among actors.

In the chapter on biodiversity conservation the book then delves deeper into conceptualizations of various actors, including the state, international institutions and organizations and civil society. Over time, the actions of and power relations between these different actors led to different configurations of human–nature relationships, or 'human–society hybrids'. Neumann focuses mostly on the narratives of fortress conservation and community-based conservation, but comes to the conclusion that both have effectively functioned as 'forms of enclosure' (p. 146); hence the call to political ecologists to come up with fresh conceptual tools and insights that broaden the biodiversity debate to become more 'inclusionary'. Neumann himself suggests six possible future directions in which political ecologists may find such new inclusionary conceptualizations: urban political ecology, landscape and meaning, environmental security and violence, ethics, identity and environment, and biotechnology and biodiversity.

Although this is one of the more complete textbooks on political ecology, one could imagine several areas for improvement. Most importantly, by its overt reliance on the discipline of geography — and here I want to pass over the 'politics of academia' discussion whether political ecology is a sub-discipline of geography alone — the book does not answer the repeated calls for more political science lessons and literature to be incorporated into *political* ecology. To illustrate this, one could point to Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs); currently very popular 'human–society hybrid' projects that have sprung up all over the globe during the last decade, and due to their international character, are even more obviously political in nature. TFCAs are clear examples of political ecology in practice and could provide the young sub-discipline with very relevant political and international relations insights. However, despite the massive attention they have received in the last decade, they do not feature in Neumann's book. TFCAs aside, the point is that the book could have taken up the challenge for a more 'political' political ecology but has not done so. Even the future directions, albeit very relevant, fall quite neatly in line with or follow up on proven or popular debates within geography, anthropology and sociology.

Another, lesser criticism deals with the book's discussion on biodiversity conservation. Although many would support Neumann's conclusion that both fortress and community-based conservation are forms of enclosure, this is not anything very new. With the advance of a distinct

resurgence of protectionist thinking, the debate seems to sharpen around the means and types of enclosure, rather than moving to the ‘flux and fluidity’ (p. 147) biodiversity conceptualizations that Neumann argues for. Although this back-to-the-barriers trend is still a relatively recent development, one would have expected a keen observer like Neumann to at least make mention of it.

Although these omissions do not make the book less readable or interesting, the inclusion of these topics would have made it more complete and up-to-date. Still, *Making Political Ecology* is a very welcome contribution to the field and can be highly recommended both as a textbook for graduate students as well as a must-read for anyone interested in the field of political ecology.

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### Bram E. Büscher

Faculty of Social Sciences, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, De Boelelaan 1081c, 1081 HV Amsterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: be.buscher@fsw.vu.nl.

**Gary P. Sampson, *The WTO and Sustainable Development*. Tokyo, New York, Paris: United Nations University Press, 2005. xiii+ 315 pp. \$45.00 paperback.**

**W. Bradnee Chambers and Jessica F. Green (eds), *Reforming International Environmental Governance: From Institutional Limits to Innovative Reforms*. Tokyo, New York, Paris: United Nations University Press, 2005. xi+234 pp. \$30.00 paperback.**

In 1987 the Brundtland Report defined sustainable development as ‘development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Brundtland, 1987: 24). This broad definition — more accurately a description — was given additional substance when sustainable development was deemed to have three components: social, economic and environmental. These are the alleged three pillars on which the edifice of sustainable development rests. The two books under review broadly interpret these as encompassing economic development, the environment and considerations such as human rights, labour standards and the legal-institutional framework within which international activity is conducted.

These books examine the role of international governance in attaining such sustainable development and are both excellent contributions to the literature. After a lucid introductory first chapter Sampson reviews institutional efforts over the last fifty years at the intergovernmental level to address environmental management. There is an account of how the World Trade Organization (WTO) has dealt with the links between trade liberalization and sustainable development, an interpretation of non-discrimination in recent dispute settlements within the WTO including agreements and standards. The regulatory response of the WTO to the development of new products and services is covered and this analysis is extended to the particular case of biotechnology. The WTO’s General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is evaluated and it is argued that GATS has very few compulsory provisions. An analysis of how these provisions could be tightened is provided. The historical record of GATT and WTO is traced in addressing the concerns of developing countries in relation to conflicts between economic development and environmental management. The authors observe how perceptions of the WTO have changed over time and they discuss environmental governance issues — the former in relation to the World Summit on Sustainable Development while the latter involves more general issues.

Whereas the Sampson book focuses on the role of the WTO in attaining sustainable development (particularly in the environmental sense), the volume edited by Chambers and Green discusses a wider range of issues related to environmental governance of which the role of the



WTO is only a component. An informative introduction to the volume and some of the related literature contains the following ironic statement ‘the world of sustainable development has grown unsustainably’ (p. 1). Since none of the individual chapter authors deals with the issue, the introduction reviews some of the obstacles to attaining sustainable development. Sustainable development proposes to provide ‘a systematic approach to formulating proposals for institutional changes in sustainable development governance’ (p. 5). Chambers reviews the historical record of efforts to improve international economic governance (IEG). He organizes the themes of the book into the following three headings: coherence (of IEG), centralization, compliance.

On the issue of coherence one of the problems with IEG, some authors have pointed out, is that there is a proliferation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs). This could lead to overlap, with individual MEAs working at cross purposes with each other. Oberthur argues that a sudden jump to clustering these MEAs would not necessarily be advisable and that, in any case, an incremental approach to such clustering is warranted. Tarasofsky argues that such incremental clustering could be achieved under the aegis of UNEP through the Global Ministerial Environmental Forum.

Some authors have argued that the issues of IEG need to be centralized under the mantle of an international organization, the current preferred name for which is World Environmental Organization (WEO). Charnovitz argues the case for a WEO and outlines its basic contours as well as *modus operandi*. In contrast to Oberthur he argues that such centralization need not be inconsistent with existing MEAs. Sampson argues that pursuing freer trade and enhanced environmental sustainability need not be conflicting goals and that the WTO could play a central role in supporting them both.

The final section of the book examines issues of compliance. Pauwelyn argues that one of the important building blocks of the WTO is the mandatory nature of its dispute settlement mechanism. The same must hold true for IEG and the case for a World Environmental Court is examined. This Court could hold states as well as private actors to account for environmental damage. Redgwell argues that compliance in IEG can be improved by reviving the UN Trusteeship Council which originally served as an international caretaker during the period of decolonization. This revived Council could look after areas which do not fall under national responsibilities, such as the high seas and global commons. Elliott argues that the brief of the UN Security Council be expanded to include environmental disasters. Just as the UN Security Council has repeatedly moved beyond its traditional security concerns to intervene in matters relating to human rights and the spread of pandemics such as HIV/AIDS, it could also deal with environmental events that have the potential to threaten security. Of course, such intervention may itself have the potential of endangering the environment.

To be sure, both books cover useful ground and should be welcomed by the large number of scholars and policy makers working on these issues. Both are focused inquiries and make well judged recommendations on how sustainable development could be enhanced through better international economic governance.

That said there are a few areas where I do have difficulties with these books. Both avoid any clear-cut definition of what, in their view, constitutes sustainable development. We are left to assume that sustainable development in the environmental sense means greater protection of the environment even as economic growth takes place. But environmental protection is a vector not a scalar. With limited financial and governance resources only some aspects of environmental protection can be addressed. Others will be neglected. Some of the writing in these books passes this off as a North–South issue but surely it is important to understand what the chosen strategy of sustainable development is targeting. To put it differently — the books neglect the intratemporal question of ‘sustainable development for whom’ to focus on of the intertemporal imperative of not sacrificing the needs of future generations to satisfy the greed of the present generation. Environmental priorities differ sharply across the globe and not just between developed and developing countries.

Sampson takes the existing structure of the WTO as axiomatic and asks how adjustments can be made to better enhance the objective of sustainable development. However, little is said about

the distribution of such gains. Nevertheless Sampson's book does an excellent job of clearly spelling out the potential role of WTO in a number of areas and how to strengthen its institutional mechanism. The book is refreshing in its unqualified advocacy of trade liberalization and how the entire gamut of WTO mechanisms can be bolstered to both pursue free trade and reduce the strain on the environment. This is particularly useful since in many instances actual accounts of how deliberations have taken place within the WTO, for example in relation to GATS, have not been disclosed. Particularly after the alleged failure of the WTO meeting in Hong Kong in December 2005, Sampson's work provides strong intellectual and procedural support for continuing the WTO process.

The Chambers and Green volume also provides useful insights into improving IEG. However, there are some important issues that have been missed. For instance, issue-linkage has not been considered by any of the authors as a basis for centralization or for the creation of a WEO. No matter what the level of centralization of MEA being aimed for, willing participation by many developing countries is hindered: although they have considerable bargaining power in the environmental area, such power amounts to very little since they are not able to use it to extract concessions where it really matters to them — in the trade area. In fact issue linkage has been essential to the economic arguments for centralization in general and the WEO in particular (see the special issue of *The World Economy*, 2002). However, such feedback effects are almost ignored by these authors. Further, they also take a rules-based approach to institutional reform and ignore internalization-based measures which rely on trade offs between different parties' interests in different areas. The economist's perspective seems to have been sidelined.

Nevertheless, so far as issue of rules-based reform of IEG is concerned the book has much to contribute and is a must read for academics, students and policy makers.

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## Raghbendra Jha

Rajiv Gandhi Chair Professor and Executive Director, Australia South Asia Research Centre, RSPAS, Australian National University, Canberra, ACT 0200, Australia.

**Ronnie Vernooy (ed.), *Social and Gender Analysis in Natural Resource Management: Learning Studies and Lessons from Asia*. New Delhi: Sage, 2006. 250 pp. £29.99 hardback, £14.99 paperback.**

Here is a publication well worth the read as, despite its title, it is not so much about gender issues in natural resource management as it is about the challenge of applying social and gender analysis to development projects within a participatory action research framework. The book presents the findings and outcomes of a three year action research project in rural India, Nepal, Mongolia, China and Vietnam, where teams of researchers tried to mainstream the use of social and gender analysis in project work. The six case studies in the book cover a lot of gender-related information on land access and gender roles — especially in decision making — in their respective contexts. The innovative nature of the work is more in the learning process that goes on as scientists, rural people and other stakeholders engage in designing and carrying out the research. The approach goes beyond the more instrumental nature of eliciting people's voice and the teams have really tried to ask meaningful questions: How and how well is gender analysis perceived by different stakeholders? How does it fit culturally? How can the research team learn and facilitate learning within communities? How can the researcher play a role in empowerment? What are the internal

and external factors which may favour empowerment and enhancement processes? What are the implications for organizations of mainstreaming social and gender analysis?

The focus of the action research was therefore not just on understanding gender dynamics per se but to see how, through a focus on social and gender analysis, communities can learn, build their capacity and raise their awareness on gender and social inequity issues. Contrary to common wisdom, the effectiveness of participatory research relies in great part on the way questions are framed and the strategy developed to reach women and the poor rather than on the tools themselves.

Within contexts ranging from promoting ginger production in Sikkim to strengthening market linkages for women vegetable vendors in Nagaland or from selecting seeds in Nepal to managing grasslands in Mongolia, the teams have tried and tested a number of different approaches to facilitate social transformation within the projects. Be it through a focus on studying self confidence and self esteem, attempts at constructive interaction with the line agencies, forming interest groups or fostering self organization, the various teams demonstrate how participatory action research can be conducted in a genuinely participatory way.

To make the book more complete, a systematic and thorough analysis of the process the teams went through would have been welcome. Though the case studies do address some of the issues, which are then explored in two useful concluding chapters, one is left wanting to know more about the learning processes and their impacts. Social learning for example is mentioned only once (if I am not mistaken) but never discussed or explored. There is also little reflection on the 'Learning Studies' project itself, on how for example lessons could be disseminated, institutionalized or replicated.

All in all I found the book useful, and although the case studies do not generate new empirical or theoretical insights globally on gender and natural resource management, the book does present innovative approaches to participatory research. It certainly raises a number of questions on action research methodology and organizational change and it challenges methodological blanket approaches.

**Marléne Buchy**

Institute of Social Studies, PO Box 29776, 2502 LT The Hague, The Netherlands.

**Jan Kooiman, Maarten Bavinck, Svein Jentoft and Roger Pullin (eds), *Fish for Life: Interactive Governance for Fisheries*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2005. 427 pp. €39.50 paperback.**

The capture fisheries sector is an important source of food and livelihood for millions of people across the world. However, capture fisheries today are facing a severe ecological crisis. In this context, researchers and fisheries professionals have focused their attempts to examine the institutional arrangements in fisheries management. However, not many studies have been able to spell out a clear and specific perspective for fisheries governance. *Fish for Life* is an attempt in this direction and proposes a new, interactive perspective on the governance of both capture fisheries and aquaculture.

This publication is an edited volume, which is an outcome of collaboration, exchange of ideas and experiences between academicians and practitioners from a wide range of disciplines, such as life sciences, anthropology, sociology, law, public management and economics. A significant feature of this book is that each theme and chapter in this volume has been neatly entwined and helps the reader to shift from one major section to another without much difficulty. In addition, the vast and previous research experience of the editors — Jentoft, Bavinck and Kooiman in particular — have significantly enriched this publication and are reflected in every chapter of this book.

This volume is organized in five major parts. The first introduces the governance perspective and also describes the challenges and concerns in fisheries. The main fisheries challenges and concerns are identified as those issues related to globalization, ecosystem health, social justice,

livelihood, food security and food safety. An interactive governance approach is proposed to address these challenges and concerns. Governance is described as interaction comprising three interrelated orders of human activity, namely: first order governance, related to problem solving or day-to-day management; followed by second order, which focuses on the institutional arrangements for problem solving; and third order, which is meta-governance — the principles and values that underlie institutional frameworks.

The second part describes the features of the system to be governed, among which the significance of scale, diversity, complexity, and dynamics of a fish chain (for example, the connectedness between the pre-capture, capture and post-harvest of aquatic organisms) are highlighted. Importantly, the authors observe that these features of a fish chain necessitate governance solutions that are situated on different spatial, institutional and disciplinary scales. An interesting aspect discussed in this context is the impact of globalization, which causes fish chains to lengthen, diversify and become more complex.

The institutions in fisheries governance are then discussed substantively. The roles of local, national and international institutions are reviewed in-depth. The presentation of both success and failure stories from different parts of the world in text boxes has made this section even more interesting to the reader. A viewpoint worth noting, found throughout this book, is that the governance approach to fisheries should focus not only on the state, market and civil society but also on the interactions that take place between the three. Also, the argument that institutional linkages in fisheries governance have to be the subject of future scholarly research deserves consideration.

The principles of fisheries governance are systematically analysed. A significant contribution is the attempt by various authors to outline concepts such as social justice, responsibility and caution as key ethical principles underlying fisheries governance. The chapter 'Hard Choices and Values' (Kooiman and Jentoft) will be of interest to researchers in the area of natural resource management. The arguments presented in this chapter clearly spell out the significance of upholding the basic values (social, economic, political and environmental), concerns and principles underlying fisheries governance. This very insistence makes their proposed governance approach different from other existing approaches in fisheries.

Finally there is a summation and expansion of the perspective discussed in the previous chapters. This section highlights the various interactions of governance in terms of self-governing, hierarchical and co-governing models. In practice, one could see a mix of both informal and formal institutions emerging at the problem-solving level (Cleaver, 2001). A close examination of the book reveals that the proposed governance perspective allows enough space to incorporate and pursue such dimensions. As the authors rightly note, this work is more a reflection on how to undertake the journey towards governance, rather than a road map to achieve it.

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## D. S. Sunil

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, IIT.P.O, Chennai – 600036, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: sunilds@gmail.com

**Stefan Dercon (ed.), *Insurance Against Poverty*. UNU-WIDER Studies in Development Economics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. xvi + 465 pp. £55.00 hardback.**

This is a splendid collection of papers, with several important contributions by the editor himself. It combines new and interesting theoretical perspectives on and empirical insights into sources of risks, their welfare implications and social protection strategy. The galaxy of contributors includes

(apart from the editor himself) Morduch, Fafchamps, Ravallion, Banerjee, Collier, Hoddinott, de Janvry and Platteau.

The book is divided into eight sections: risk and insurance — evidence; risk and poverty — theory; risk and poverty — persistence; identifying the vulnerable; risk and social institutions; safety nets and social institutions; developing better protection for the poor; and conclusions. Each section without exception contains at least one scholarly and innovative contribution. Some of the most impressive features are a meticulous exposition of analytical issues, careful distillation of empirical evidence and clarity of interpretation. A few examples are cited below.

The first chapter by Dercon is a comprehensive exposition of sources of risks (both idiosyncratic and covariate), potential of self-insurance through savings, income smoothing through diversification and informal risk-sharing, and monitoring of vulnerability. An important but worrying concern is that missing insurance and credit markets 'result in efficiency losses, more inequality, and higher current poverty' (p. 28). In another illuminating but largely econometric analysis of household panel data for South China in chapter 5, Jalan and Ravallion reinforce the concern for social protection by demonstrating that the poor take longer to recover from a transient shock than the non-poor.

In chapter 6, Dercon and Hoddinott examine the links between covariate shocks (such as droughts) and health status, drawing upon evidence from Ethiopia and Zimbabwe. Health status as measured by height and body mass is susceptible to such shocks, implying imperfect insurance. Livestock and other assets mitigate the effects of these shocks. An important conclusion, however, is that the poor have few options other than using their bodies as a store of energy in the absence of efficiently functioning food and asset markets.

In an admirably clear and coherent contribution (chapter 7), Collier gives an exposition of how volatility of agricultural incomes (as a result of, for example, agricultural export price shocks) translates into much larger effects on overall income. He explains why aggregate demand shocks from large price increases are likely to be considerably smaller than from price reductions. As agricultural incomes continue to be highly volatile in both Asia and sub-Saharan Africa when covariate shocks occur — especially those leading to a sharp drop in agricultural incomes (for instance, floods in Bangladesh) — the absence of a coherent strategy to mitigate their worst effects is likely to undermine the progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals (Gaiha and Imai, 2006).

In chapter 8, Kamanou and Morduch draw pointed attention to the strengths and weaknesses of various measures of vulnerability, based on expected utility, income mobility, and income/expenditure variability. What I found particularly instructive is their discussion about the ambiguity in interpreting vulnerability in terms of the extent to which income shocks translate into consumption shocks, controlling for village-specific effects. Suppose in two communities a given income shock leads to identical consumption changes. This would imply that both communities are equally vulnerable. However, one community may be subject to small but frequent shocks while the other experiences a few shocks. In that case, it is arguable that the former is more vulnerable, contradicting the earlier interpretation. As an alternative, they propose and demonstrate the usefulness of a Monte Carlo bootstrap approach, based on a household panel for Cote D'Ivoire. They demonstrate that observed poverty outcomes over a period of time may not be a correct guide to the extent of possible vulnerabilities in the sense of a high risk of worsening of poverty status.

Ligon (chapter 9) carries out a decomposition of vulnerability into two major risk components: aggregate and idiosyncratic, based on a subset of ICRISAT panel for three villages in semi-arid south India. On the basis of this and (related) econometric analysis, he draws attention to two distinct risk-sharing networks, one among the landless and smallholders, and another among medium and large landholders. But some of these results change with a different specification and longer panel data (Gaiha and Imai, 2006).

In the last chapter, Dercon pulls together the various contributions from the overall perspective of social protection. Emphasizing that a credible social protection strategy may exceed the capability of most developing countries as they lack both resources and institutions for it, there

is an important role for the donor community to support and provide 'genuine insurance against poverty' (p. 449).

In conclusion, this is a rich and scholarly collection of papers that could help design a more effective poverty alleviation strategy — especially in a world characterized by diverse and pervasive risks against which large segments of the population are often defenceless.

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### Raghav Gaiha

Department of Economics, University of Rome 'Tor Vergata', Rome, Italy.

**Eileen Stillwaggon, *AIDS and the Ecology of Poverty*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. ix + 260 pp. £16.99 paperback.**

This is an important and informative (though somewhat uneven) book that should be read by anyone concerned with what to do about HIV/AIDS. Stillwaggon begins by suggesting that many policy makers and researchers ask the wrong question about AIDS. They focus on the origins of AIDS per se, whereas the key explanatory question is why AIDS has been so virulent in some places (particularly sub-Saharan Africa) and not in others. Her answer is that underlying social conditions, particularly poverty and inequality, shape the AIDS epidemic, as they have shaped other epidemics before it. Stillwaggon has already published some sections of this book in a series of journal articles, but it is good to have the material put together here in a coherent form.

Stillwaggon criticizes conventional explanations of HIV/AIDS that focus on the sexual transmission of HIV, relate differences in the incidence of HIV/AIDS to differences in sexual behaviour and correspondingly stress 'safe sex' as the principal form of AIDS prevention. She does not deny that HIV is sexually transmitted, but argues that this is not a sufficient explanation of the variable incidence of HIV/AIDS across regions and over time. She argues that AIDS should be understood just as epidemiologists have conventionally analysed other epidemics — looking for the social conditions under which they spread. This means situating AIDS in the working and living conditions (the ecology) of the populations it ravages. 'The HIV/AIDS epidemic in sub-Saharan Africa', she suggests, 'is a predictable outcome of an environment of poverty, worsening nutrition, chronic parasite infection, and limited access to medical care' (p. 69).

In the first section of the book, Stillwaggon deftly reviews for social scientists the epidemiological literature on co-factors such as malnutrition, STDs, parasite infections, malaria and tuberculosis that promote HIV transmission or compromise the immune response to it. She argues that these co-factors are intrinsically tied to poverty, particularly in tropical conditions. Stillwaggon's review of the relation of co-factors to HIV transmission convinces me, but it does not provide sufficiently detailed critical discussion of countervailing epidemiological evidence that the social scientist inevitably confronts once immersed in the HIV literature. Stillwaggon's linkage of the co-factors poverty and inequality also seems intuitively correct, but her evidence here is somewhat sketchy. Too much hangs on somewhat dubitable cross-country regressions.

In the second section, Stillwaggon looks comparatively at the health profiles of developing and transition regions — comparing sub-Saharan Africa with Latin America and the Caribbean, Eastern Europe and the former USSR. She shows that in all these regions health conditions have worsened as have other indices of poverty and/or inequality. Thus there is good reason to expect that the HIV/AIDS epidemic now established in Africa will extend itself in other regions characterized by poverty and inequality. The focus here is so wide that the evidence presented for this sensible proposition is unfortunately scattered and somewhat superficial.

In the third section, Stillwaggon asks why current HIV/AIDS research has lost the focus on the social determinants of disease once accepted in mainstream epidemiology. Here she finds two answers. First is the dominance of cultural explanations drawn from racist discourse that emphasize exotic and exceptional sexuality in Africa. The second is the focus on individual behaviour rather than on populations in AIDS research. Stillwaggon notes that the standard question asked is 'Why does a person contract HIV?' rather than 'Why do nearly forty per cent of the adult population in one country and only one per cent in another contract HIV?'. These two biases have led to an almost exclusive preoccupation with altering individual sexual behaviour in AIDS interventions.

In the last section, Stillwaggon deals with current international AIDS policies and alternatives to them. She traces the ways in which the main policy actors, both funders (USAID, the World Bank, etc.) and suppliers (organizations with a history in promotion of family planning), have fixated on the proximate causes of HIV transmission and systematically neglected the co-factors that fuel the spread of HIV/AIDS at a population level. She observes that new forms of intervention are really more of the same. New work-place initiatives, for example, continue to focus on workers' sex lives rather than their economic lives. Stillwaggon argues that HIV interventions will only be effective if they are situated within a comprehensive health programme.

Stillwaggon proposes a series of alternative or complementary AIDS interventions, arguing that we already know how to improve health in developing and transition countries and that we can afford to do so. One can here imagine the voices of critics telling Stillwaggon that her vision is pessimistic. Poverty and inequality are deep and long-term problems, they say, whereas AIDS prevention requires an immediate response. Convincing people to stop taking risks in their sexual behaviour is better than doing nothing. In response, Stillwaggon comes up with a dozen plans that could contribute to HIV prevention. These address a range of objectives — from eliminating specific parasite infections to improving trade and trucking corridors to end the oppression of women. Here Stillwaggon outreaches herself, descending into the kind of apolitical technocratic approach that international development agencies require. In fact there is no 'we' with shared visions of how to improve health in developing countries. Stillwaggon's principal contribution to HIV/AIDS policy is not her list of plans but rather showing that asking the right question leads to a different way of construing the space of policy. By trying to do so many things, Stillwaggon compromises the clarity of her argument, but one must nonetheless congratulate her and her team of researchers for doing so much so well.

### **Bridget O'Laughlin**

Institute of Social Studies, PO Box 29776, 2502 LT The Hague, The Netherlands.

### **Deborah Fahy Bryceson and Deborah Potts (eds), *African Urban Economies: Viability, Vitality or Vitiation?* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. xiii + 353 pp. £65.00 hardback.**

This book brings together ten city case studies and offers a current assessment of progress in de-agrarianization in eastern and southern Africa. The editors have studied the subject over several years and focus now on urbanization, particularly what role economic factors play in the urbanization process — a question that still remains something of a puzzle by the end of the book. And given the almost universal weakness of African urban economies and the inability of these cities to provide anything close to satisfactory incomes or living conditions for their citizens, why does urbanization continue?

The book can be seen as an impressive contribution to the continuing review of 'the final stages of global urbanization'. Whereas the logic of urbanization in the 'developed countries' seemed an obvious function of increasing agricultural productivity shedding labour and industrialization demanding labour in towns and cities, this is clearly less and less the case with urbanization of southern countries — most obviously in Africa today. In her introductory chapter, Bryceson points to the lack of indigenous urban traditions in the region and how almost all the 'apex cities' were founded by colonial governments, largely excluding the indigenous population or

containing them outside the city and its operation. These colonial legacies sit heavily upon the cities, in many ways inhibiting any easy path to a more consistent, self confident and conflict-free urban development process.

The second chapter is posed as a search for sources of urban economic sustainability. A model is set forth to articulate the various components of urban economic development, with a view to analysing what is missing in the cities of the region that might indicate what has to be done to achieve a more robust economic development process. Clearly the cities started with different economic *raison d'être* — ports, rail junctions, mining towns — but none has continued to thrive. There has been some diversification albeit rather weak and efforts to develop stronger indigenous industries have been thwarted by structural adjustment and the workings of the global economic system.

The productive economy is thus restricted to the construction of housing and (however inadequate) the provision of infrastructure. The informal economy provides precarious livelihoods through petty trading, repair workshops, urban agriculture and so on, for the majority of the populations in all the cities. National income from mining activity diffuses into the cities and external support is provided increasingly from remittances and from donor programmes. Given the lack of financial resources, greatly exacerbated by corrupt and incompetent government, urban infrastructure is in extremely poor condition or entirely lacking, resulting in abysmal environmental conditions.

A third chapter reviews the demographic trends in the countries of eastern and southern Africa, focusing on the rates of urbanization in recent years and the forces driving this, divided into factors of natural increases and migration, ranging from restrictive policies to the impact of national conflicts to the results of the AIDS pandemic.

The case studies are grouped into three sections concerned with city economies in the making, urban livelihoods and social dynamics, and urban welfare and housing. Presumably this is a consequence of the different focuses researchers have adopted in their work: no attempt is made to extract the same information from each study that might have contributed to a more focused analysis of the overall situation. All the researchers have long experience with the cities they write about, of course with their own particular focuses, and this is reflected in the depth of their insights. Their diverse approaches are a strength of the book rather than a weakness. Readers looking for information on specific cities should bear in mind that each contributor looks at the history and current issues of the cities from a particular perspective. Nine cities are covered altogether — with Nairobi and Kampala each being looked at from different angles in two chapters.

The concluding chapter by Bryceson serves to underscore the main findings and to make one last attempt to try to understand the forces leading to urbanization in eastern and southern Africa. She focuses on regional dynamics and relations to the outside world. The nearest she comes to characterizing the economic basis of these cities is by referring to them as 'trading places'. However dissatisfied the reader may be at the end with the lack of answers about the role of economic factors in urbanization, the book cannot be criticized for reaching any glib conclusions. It is an important book for those concerned with urbanization on a global scale and especially in Africa, providing new insights into the fast-changing reality of urbanization in Africa today.

**Adrian Atkinson**

Institut für Stadt und Regionalplanung, Hardenbergstr. 40a, 10623 Berlin, Germany.

**Steven M. Fish, *Democracy Derailed in Russia: The Failure of Open Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005. xviii + 313 pp. £45.00/\$75.00 hardback, £18.99/\$29.99 paperback.**

Interest in Russian politics and society is on the increase in 2006, sparked mainly by concerns about Putin's commitment to democracy (especially in the light of efforts to suppress the



independence of NGOs) and the use of Russia's natural resources in the pursuance of foreign policy objectives (brought into focus by the gas price dispute with Ukraine). *Democracy Derailed* thus makes a very timely contribution to the literature. Fish has produced a highly informative book that will be of use both to readers with a background in post-communist transformation as well as those with a general interest in Russia. Even though the book contains a plethora of statistical information which might at first discourage a non-academic audience, its presentation is accessible and includes anecdotes and personal accounts that bring together data with real life experience.

The author does not offer an optimistic assessment of Russian democracy. The book identifies a deficit of economic liberalization, widespread corruption funded by profits from natural resources and a weak parliament as the reasons for Russia's democratic deficit. In the opening chapters the author makes the valuable point of placing the Russian experience in perspective. Many analyses of contemporary Russian politics fall victim to the tendency to consider Russia a unique case not subject to comparative analysis. Fish avoids this mistake by demonstrating that Russia's democracy is in many ways defective, but the country neither stands apart from the world nor are its calamities unprecedented. This contradicts the theses of both the enthusiasts of post-communist transition who consider Russia a 'normal country' and of its critics who blame most transition problems on the mode of liberalization.

Fish tries to dispel the myths of what is wrong with Russia using the factors identified above. Contrary to common belief Fish does not think Russia is culturally unsuitable for democratic capitalism, destitute beyond hope or demographically doomed. He analyses the factors that do explain current socio-economic and political conditions, namely, the effects of corruption, economic statism and unchecked presidential power. The discussion of economic statism is of particular interest because Fish attempts to steer a course distinct from both advocates of initial Russian reforms (commonly referred to as shock therapy) and their critics (advocates of gradual transition). He maintains that Russia did not implement radical reforms in the early 1990s but inconsistent gradualism. Much like Aslund in a paper entitled *Why Has Russia's Economic Transformation Been So Arduous?*, Fish blames the political environment in the early 1990s for the lacklustre attempt at reform that resulted in an economy dominated by natural resource extraction and a polity rapidly losing democratic legitimacy.

However, blaming Russia's political and economic deficiencies on insufficient liberalization is a flawed explanation. Arguing that reform post 1989 was not radical enough ignores the fact that political expediency was a factor in policy design. It was always the opinion of Russia's foreign advisors that political support had to be 'bought' (see Boycko, Shleifer and Vishny, 1996) thus allowing for diversions from the 'optimal reform model'. Therefore, it is of limited usefulness to argue that more radical reform could have been attempted. Secondly, what constitutes radical reform is subject to definition and the majority of commentators (Joseph Stiglitz included) do classify early Russian reforms as radical. Furthermore, those making modern proposals for reform largely assume that initially the shock therapy model of reform was implemented and they seek to correct the problems it generated by focusing on institutions and the rule of law.

The book seems to portray academic advocates of gradualism as inherently anti-capitalist and anti-shock therapy politicians as motivated by personal interest. This undervalues the legitimate debate on the speed and sequencing of reform. Also there is an apparent contradiction between the author's dismissive attitude toward the quality of politicians, particularly the nationalist/communist Duma deputies in the 1990s, and his support for democracy. If popular will expressed through parliamentary elections does not promote democracy, what other route to legitimacy is available? This is a common problem facing advocates of democratization in situations when elections are likely to produce undemocratic governments (Algeria) or administrations otherwise objectionable to the West (Palestine). Branding the Duma of the 1990s as reactionary, however, undermines the author's argument that excessive presidential power is blocking the development of a democratic polity in modern Russia.

On the whole, *Democracy Derailed* offers an interesting, informative and well-referenced discussion of Russia's stalled democratic reforms and the reasons behind the current slide to

authoritarianism. As such, it is a useful contribution to the literature on Russian economic and political reforms.

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### Ioannis Glinavos

Kent Law School, University of Kent, Canterbury CT2 7NS, UK. E-mail: i.glinavos@kent.ac.uk

**Clarissa De Waal, *Albania Today: A Portrait of Post-Communist Turbulence*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris; St. Martins Press, 2005. vii + 268 pp. £45 hardback.**

Most research studies and field work related to Albanian populations concern northern Albania because of its authentic character and ethnic values. Many are written by English academics, one of whom is Clarissa De Waal. Her sympathetic book reveals Albania as a fascinating research subject. Her detailed style lets one imagine Albanian life with its hard living conditions and daily frustrations.

North Albanians are an adaptive people. They have survived for centuries in an inhospitable natural environment and De Waal describes their various survival strategies in detail. For several years during the 1990s De Waal took part in Mirditan life in North Albania. Though she never explicitly mentions the challenges of being a woman researcher in Albania, one can easily imagine this might have prevented access to some parts of a male-dominated society.

In each village De Waal visited, the lack of educational opportunities for children and vocational training for adults restricted the people to agricultural activities and small businesses. The consequent poverty and unemployment — 'Third World living conditions' (p. 41) — contrast with high cultural standards and openness to foreigners. De Waal's analysis of Albanian generosity as resulting from a lack of self confidence has merit, but the admiration Albanians express for western societies as the solution to every difficulty is not related to their social openness. It is easier to open themselves to a foreigner who values their opinions more, perhaps, than a fellow Albanian. But deep theoretical analysis is not the strength of De Waal's book. It is her detailed description, which provides a good basis for further analysis, that is the most important aspect of the book.

Mirditans have a strong sense of identity, as they have historically resisted all kinds of ideological influences. Nevertheless recent emergent changes could be the foundation of a social transformation that might impact the structure of these communities, such as the diminishing importance of extended families or clans compared to the strengthening of closer, nuclear family relationships. Capitalism and the market economy are pushing people to become more self-reliant and individualistic, even if major social matters are still regulated in the same way they have been for hundreds of years (Durham, 1909). And what if this is the most modern of adaptation strategies to invasion — be it religious or political — only differing this time in its form? When social networks become as important in western societies, from a theoretical and practical point of view, North Albanians will be seen as having adapted once again in the ongoing process of social evolution.

De Waal's observation process seems to assess current behaviour in terms of past history, a causal orientation combined with ambitious atemporal research and contemporary impacts. Is there a clear presentation of these explanatory factors? The 'agitated stagnancy' De Waal observes in the first years of political change is not supported by any theory, be it anthropological, sociological, or psychological. Does the subsequent conclusion point to the existence of an Albanian cultural exception?

When writing about possible escapes from the Albanian *cul de sac*, De Waal mentions government, highlighting its lack of power. Generally speaking, little is said about her sources of information. Some foreign studies student families the author mentions might seem to be less than representative of the general population. In a previous article (De Waal, 1998) she explains she honoured requests for help, but only when she knew a reciprocal relationship was possible. Albanians consider someone a friend (*mik*) only on the basis of this mutual exchange of services. When friendship is expressed, Albanians feel very obliged to their friend/guest. Here is the explanation of De Waal's accurate descriptions: she became friends with the people she observed. De Waal thought she 'could sense the regime of terror which had enforced acceptance and patience in these inhuman conditions' and yet she came across some of the 'most cultured, thoughtful . . . people' she had ever met (p. 155).

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**Esmeralda Gassie**

Department of Economics, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland. E-mail: Esmeralda.Gassie@ul.ie