

Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa

Anthropology, Change and Development

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Mainstream development studies have tended to neglect important aspects of experience in developing countries that fall outside the conventional preserve of development intervention. These neglected phenomena include consumption, modernity, and mobility and ambivalent experiences such as uncertainty, mistrust, jealousy, envy, love, emotion, hope, religious and spiritual belief, personhood and other experiences throughout the lifecourse. They have most closely been addressed through critical ethnography in the context of contemporary developing societies. We invite volumes that focus on the value of ethnography of these contemporary experiences of development (as change), not only to address these neglected phenomena, but also to enrich social science thinking about development.

Ethnographies of Uncertainty in Africa

Edited by

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Series Preface

This book series, 'Anthropology, Change and Development', fosters engagement between critical anthropology and development studies through the notion of thinking about development *as* change. Both applied anthropology and the anthropology of development have made significant strides in building a more critical engagement between anthropology and development and both are widely acknowledged as pertinent in various ways for students, researchers and, to a lesser degree, practitioners of international development. This recognition inadvertently sustains, on the part of development studies, a somewhat selective engagement with critical historical ethnography, often limited to that which is easily 'legible', as well as a clear disconnect with a wider swathe of critical ethnography about modernity in developing countries (for example, Burawoy, 2009, Murray Li, 2007, Ong, 2011). Whilst both can contribute substantially to understanding and valuing change, such ethnographies are mistakenly seen as being less relevant to the concerns of contemporary development. Non-anthropologists and those working from a more pragmatic development orientation may find that they make 'difficult' and 'uncomfortable' reading. However it is precisely this theoretical rigor and the determination to unsettle conventional perceptions about development that lies at the centre of the value of critical anthropology for development.

This series goes beyond the remit of an 'applied anthropology' framework to include phenomena that have been overlooked by development studies. It focuses precisely on the important aspects of experience in developing countries that fall outside the conventional preserve of development intervention. These neglected phenomena include uncertainty, mistrust, jealousy, envy, witchcraft, and ambivalent experiences such as love, emotion, hope, consumption, modernity, aspiration, social mobility, religious and spiritual belief, personhood and other experiences throughout the life course. They might also include the sensory dimensions of life, for example, the pleasures of consumption in festivals and malls, the experience of love, and other less celebrated emotions. Other marginal phenomena include the subjective and relational aspects of life in developing countries that contribute to anthropological and sociological critiques of development and modernity. Rich applications of

life course analysis to developing country experiences, as well as deeper approaches to experiences of time, and related emotions of hope and aspiration, are offering more meaningful ways of understanding how different individual's experience, influence and are shaped by complex, and often rapid, processes of wider societal change.

The purpose of this series is to bring ethnographic research on these phenomena into conversation with contemporary development discourses and debates and enrich social science thinking about change and development. The contributions to this series show that these phenomena *matter* in contemporary developing societies and in doing so offer new theoretical insights for anthropological engagement with contemporary change and development. Whilst development debate over time has substantially opened up discussion about phenomena previously considered as being beyond its preserve, such as rape, taking a step back from the 'development lens' (Jackson, 2011) makes visible core elements of everyday experience that are still not spoken about within development. Factors like envy that, as any practitioner can confirm, are a well-recognized reality in poor communities, are rarely seen as a fit subject for theoretical analysis within development studies. Placing these phenomena outside the frame of investigation, rather than as analyzing them as central dynamics of situated developing contexts, severely undermines the capacity of development studies to develop rigorous theoretical explanations about change. This series makes a contribution towards focusing more direct empirical and theoretical attention on these various kinds of social phenomena.

In doing so, the series deliberately aims at extending the conversation between anthropology and development in ways that will deepen theoretical frameworks and raise questions about development. This is an intrinsically critical endeavor that involves close attention to multi-sited power relations, including those of gender, and reflexivity. Readers will need to look elsewhere for development 'solutions', policy 'recommendations' or visionary 'agendas': Instead, the series offers a serious ethnographic treatment of hitherto neglected phenomena that are central to contemporary experience in developing contexts. The series encompasses contributions from anthropologists, other social science researchers and development practitioners using anthropological and ethnographic methodologies to engage with processes of change and raising questions about what they mean for development.

Cooper and Pratten's edited volume addresses the neglected phenomenon of uncertainty, and uses this as a problematique for analysing contemporary life in Africa. The ethnographies included in the volume

examine people's everyday experiences of conflict in Guinea-Bissau, economic livelihoods in Ethiopia and Mozambique, development and power in Kenya, and health regimes and outcomes in Uganda, Tanzania and Cameroon. In doing so it shows how people engage with and understand global processes such as risk and vulnerability, and how they manage different forms of uncertainty in their daily lives. The volume draws on literature from anthropology, African studies, and development studies, and sets the perspectives and actions of individuals against the collective implications of uncertainty for societies. It shows how situated ethnographies of contemporary experiences of development (as change) can enrich development studies and make a conceptual as well as an empirical contribution.

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