

ANTHROPOLOGICAL FUTURES

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A review of Henrietta Moore, ed.: *The Future of Anthropological Knowledge*. London: Routledge 1996. *Anthropos*, spring 1997.

"Anthropology is no longer a singular discipline, if it ever was," writes Henrietta Moore in her Introduction to *The Future of Anthropological Knowledge*, "but rather a multiplicity of practices engaged in a wide variety of contexts." The volume, based on papers presented at the ASA Decennial Conference in 1993, is accordingly not an attempt to redefine the discipline, but rather aims to examine the "nature and purpose of social knowledge, and in particular anthropological knowledge". Not extremely surprisingly, those of the contributors who provide anthropological knowledge with a historical and cultural context conclude that it tends to be both hermetic and ethnocentric.

In her Introduction, Henrietta Moore outlines some main challenges faced by anthropology in a post-colonial world: the social and geographical embeddedness of anthropological knowledge and the facile discarding of non-western theory; the transformation of anthropological knowledge due to technological change leading, inter alia, to the increasing mediation of culture and social relations by communication technology; the importance and significance of knowledge produced at the social margins; and the importance of studying what Foucault speaks of as "governmentality", that is, the rationalist ideology which underpins social engineering -- especially because anthropology, as an academic subject, is part of this mentality. While one might have wished to add further fields of priority, for example a thorough investigation of the interrelationship between anthropological and nationalist thinking, hers is an appropriate starting-point for the following contributions.

Emily Martin's chapter looks at social perceptions and interpretations of micrographs, that is magnified images of internal bodily processes. Her informants, who are lay people, generally respond in a commonsensical or phenomenological way to them, arguing that although the images are "dazzling", "impressive" and so on, their experienced reality is more relevant for an understanding of their condition: the scientific images, when presented to terminally ill patients, make them "a stranger in your own dying". Also approaching the relationship between expert and everyday knowledges, Norman Long, in the following chapter, considers the state of affairs in the anthropology of rural development. Globalisation processes influence policies and conditions for decision-making, and a new agenda for rural research, Long argues, must analyse "the complex sets of relationships that develop between policy discourse and interventions and the ideas and strategic actions of various social actors". In order to accomplish this, he advocates his own and his collaborators' concept of the interface, the locus where discrete knowledge systems constituted differently with regards to magnitude and power, meet. Encompassed in such a research agenda is also a consideration of the construction and use of forms of agricultural knowledge, where local and global perspectives tend to differ crucially.

The two following papers, by Aihwa Ong and Mayfair Yang, both discuss the social scientific concept of modernity in relation to processes of change in contemporary China. Ong explains the predominant Chinese concept of modernity, connecting it to "soft authoritarianism" and the role of informal networks; while Yang concentrates on the effects of state-imposed cultural amnesia in Maoist China, where traditional society is depicted as feudal, backward and exotic. Ong's message is that modernities not only vary and must be studied comparatively, but that they also inform knowledge construction (including anthropological knowledge) in different ways; while Yang argues that anthropological knowledge on Chinese tradition can be used "as oppositional moments against the state".

The most critical paper is probably Wazir Karim's, which argues strongly that

academic anthropology has opted for marginality and irrelevance by failing to come to terms with pressing political issues, such as the oppressive uses of Western knowledge by governments and elites in the South, and by arrogantly discarding non-Western knowledge as parochial and atheoretical. To her, it is evident that anthropological knowledge is created for "endogenous" anthropological, Western audiences. Paul Richards, in a piece on environmentalism and social unrest in Sierra Leone, sharply criticises Western conservationists for unwittingly providing cover for warlords and mercenaries on the Liberia--Sierra Leone border, and shows that local knowledge skilfully -- if not entirely satisfactorily -- deals with the predicaments faced by humans living in a tropical forest environment.

It is obvious that turn-of-the-century anthropology is suffering from a crisis of legitimation (see also Shore and Ahmad: *The Future of Anthropology*, 1995); phrased by Peter Harries-Jones in his Afterword to *The Future of Anthropological Knowledge* as a tension between a "crisis of relevance" and a "crisis of representation". The post-colonial hangover and the incessant questioning of fundamental concepts and assumptions, accompanied by a widespread loss of faith and a bewildering pluralism in the disciplinary practice, are in this volume not, however, merely lamented or celebrated: alternative modes of legitimation are offered. Martin and Long show the importance of studying the social appropriation of scientific knowledge anthropologically; Ong and Yang argue the need for a more nuanced, less Occidental view of modernity; while Karim and Richards juxtapose anthropological knowledge with the knowledge of others, showing the relevance of the latter. In the Afterword, Harries-Jones rephrases the classic critique of positivism by linking, in a discussion of social advocacy and social movements, the production of social knowledge to social action. All of these approaches respond relevantly to recent charges of exoticism and encapsulation, and all may have significant political consequences. Whether or not anthropology may again be a socially important discipline outside of academia remains, of course, to be seen, but if these papers are representative of current perspectives on the discipline, we may well see a

reinvigorated and socially relevant anthropology in the twenty-first century. It is also an open and debatable question whether we really mean to place the knowledge of others on a par with our own. Notwithstanding the post-colonial expiation, self depreciation, praise of others' knowledge and emphasis on the local embeddedness of all knowledge characteristic of this kind of publication, the anthropologist's way of reasoning always gets the final word in practice. That is certainly the case in this book; and how could it be otherwise? Perhaps what is called for, rather than trying to be what we are not (such as social activists or political analysts), is respect and pluralism at the interface as an alternative to competition or merging horizons, informed by a thin but tough universalism?