

DIRECTIONS IN DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH: IDENTITY AS UNIFYING TOOL OF ANALYSIS

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Globalization and development: Themes and concepts in current research represent a collective effort from the CERES Research School in development studies in the Netherlands. The key focus of this edited book is a discussion of current themes and concepts that are intertwined with issues of globalization and development research. The six chapters in the book address themselves to broad and specific theoretical and methodological issues of researching economic, political and social development. While the book does maintain easy dialogue throughout, as is perusal with most edited texts, some chapters tend to be more accessible than others.

The six chapters are authored by scholars with diverse disciplinary affiliations, from anthropology, sociology, psychology and economics. The first chapter introduces the current issues of contemporary globalization and in many ways sets the agenda for the rest of the book. Ideological and analytical questions are raised regarding the concept of globalization itself: what was the political agenda of contemporary globalization project and its consequential achievements, what forms of critique have arisen both from within and without? What analytical claims were made and what substantial critiques can be leveled against these?

The second chapter, "Ways forward in livelihood research", extends this analytical query in its exploration of local responses to contemporary globalization. Two basic questions frame the discussion: how people are able to make a living *and* make a difference – considering both the ideological and political dimensions that are entwined with ordinary people's modes of life and broader policies of structural adjustment as well as the operations of multinational companies. While acknowledging the importance of such macro forces in impacting on sustainable development, the chapter opts for amore intensive focus on the intricate and complex ways people actually deal with these impacts in trying to make a living. The concept of livelihood is developed as a tool of analysis to explore the economic, social, political and cultural dimensions of how people make a living. The chapter

makes an argument for a processual and actor-orientated approach to livelihood and the necessity for a more focused analysis of some of the “consequences” of globalization that include increased insecurity, risk and vulnerability.

Concerns about security and social exclusion immediately bring to the fore issues of identity formation and the ways people both constitute and position themselves in the world. Chapter three’s “Identity formation: Issues, challenges and tools” was authored by a multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional group of social scientists and reflects the diverse and contentious issues that have characterized identity studies. The chapter is structured around three sections: contextualization of the concept of identity formation within the social sciences, an overview of the different perspectives that have framed social scientific inquiry in this area and a reflexive focus on the issue of “identity politics”. The latter section specifically engages with the issue of identity politics within the struggles over globalization as a neo-liberal political project and identity politics as a consequence of increasing flows between people and commodity and meanings which in essence challenge existing localized, regional and national identifications. The issue of governance and the competence of central governments in relation to supranational integration, but more importantly, how these may affect policies and implementation is discussed in chapter four.

The issue of transnationalism, both as concept and phenomena, extends this dialogue on the consequences of globalization in the next chapter. The authors raise and discuss two under-researched areas in transnationalism research: the different effects of transnational phenomena on various actors and alternative forms of transnational phenomena other than the classical south-north migration which remain under-explored. The chapter also raises some crucial methodological and empirical research questions and units of analysis that characterize this area of research and which may serve as useful points of critical introduction to newcomers in the field. The book concludes with its final chapter on “Unpacking and re-packing knowledge in development”, which takes a reflective and critical look at expert knowledge production in development. Critical questions are raised, such as the under-representation of alternative types of knowledge necessary for transformation and development and interrogating the implied “inevitability” and superiority of others such as technological expertise. The legitimacy of what constitutes “expert knowledge” and the positioning of local knowledge within this discourse is increasingly becoming a contentious issue within the social sciences, psychology in particular. More importantly, it is perhaps the differential access to knowledge that points to the necessary imperative of addressing issues of power relations and knowledge production in our practice as researchers.

The text is primarily a multi-disciplinary approach to issues of social, economic and political development within global processes. The six themes, structured in the form of chapters, that are identified and discussed, form part of the broader debate on globalization and development that have interested social scientists, economists and political scientists for decades. The relevance of such a text for a socially relevant psychology lies in its pinpointing of identity as a crucial unifying and important tool of analysis in research on human and social development. *Identity* in its many hybrid forms, is shown to encompass many facets of development. What identity formations and deformations remain under-explored in dominant psychological

research, particularly within community and social psychology respectively? What varieties of exclusion and discrimination in contemporary South Africa for example can be integrated as particular dimensions of community processes intertwined with globalizing processes? What are the different impacts of human movement on living communities?

In what ways has globalization, and economic states locally, continually produce current identity projects — and in light of the upsurge in xenophobic conflicts in South Africa — how do these in turn manifest in exclusionary practices toward persons from outside the communities? In what way/s has national identity been subsumed by regional/community identities? This remains an issue that is especially crucial in any discussion of transnational identities and contexts of xenophobic conflict, also given that there is also implicit in most xenophobic contexts, an upsurge in specific *self-identifications*. Also of increasing importance is the strategic use of identity politics in the struggles over access to resources and inclusion /exclusion processes, whether class, “race”, gender or nationality. In spite of its useful contribution to development debate generally, I was somewhat disappointed in the rather limited acknowledgement and engagement with gender as an important analytical lens. Perhaps this remains a necessary challenge: what local studies of globalization in which gender takes centre stage and the potential different understandings of globalization that may come from this. What gender identities are formulated and reformulated as part of processes of resistance and negotiation of impacts of macro processes? This text serves as a useful springboard for new ways of interrogating and revisiting themes and concepts in psychological research on human and social development, highlighting identity as a substantive area of inquiry in this area of research and knowledge production.