

Adams, Vincanne and Stacy Leigh Pigg (eds.)

Sex in Development: Science, Sexuality and Morality in Global Perspective

Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005, ISBN:0 8223 3491 7, 360 pp.

This book makes an stimulating contribution to debates on development and relief, because it covers issues—sex and sexuality but also morality—that are only very occasionally and perhaps reluctantly dealt with in the literature intended for relief and development practitioners.

If I have understood the book correctly (and this may not always be the case) it covers and illustrates (with case studies of different types) three main arguments:

- interventions in health, family planning, AIDS prevention etc. contribute concretely to shaping new sexual behaviours, on purpose or otherwise;
- development activities, broadly understood, play an important role in defining what is ‘normal’ (and hence morally and socially acceptable) sexual activity;
- there are complex and unpredictable paths through which sexual identities are shaped by development interventions, especially those related to HIV/AIDS.

Given these topics, this is a book that will draw, intrigue, and entertain readers who are especially interested in the emergence and nature of social and gendered identities, and in particular sexual identities.

It is also a book that carries a warning salutary to all those practitioners who may naively believe that the outcome and impact of our work have precise and foreseeable boundaries, with little or no effects on aspects of people’s lives as sensitive and intimate as sex and sexuality.

A criticism of this book is that it is not always easily accessible. Its erudite language and wide span of theoretical debates make for a challenging and at times downright difficult read. In particular, I struggled with the introduction, and phrases such as ‘... creation of normative as a bio-political project; and the

negotiation of a morally based liberal humanist forged in a sexual identity politics tied to health development’ (p. 28), and ‘transcultural junctions’

The separate chapters are of easier access. This is because the analyses of the selected themes are interwoven with well-documented historical accounts and illustrations of events. These span considerable historical and geographical contexts: from the so-called ‘sexual revolution’ in Russia, the transformations in the sexual education of girls in Uganda, the evolution from tantric Buddhism to contemporary fertility control in Tibet, among others. I did miss, however, a focus on relief (as opposed to development) work, as well as examples from the Americas, surely all potential sources of additional and different insights.

Several common themes emerge which I found particularly interesting. One is the recognition of the variety of development actors who can and do affect sexual norms and behaviour in given times and places. For example, it is the government and its officials who, in Papua (Indonesia), define the sexual behaviour of local people as deviant and primitive, by valuing and sanctioning alternatives through health programmes. In this article (as in others) sexuality is an entry point through which other key institutions, marriage, divorce, even clothing, are analysed. On other hand, the owners and clients of two bars in Abidjan, are equally considered actors. They shaped the networks connecting same-sex relations in Côte d’Ivoire that gradually created a culture of openness in which AIDS—prevention work could be inserted.

But while powerful actors (colonial powers, state agents etc.) use definitions of acceptable (moral, civilised etc.) sexuality as one of the many ways of asserting superiority and hence control, those who are the subjects of these controls (women, minorities, the colonised) have their own methods of subverting this imposition. The article on India during the colonial era is both complex and intriguing. Here the

construction of a respectable sexuality was embodied in the image of the middle-class wife and opposed to that of the prostitute, with the former offering an indigenous ideal worthy of comparison with the colonial model. Long after decolonisation, the current influx of pornographic material, on the wave of globalisation, is bringing back old concerns about national pride and morality, built around female sexuality.

A second and related theme is the heavily gendered nature of all sexual norms, codes, and practices. In this context it is interesting to note the universality of the association of women's sexuality with biological reproduction (see, for example, the article on Russia), an association that ironically serves to desexualise sex, at least for women.

A third theme is the unexpected role that the 'HIV/AIDS industry' plays in the re-figuring of sexual identities. The competition and tensions (to the point of a 'war') between factions within the health NGO sector in India is a fascinating backdrop to debates on whether Kothis (men who have sex with men) should or should not be considered to be 'gay'. They also offer the pretext for state interventions of a very repressive and violent nature. According to the author, the flow of capital generated by AIDS was at least in part at the core of the problem, by stirring latent conflicts and internationalising the issues.

In conclusion: my struggle with some of the language and the more complex ideas was not always won but it was worthwhile. I emerged from reading this book with an appreciation of how important it is to discard the view of sex as 'natural', and acknowledge that all forms of sexuality are contextual and historically specific. I also came away convinced of how much more careful we need to be, as development practitioners, to avoid presenting our work as part of more modern, scientific, and hence more valuable understandings of all aspects of life, including sexuality.

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Lockwood, Matthew

The State They're In: An Agenda for International Action on Poverty in Africa
London: ITDG Publishing, 2005, ISBN: 1853396176, 192 pp.

In 2005, Africa became the centre of considerable attention in the international aid community. As a broad coalition of NGOs launched a campaign to 'make poverty history' and increase aid to poor countries, numerous official reports called for substantial increases in official development assistance (ODA) on the premise that higher levels of aid are critical to reach the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015—especially in Africa. Both the report of the Commission for Africa chaired by Tony Blair and the report of UN Millennium Project, chaired by Jeffrey Sachs, for example, call for doubling aid to poor countries. If donors deliver on the public statements they have made, at the G-8 Summit in Gleneagles in July 2005 as well as elsewhere, the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD estimates that ODA from the main OECD donors will increase from a little under US\$80 billion in 2004 to US\$130 billion in 2010. This US\$50 billion represents the largest expansion in absolute levels of aid (if not in the proportion of gross national income) as measured by the DAC since the Committee was formed in 1960. The sharpest percentage increase is likely to occur in Africa, taking the level of aid to that continent alone to around US\$50 billion in 2010 (DAC 2005).

Yet, despite this enthusiasm among donors and international NGOs that the increased levels of aid pledged in 2005 can mark 'a new beginning for Africa', in the words of Gordon Brown, many critical voices in Africa, especially within civil society, seem to be more ambivalent about the merits of 'scaling up' international assistance.¹ African civil society organisations (CSOs) are suspicious about the impact of aid in their countries as well as about donor intentions behind such assistance. Much of that discussion continues to be shaded by an anti-colonial discourse against ill-conceived

interventions driven by donor political interests. In a particularly strong critique of the July 2005 Live 8 concerts organised around the world, Jean-Claude Shanda Tonme (2005), an independent consultant and columnist from Cameroon, argued in a *New York Times* editorial that aid to Africa has been essentially misguided and has helped to entrench authoritarian regimes: 'we [Africans] are troubled to think that [donors] are so misguided about what Africa's real problem is, and dismayed by their willingness to propose solutions on our behalf . . . Don't they understand that fighting poverty is fruitless if dictatorships remain in place? Neither debt relief nor huge amounts of food aid nor an invasion of experts will change anything. Those will merely prop up the continent's dictators'. Siapha Kamara of the SEND Foundation in Ghana has also argued that official Africa is much more enthusiastic about the prospects of increased aid than African CSOs, who 'are justifiably asking what is different in the present day international aid system' that would make aid have a more positive impact in the region.²

It is against this backdrop that Matthew Lockwood's book *The State They're In* seems particularly timely and relevant—and ought to become essential reading for those interested in acquiring a more profound understanding of the role of foreign aid in tackling poverty and promoting development in Africa.

Lockwood's fundamental argument is that the root causes of Africa's economic and social underdevelopment are political in nature. In their majority, African states have been *anti-developmental*, or at best non-developmental, enmeshed as they are in a system of clientelistic ties where elites dole out favours and grant preferential access in exchange for political support. In a context of economic stagnation and structural reform, aid itself has become an important source of patronage, so that in many cases donor interventions themselves have served to reinforce clientelistic tendencies rather

than promote the establishment of more developmentally oriented states.

Lockwood also provides a thorough and informative review of five relatively good performing 'developmental states' in Africa—Botswana, Ghana, Mozambique, Tanzania, and Uganda—and how they came about. If anything, the five experiences highlight how difficult it is to identify a set of common factors that may help explain when and how a degree of political transformation, however limited, is possible. In other words, context and historical specificity matter, and matter a lot. Lockwood seems to suggest that such transformation may be more easily achieved under a system of centralised political leadership by a strong ruler who can keep a tight(er) rein on clientelistic behaviour. It is not entirely clear, however, that a more centralised system is any less dependent on or subject to patronage for its survival. An example from a different region that comes to mind is that of Mexico in the 1990s under the highly centralised administration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. Salinas laid an assault against traditional organisations of corporatist representation, which he criticised as paternalistic, populist, and clientelistic, and then he went on to establish a new programme of poverty alleviation which itself turned out to be a highly effective source of patronage.

For every 'enlightened' authoritarian ruler (e.g. a Museveni in Uganda) one can easily identify a much less successful and damaging counterpart (e.g. a Taylor in Liberia), and the risks of such a gamble may be too high. The case of Ghana that Lockwood describes could be used to argue the opposite: that political competition can, under the right circumstances, 'attenuate neo-patrimonialism over time'. The key here is, of course, to identify what these 'right circumstances' might be. For Ghana, the answer seems to lie in the existence of a strong civil society with cross-cutting identities. How and why such a strong associational life was able to emerge in Ghana, and apparently not elsewhere, is a question that Lockwood does

not address, but one that surely deserves closer attention.

In a way, as the author himself states, the analysis he presents in this book is neither new nor original, but that does not make it any less valuable—especially because many of the lessons of what he has to say do not as of yet seem to have been duly absorbed by those making aid policies and those seeking to influence them in the North. Lockwood makes a compelling argument that ‘much of the thinking on Africa—from . . . official donors and . . . NGOs alike—is flawed because [it] either does not recognise or does not draw out the implications of the central role of politics and the state in Africa’s development problems’ (p. 5). This is manifested, for example, in the insistence of donors to reduce ‘good governance’ reforms to a technical exercise, thereby failing to recognise that ‘governance problems are symptoms of the politics that underlie African states’ (p. 68). International NGOs, for their part, have tended to (over-)emphasise the external conditions that have inhibited the developmental potential of African states (unfavourable terms of trade and IFI conditionality, for example) without giving serious thought to the internal political dynamics that have led to the severe failure of states to promote development through intervention. Their preoccupation has been with pressuring donors to increase levels of aid, reduce trade barriers, and eliminate debt, but as Lockwood puts it, ‘if NGOs don’t adopt an analysis that engages with politics in Africa, they run the risk of campaigning for change that will not help, or even make things worse’ (p. 121). Indeed, as highlighted by the words of Shanda Tomne quoted at the start of this review, it is on the issue of political conditionality that international NGOs (mostly based in the North) most differ from their Southern-based counterparts, who tend to support it far more often than they do.

In the end, Lockwood argues, it is essential for both donors and NGOs to recognise that, if sustainable change is to take place in

Africa, it will have to come from the inside and will have to involve a substantial transformation of the clientelistic structures that currently dominate African political systems. Thus, the solutions to the region’s developmental challenges need to be political and not merely technical. The international community can play a supporting role by adopting policies that assist this process of political transformation, although, as the record of both economic and political conditionality shows, international actors will have to become much more realistic about what aid can and cannot achieve. Much as donors and international NGOs would like to believe the opposite (albeit for different reasons), things don’t happen just because donors will them and impose conditions to make them happen.

So what can the international community do? Lockwood proposes a two-tier approach to aid that includes: (a) a ‘floor’ of assistance to all countries relative to their poverty levels, based on humanitarian needs and aid efficiency criteria; and (b) significant additional resources to be allocated ‘on the basis of very few final outcome indicators of development performance’ (p. 107). However, while the author explains the nature of Africa’s developmental predicament with remarkable clarity, his analysis of how such (political) problems might be successfully addressed by donors and international NGOs is less clear. Though he tries, for example, to dissociate himself from it, the second aspect of his proposed approach very closely resembles the Millennium Challenge Account (MCA) initiative that has been launched by the USA whereby countries qualify for MCA assistance depending on their performance on a range of conditionalities—both economic and political. However, Lockwood does not specify what those criteria would be, beyond suggesting that his approach would take political considerations into account. Nonetheless, he does point to some areas (arms trade, money laundering, etc.) where the international community can exert

important pressure and in that way have a positive impact in supporting the emergence of more developmental states in Africa.

Overall, this is an important book with very valuable lessons that deserve to be taken seriously. Doubling aid to Africa without acknowledging and engaging with the political nature of the region's troubles may not help to make poverty history.

Notes

1. In 2005, ODI launched a project titled 'Southern Voices for Change in the International Aid System' that seeks to capture the views and opinions of Southern civil society organisations (CSOs) on the way the international aid system currently functions and how it ought to be

reformed. For more information, see www.odi.org.uk/ffa.

2. See http://www.odi.org.uk/ffa/papers/kamara_summary.html

References

- Development Assistance Committee (DAC)** (2005) *DAC Members' net ODA 1990–2004 and DAC Secretariat simulations of net ODA to 2006 and 2010*, Paris: OECD-DAC, available at www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/30/35320618.pdf
- Shanda Tonme, Jean-Claude** (2005) 'All rock no action', Op-Ed, *The New York Times*, 15 July.

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