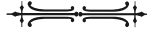


## FOREWORD



Public anthropology is often criticized for vacillating between a disciplinary commitment to a credible accounting for the experienced reality it studies and an accountability to worthy social causes. This divided loyalty between knowledge and ethics is habitually resolved through an unbending subscription to one or other all-embracing ideology that furnishes both the need for an overarching cosmopolitan morality and the imperative of providing a cogent, well-informed interpretation of the matter in hand. Thus, postcolonialism, feminism, anti-globalism and other -isms of our day are turned, in the name of critical thinking, into indisputable, politically correct tenets of an uncritical, self-indulgent anthropological perspective.

It takes an intrepid, truly critical scholar such as Esther Hertzog to muster the courage of her convictions not to succumb to these trendy regimes of contrived knowledge, and instead to offer a level-headed, disenchanting, yet heartening approach to the study of the so-called underprivileged. The disillusionment lies with the disappointment with false expectations and promises, while the hope rests with the moralistically untainted scrutiny of the unadulterated circumstances of being a disenfranchised woman in a developing country dominated by organizational bigotry and bureaucratic alienation that excludes her even further from any position of power and influence. Indeed, this study bears witness to the far-reaching implications of the experience under study for world economy, political power games and moral agendas; all through the lens of an anthropological discourse free of the airs and graces of contemporary facades of paying lip service to women's rights and to the protest against the exploits of globalization. In this sense this book is a wake-up call from the vagaries of self-righteous do-gooders and political cynics alike.

This book, however, exposes such styles of pseudo-humanitarianism for what they are, namely mere fig leaves to cover ill-intentioned investments and projects. By keeping a dignified distance from, and free of patronizing empathy for, the "natives", Hertzog makes room for their presence and lets their voices come through as persuasive, genuine, and unperturbed expressions of their lived experience. This self-restrained stance enables the author to present an exceptionally lucid and incisive example of an ethnographically informed evaluation study of the built-in subversive forces that turn a socially designated boon into an untoward bane. With impressive vigor and verve, Hertzog took it

upon herself to conduct an involved and disenchanted piece of research into an internationally sponsored feat to empower women villagers in Nepal through the introduction of literacy programs.

Drawing on a series of extended case studies embedded in the breadth and depth of contextual analysis of local politics and socioeconomic processes insidiously shaped by overt as well as covert global interests, Hertzog unveils the infrastructure responsible for the aborted initiative. To ascertain the intricacies of the multitude of circumstances and factors implicated in that destined failure to decolonize oppressed women, Hertzog is not beguiled by politically correct post-colonial ideological and pedagogical academic fads offering clichéd, often out of context, patently patronizing interpretations. Instead, she resorts to the well-trying ethos and practice of first-hand anthropological observation. She accomplishes that by interweaving the global and the local, thus making sense of what seems to be an apparently paradoxical reality of disempowering empowerment.

Spawning a gamut of interlocked circles encompassing macro perspectives from the operation of world systems, through state rule and legislation to gender relations, Hertzog addresses local cultural knowledge and custom as active, self-aware actors in a worldwide arena of power and interests. All these points of view converge to create a prism through which the studied village scene of ritual, discourse, and interaction is observed and analyzed. This field of action is manifested in the sponsored literacy classes that Hertzog investigated as she highlights their ensuing untoward repercussions in strengthening women's presence and position. With the aim of explaining the almost fatalistic consequences of what seem to be good ideas coupled with the best of intentions, Hertzog employs a spectrum of research methods, ranging from thorough ethnographic fieldwork based on participant observation, through interviews with decision-making officials in government and the funding agencies, to qualitative content analysis of accounts and documentation.

This outstanding wealth of findings allows Hertzog to develop an original and erudite approach to the study of developing societies within the context of the emergence of forms of economic exploitation and gender discrimination under the guise of cosmopolitan ethics and empowering support. This is an unassumingly written, yet powerfully persuasive and immensely disturbing contribution to the anthropological understanding of the place of the Third World in today's global universe.

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