Editorial

Jonathan Skinner

In this special issue of *Anthropology in Action*, applied anthropology colleagues from Durham University—one of the largest anthropology departments in the UK—come together to feature some of their recent research. Anthropology at Durham University is well known for its applied strain. And here, guest editor Paul Sillitoe, Professor of Anthropology at Durham, showcases some of the indigenous knowledge (IK) research projects emanating from Durham as part of their Anthropology in Development programme.

In this issue, we are fortunate to have Sillitoe introducing his work on the neglected importance of indigenous knowledge in development. His ideas and arguments about the advantages of IK—dynamic, communicative and one-off—are then exemplified through a selection of case studies. First, Emma Gilberthorpe considers personal experiences and perceptions of development in Papua New Guinea, using her film camera as a focal point for her informants. Then, Aneesa Kassam and Alemayehu Lalise comment upon the work of Hundee, an indigenous non-governmental organization (NGO) in the regional state of Oromia in Ethiopia which, for the past ten years, has been working locally to reform female genital cutting (FGC). In a detailed and contentious case study, Kassam and Lalise show how ethnodevelopment can work. Along with Kassam, Lalise, a trained anthropologist and Head of Programme Operations for Hundee, has changed Oromo practice away from FGC through carefully staged phases of

transformation, a movement from participation planning and male/female sensitization workshops to law making.

The third article in this special issue shows how computer modelling can contribute to applied anthropology. Stephen Lyon and Michael Fischer argue convincingly for the use of computers to simulate and analyse scenarios, and to generate data on human behaviour and reactions to extreme situations such as tsunami, hurricane and earthquake. 'Multi-agent simulation' can extend into the more fine-grained behaviours and decision-taking practices: land allocation and agricultural planning for crop yield in New Guinea, for instance. Computer modelling can also work for us in elucidating the cultural systems of indigenous knowledge such as the honour system found in Punjab Pakistan. Using modelling to work out the ontology of a cultural system helps applied anthropologists to best understand and best help locals. It allows us to communicate effectively; to conduct ourselves appropriately; and to understand what we both know and do not know in our work. Modelling, then, can lead to best practice for applied anthropologists.

The remaining three case studies in this special issue take us to IK project work in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and the North Sea. Manzurul Mannan assesses the rhetorics and realities of development work in Bangladesh in the work of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), the largest NGO in Bangladesh. One clear finding from this research conducted

by a Durham-based anthropologist is that project researchers have different perspectives than project managers, partly arising from their position in the projects. Mariella Marzano looks at how Sri Lankan villagers adapt and change their states as vulnerable citizens responding to the erratic weather. There, indigenous knowledge—as forecasting—is a vital holistic skill helping villagers to make informed livelihood choices. And finally, Selina Stead, Tim Daw and Tim Gray, anthropologically-minded colleagues based at the University of Newcastle, show how interdisciplinary IK work is and can be. United in their research, these team members from the School of Marine Science and Technology and the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology present an assessment of the uses of fishers' knowledge in fisheries management and of the place of traditional, ecological knowledge in this new fisheries science. Working with fishermen, stakeholders, skippers and advisory groups, Stead, Daw and Gray integrate deep individual insights into a broad new discipline. Notably, their research methods involve a range of techniques from questionnaire

to focus group, interview to participant observation. In this final article, together, these marine scientists show how pertinent and apposite anthropological methods (participant observation - PO) and anthropological concepts (indigenous knowledge - IK) really can be.

We hope that you enjoy this special issue and that you also find it useful. Do browse the Department of Anthropology website at the University of Durham: <www.durham.ac.uk/anthropology> for further information and details of their projects; and at the Anthropology Department at the University of Kent you will find examples of collaborations with Durham as well as examples of applied anthropology and computing <<http://www.kent.ac.uk/anthropology/department/csac.html>>. Finally, do contact *Anthropology in Action* if you would like to showcase applied anthropology projects, activities and news from your own departments.

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