

Book Reviews

***There Is No Such Thing as a Social Science: In Defence of Peter Winch* Directions in Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis**

Phil Hutchinson, Rupert Read and Wes Sharrock, Surrey: Ashgate, 2008, ISBN 978-0-7546-4776-8, 148pp., Hb. £50.

Reviewed by Hayder Al-Mohammad

It may seem anachronistic to many academics working in the social sciences and humanities to still be talking of Peter Winch and his 1958 almost pamphlet-length book, *The Idea of a Social Science*. The three authors of *There Is No Such Thing as a Social Science*, however, argue forcefully that maybe now more than ever Winch's most fundamental insights are crucial as a corrective to the scientism of much contemporary research within the social sciences. The authors of this book draw upon Winch's arguments in his earlier works, particularly to support their claim that there is no such thing as social science.

The two initial assertions which underpin and motivate the analyses throughout the book and which aim to clarify why there cannot be such a thing as a social science can be clearly stated as follows: the type of questions and problems which social scientists engage with are fundamentally conceptual not empirical. Scientists can engage in research because they can, more or less, agree upon criteria for determining whether insights X, Y or Z support a claim P. However, in the social sciences, such agreement cannot be assumed because it is unclear what evidential grounds can support a picture about human-reality; thus, claim the authors, we move into the discrete domain

of philosophical inquiry when posing questions 'as to the subject of the question's criteria for identity' (7).

The second claim, more parochial, is that science is not a paradigm per se but is continually responding to the type of knowledge to be acquired and the field in which such knowledge is to be garnered. Thus, science builds up its methodology along with its inquiries and then certain regularities emerge from which criteria can be established. Social science, then, seems somewhat of an oxymoron given the attempt to import a supposed set of methods and ideals irrespective of the particularity and specificity of the phenomena to be studied. It cannot be *a priori* true that social life is amenable to the same type of analysis and mode of investigation as used to study an amoeba or snake mating habits. The authors claim that on this issue alone social science necessarily fails on the 'scientificity' stakes.

The Is No Such Thing as a Social Science is a philosophically technical text, which assumes knowledge of Winch, Wittgenstein and background philosophical competence, and thus is aimed much more at the philosophy of social science market than to a wider academic audience. The chapters within the text take on classic epistemic, metaphysical and methodological issues within philosophy and the philosophy of social science (e.g. the debate between pluralism and monism; linguistic idealism; philosophical quietism) which would be of little interest to only but specialists and those familiar and interested in Wittgensteinian and post-Wittgensteinian philosophy and its implications for the study of social life.

I found this book an important intervention, which challenges the equation that intellectual

rigour is somehow coterminous with tables, charts, spreadsheets and hours spent staring through a microscope. Then again, however, the authors were speaking to the already converted. Nevertheless, there is an important call within this book not to fall back unreflexively on the concrete and the pragmatic as containing the desideratum of a study into the social; the answers and questions themselves may require much more conceptual than empirical work.

Hayder Al-Mohammad has recently finished his doctoral thesis, 'Basra: The Struggle of Dwelling: An Ethics of Everyday Life in Basra', which is based on several years of fieldwork in Basra and Baghdad since 2005. E-mail: hayderalmohammad@gmail.com

***Biocultural Diversity
Conservation: A Global Sourcebook***

Luisa Maffi and Ellen Woodley, Washington, DC: Earthscan Publishers, 2010, ISBN 9781844079216, 282pp., Hb. £34.99.

The Heritage-scape: UNESCO, World Heritage, and Tourism

Michael A. Di Giovine, New York: Lexington Books, 2009, ISBN: 9780739114346, 519 pp., Hb. \$95, Pb. \$45.

Reviewed by David Lempert

There can hardly be more important issues for humanity, today, than how to stop or reverse the forces that are destroying human cultural diversity and the ecosystems that are the basis of that diversity (and human survival) and those that are erasing or manipulating human cultural heritage – the legacy of human civilization and key to its future. Yet, if two of the most recent books in this field by anthropologists are any indication, we may be

going backwards rather than forwards. Maffi and Woodley's *Biocultural Diversity Conservation: A Global Sourcebook* and Di Giovine's *The Heritage-scape: UNESCO, World Heritage, and Tourism*, offer little to serve the profession in research and modelling, or in teaching tools on how to measure cultural and ecological health, identify root causes of threats, create change, mobilize support or choose from alternatives. They offer little in the way of either social science measures or passionate advocacy to serve the moral-legal goals of the profession and humanity; shying away from identifying the specific actors and behaviours that are violating international laws in these areas (e.g. how the ideology of globalization and actions of the international community actively break cultural sustainability within ecosystems in forms of genocide and ecocide) and from comparing and measuring the full range of strategies and alternatives to achieve results.

Maffi and Woodley's book claims to be 'the first resource of its kind' and is targeted as a 'reference on biocultural diversity conservation for researchers, professionals ... and others' (xx) but seems more fittingly described, one page later, as 'increasing the visibility of integrated biocultural endeavors vis-à-vis policy makers, international agencies and NGOs, funders, media and others' (xxi), that promote the brand-name approach of the authors' organization and some 45 projects and partners. Though described as a 'survey', the book actually solicited self-reported, non-critical, non-evaluative, narrative descriptions of projects that fit the category to fill more than half the book. These lack any insightful information of the problems they face, the strategies they chose and the measures of results.

Maffi and Woodley have been doing good professional work in their organization, Terra-Lingua, documenting and seeking to reverse language (and cultural) extinction. Yet, rather than present the hard-hitting direct advocacy and implementation tools for practitioners and students that are the result of their experience,

or provide measures of impact of work that has been going on much longer (in various forms of resistance to colonialism and genocide and ecocide throughout human history), they have produced what is hard to distinguish from a corporate annual report or networking tool.

Indeed, is 'bio-cultural diversity' really new and different from the sub-disciplines of human ecology, human geography, eco-biology, sustainable development, system dynamics and world systems/dependency theory, or studies of indigenous rights, or is it just a 'brand name'? Is this movement or form of action any different from what David Maybury Lewis was doing with Cultural Survival, or what indigenous peoples have done in international treaty conventions and laws, in professional codes, in indigenous people's movements or in national struggles for their resources and identities throughout human history? The book is a-historical and a-contextual, avoiding these questions or measures (even the standard ones in the fields of cultural sustainability and survival), seemingly erasing decades of action.

The successes of the Shuar Federation, the new Bolivian constitution protecting minority rights in a form of federalism, lawsuits against multinationals in the Latin American context; Chicano, Native American and Black schools in the U.S.; land rights movements in Africa and Asia; to the genocide treaty, the Rio Declaration, and UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and new screening and 'accountability' provisions of the international banks at the international level; as well as the varied and changing political approaches of organizations like Cultural Survival, all disappear in this book, replaced only by a list of 'projects' and some lip service to what others have done but with no analysis or critique.

Though the data in the book would suggest that at least 3,000 cultures are endangered, the authors could find only 45 projects trying to reverse the symptoms, let alone touch the root causes; meaning that nearly 99 percent

of cultures at risk do not have any 'projects' while the 'deep structure' causes of the problem and strategies to target it go unidentified and unaddressed. Little new is offered in this book that is likely to change that, and the book does not confront the real causes. The authors are reinventing the wheel, providing simply a list of approaches, mostly just in the form of labels, that is little different from efforts that go back generations. For newcomers, the book is disempowering, leaving readers with no choice but to have to hire the authors and partners rather than to have the real resources to learn their lessons and apply their work in project design or activism, implementation or measurement.

The authors end the book avoiding measurements of success (147) and calling for 'more research' (175–178) to do what they should have done in the six years of writing this book, along with the usual platitudes ('shift in values' and 'a community of practice'; 184–189). Most appeals to protecting the environment and minority rights have met with deaf ears over the past fifty years despite international laws and agreements and even long-term self-interest. It is hard to think that this book, less forceful than some previous approaches and offering no accountability or measurement tools, will really convince or 'educate' those whose minds and behaviours most need to change, or that it will empower others who suffer the consequences.

Di Giovine's book could offer a case study of UNESCO, one of the actors partly in our field that is promoting globalization in cooperation with nation-states and undermining cultural diversity in violation of its own mandate, but he largely advertises for UNESCO's universalism at the expense of cultural diversity (399, 409, 411). Di Giovine's stated purpose is to present a seminal ethnography of UNESCO and/or of the international 'world heritage' sites that it establishes with member governments; to 'look at the ways in which tourists, manag-

ers, experts and politicians are moved to create, impart and remember a site's disparate meanings,' (9). The specific cultural heritage and natural sites he chooses to examine are in Vietnam and Cambodia where he previously worked as a tour guide.

As an author it is Di Giovine's prerogative simply to do an anthropological study of UNESCO, an organization that hires (few) anthropologists and seeks to define a key area of our field. He could take a look at their resources, hiring, history and continuity from French colonialism, their ideology of civilization, progress and challenge to territorial claims, role in globalization as part of an international bureaucracy reshaping the globe's resources and environment, and power relations with government culture Ministries, as well as influence on national and minority cultures. This would make an important contribution to the field. He could also boldly add a cultural critique or ethical critique that would hold UNESCO to both international legal standards for cultural protections and to the standards of our profession for respecting cultures in their diversity (e.g. is UNESCO's approach different from Nazi era approaches to 'museumification' and 'reich?'). A local perspective of UNESCO in a case study, such as from the point of view of the Vietnamese, the Khmer and/or the different subcultures whose identities have been appropriated within their empires would also reveal how cultural heritage and history are manipulated, serving either implicitly or directly as a guide to action by practitioners working in the field.

The problem with this book is that even at twice the length of most contemporary monographs, he does none of these. Instead, he chooses to mix his experiences as a tour guide with journalistic evidence and footnoting of texts, none of which could be described as anthropology or action. What would classify as anthropology in either methodology (participant observation) or deep description (modelling) or interpretation and cultural critique

– the small glimmers where Di Giovine starts to describe some of the sites in a way that does start to look like field anthropology or at least critique (i.e. the packaging of Hoi An and Ha Long), that can be boiled down into a single article – accounts for only about 10 per cent of the book and is mostly based on second- and third-hand information. As for UNESCO itself, there is almost no direct or internal information on the institution's workings at all beyond what the author downloads and dutifully repeats from the UNESCO website, with little real critique.

Reading this book is like reading the dictionary or a religious text given its staggering 935 footnotes. There is little that someone has not written and vetted before. The book belabours the obvious, focusing on minutiae rather than seeing the larger context, and adds little in the way of models or insight beyond the catchy phrase of the title, 'Heritage-scape'. It avoids any kinds of scientific comparisons (with sites that are not touched by UNESCO, work of other donors in heritage protection and exploitation of sites and peoples for tourism), or challenges (e.g. work by UNESCO elsewhere that some describe as creating 'human zoos' for global exploitation) or measures of resource flows and linkages of this sector and their real impacts. Endlessly repeated are empty phrases like: 'World Heritage sites are places', 'monumental mediation' (70), 'place-making' (indexed 12 times), and 'scape'. Typical are fuzzy, self-indulgent sentences like this: 'A monument is a social being mediating between other social beings' (27).

One would think that anthropologists would be at the forefront of advocacy, creation of new mechanisms and the teaching and dissemination of a variety of approaches to save our field and fulfil the profession's basic moral directive of protecting cultural integrity and diversity, both living and historic, giving teeth to the work of anthropologists more than a generation ago who have helped build global indigenous peoples movements, and international

law with new declarations and pressures for enforcement, and in other ways. Indeed, if these two books are really among the best and most progressive of what is available, it is a sign that we are more likely to find works fulfilling our discipline's mission from outside of it rather than from within. Shame on us.

Dr David Lempert, PhD, JD, MBA, ED (Hon), is founder of Unseen America Projects, Incorporated and the Diaspora Bridge Center. He has worked in more than 30 countries on issues of cultural survival, rights and heritage protection over the past 30 years. He has spent most of the past decade in Southeast Asia where he currently heads a cultural heritage project on the Mekong.