

Les associations paysannes en Afrique : organisation et dynamiques. Sous la direction de Jean-Pierre Jacob and Philippe Lavigne Delville. Paris : Karthala, with APAD and IUED, 1994.

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- 1 The goal of this book is to provide a scientific analysis of peasant organizations in Africa and their organizational dynamics. Based on presentations at the first APAD colloquium in October 1992, the major topics covered include theoretical approaches to the relationships among state interventions, civil society and social movements, the internal dynamics of associations in rural societies, the relationship of peasant organizations to state and other external organizations, and the relationship of organizations to existing social networks. Thirteen different papers plus an introduction cover a variety of organizations in different African countries, mostly francophone.
- 2 Although the authors write from a range of theoretical perspectives, most begin, explicitly or implicitly, with at least some of the following assumptions. First, they reject the dichotomy of traditional vs. modern, emphasizing the historical development of both local societies and state organizations. Second, they emphasize the negotiability of the relationship between peasants and peasant organizations and the state. While the state has more power, its power is by no means unlimited, it dominates rural areas unequally, and uses a variety of different means to penetrate them. Third, given the negotiability of social, political and economic relationships, the relationship between formal structure and the activities of various actors cannot be easily predicted. Behavior cannot be simply derived a knowledge of social structure or ideology. Fourth, although social statuses and roles (e.g., age, gender, lineage) may be a useful place to begin analyses, human behavior cannot be confined to these roles since individuals are

complex actors with multiple goals. Finally, many ideological concepts include bundles of strands that are often combined in a variety of ways on the ground, endogenous change, for example, is not necessarily accompanied by social cohesion.

- 3 These assumptions, standard in academic anthropology, remain much less systematically used by development practitioners. Rigorous use of them gives to development anthropologists the means to critique existing approaches to applied social change as well as to suggest new policy approaches. In the case of peasant organizations, authors have been able to look systematically at the differential interests of men and women, youth and elders, and leaders and followers (e.g., Blundo, Jonckers), forms of competition as well as cooperation among local organizations (e.g., Kassibo, Floquet), the way in which "tradition" and new forms of organization simultaneously support one another and are in conflict (e.g., Laurent, Kassibo), the varying roles of the state and the effects on the growth of endogenous peasant organizations (e.g., Guillermou). Authors have looked critically at the role of language in organized development activity (e.g., Mongbo), as well as corruption (many). Some papers analyze organizations in dialogue with peasant associations: development workers, donor agencies and missionaries.
- 4 All the analyses underline the complexity of interaction networks at local, national and international levels. They show that single interventions or innovations that will allow populations to make a quantum leap forward rarely if ever exist, despite the desire of many development practitioners. Instead social change is a messy, inherently inequitable business, that moves forward (when it does) only in fits and starts. This insight is important methodologically, as well as in terms of program content. As development practitioners have explicitly recognized the importance of "local perspectives", there has been a search for simple, easy methods to grasp them, e.g., rapid rural appraisal (RRA/MARP). Much of the detailed ethnographic data so important to the conclusions of these papers could not have been collected using only rapid methods. They demonstrate clearly the importance of in depth anthropological field methods for grasping social complexity and conflict.
- 5 In sum, the papers in this volume offer extremely valuable analyses of peasant organizations based on a sound understanding of contemporary development practice and anthropological theory. But some important tasks are left undone. One is beyond the scope of this book. The emphasis on peasant organizations reminds us of two interlocutors who merit more detailed study: developing country states and NGOs. NGOs are expected to serve roles in some ways similar to those of peasant organizations in the post-structural adjustment state, and they too are sometimes expected to revolutionize development. Many authors here discuss the interactions of NGOs with peasant organizations, they need further analysis in their own right. The activities of developing country states- also deserve the same kind of analysis that is begun here for other powerful interlocutors like the EC and development practitioners.
- 6 Some political scientists have already undertaken these studies, but there is clearly also a role for anthropological analysis. This task is one where developing country anthropologists need to take the lead role. Other tasks could have been begun in this volume. If development anthropologists wish to affect development practice, we need to delineate the linkages between theory and practice. Specific recommendations belong not only in project designs, but also in the numerous other -fora where development issues are debated. Even though there are no simple solutions to the

problems presented, the papers would be more valuable to practitioners if each author had included in his or her conclusions some practical suggestions about the design of development initiatives in the zone under study.

- 7 Nevertheless, the papers have been much more successful at addressing the first audience, development practitioners, than the second, the anthropological community. If development anthropology is to reach the goal enunciated by Olivier de Sardan in his introduction, to feed internal debate in the social sciences and to improve social theory, issues of theoretical interest to the discipline need to be addressed more directly than they have been in these papers. In the United States, academic anthropologists often believe that while applied anthropologists have much to learn from the discipline, they have little to offer it in return. Volumes like this, which use sophisticated theoretical paradigms, but do not explicitly either refine or critique them, support that notion. Yet, the content of the papers suggests that the authors could contribute to a number of issues, e.g., the debate on the concept of resistance, or by new insights on the relationship between elders and juniors in African societies. In terms of this volume, it would have been very instructive had a final chapter been commissioned that directly discussed some of the ways in which the findings of these papers would impact academic debates in social anthropology. Olivier de Sardan is absolutely right when he states that development anthropology should not be ghettoized and it is especially incumbent upon those of us who are simultaneously academics and practitioners to remember that we must speak, simultaneously, to both audiences.

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