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RUTH MCAREAVEY

Taking Sides. Ethics, Politics and Fieldwork in Anthropology, by Heidi Armbruster and Anna Laerke (eds.). New York and Oxford: Berghahn. Pp. Vi+261, £55 (hb); £17.50 (pb) ISBN 978-1-84545-421-0 and 978-1-84545-701-3

In *Taking Sides* Heidi Armbruster and Anna Laerke present nine firsthand accounts of conducting anthropology in various geographical locations and in different socio-political contexts including Syria, England, Bangladesh, Turkey and Austria. The importance of taking sides is the key premise of the book, it reveals how even if the researcher 'does nothing' a choice has been made. As becomes clear throughout the volume, this is not unproblematic; it can cause tension and ethical dilemmas as it tends to raise difficult choices for the researcher. Consequently the book is premised on the impossibility of the anthropologist ever remaining impartial and so the politics and ethics of conducting participant research are examined throughout the volume. While the authenticity of this particular stance on impartiality may be debated at length, it nonetheless provides a platform for analysis. Rather than considering the way in which those in the field may be represented by others speaking on their behalf, the starting point here is to speak with them. Through critical analysis the researchers reveal how they are embedded in the field and are politically engaged; they are not set apart from the research, instead they inhabit it and they help to shape it. Researchers develop relations with individuals; even so their activities are bounded by wider social structures.

This eclectic compilation presents accounts from both seasoned and less-experienced researchers. It expertly tackles tricky matters such as the romanticisation of the grassroots or the suffering of the elite; it brings to centre stage the importance of place or 'place making' (p.177), social relations and experiences; it reveals the complexity of the relationship that exists between the research field and academic institutions; and it demonstrates the temporal nature of ethnography. With this myriad of themes one might imagine that the book would struggle to achieve continuity. This is not the case. The contributors analyse the process of 'doing' anthropology and the subsequent ethical dilemmas. Accordingly the following issues underpin the book: connections to institutional structures; power relations that exist between people; and researcher positionality.

Ethics in research is ever more widespread and to some degree this mirrors the increasing prevalence of an auditing approach to the management of universities. These administrative driven associated ethical frameworks are thus broadly concerned with principles, values and rules. Some would argue that professional autonomy is being stifled by these bureaucratic regulations. This book is not about such prescriptive, bureaucratic ethics¹. Ethics as a dynamic and multi-dimensional process that is steeped in power relations is the subject of the book. Viewing ethics from this perspective recognises how local and particular features of each situation affect the way in which events are interpreted so that everyday encounters provide context (Armbruster p.16). At the same time it demonstrates the inadequacy of a pre-determined, managerial approach to research ethics. The collection is concerned with the ethical judgements that the researcher makes in the course of conducting research. These ethics cannot always be pre-empted; they often require instantaneous decisions where the researcher must 'think on her feet' and indeed ethics are sometimes only apparent during the write-up phase. Ethics relate to personal position, perception and knowledge of others, and of their world.

The book sets out to reveal how the research field is inextricably linked to power. It does this effectively and expressively. Many of the authors grapple with highly sensitive and often personal

¹ although it is recognised elsewhere that this framework affects the ability of the researcher to conduct the politicised, engaged research promoted within *Taking Sides* (see for instance Hennings 2006; Israel and Hay 2006), the authors acknowledge a role for an ethical review process

issues using examples located in normal and in extraordinary situations. In the context of primary school education in an English village, Laerke was compelled to take sides in the continuous struggle over whose version of the truth was more powerful. Using instances from everyday life, such as the ploy to mask the reality of administering children's vaccinations or the performances connected with the church harvest festival, she vividly illustrates the way in which knowledge is used to exert power. On these occasions the adults withheld information in the belief that they understood best what was in the interests of the children. In a less mundane scenario, Schaumberg's account of an anti-capitalist movement in Argentina unmistakably shows how the option of doing nothing does not exist. Schaumberg considered her choices at a public meeting: to speak up or to remain silent. The latter course of action would have aligned her with the alleged injustices of the municipality. Schaumberg reveals the power of speaking up in allowing analytical progress as it engaged with collective debate while also informing and shaping the ongoing study of events in the field. But these are not easy choices for the researcher and there are certain risks, for Schaumberg this was the danger of facing criminal charges. Other risks associated with taking sides are illuminated within the book, such as the fear of estranging friends (Geros p.111); or of providing material for misuse by partisan groups (Mookherjee p.83); or of jeopardising marital relations (Atay p.61).

The role and limitations of predominant approaches to anthropology that have been evident in recent decades are highlighted within the collection, including post-colonialism, feminism and postmodernism. It is argued that established notions of power must be challenged in today's globalised, capitalised world where traditional social boundaries, identities and place are more variable. Accordingly the contributors identify the ubiquitous nature of power and power relations in the manner described by Foucault. This is illustrated by Lindisfarne as she makes connections between American imperialism, the Afghan war and gender (and gender inequalities). Through her instructive analysis, Lindisfarne provides a rationale for anthropologists to avoid viewing society solely 'from below' (p.23) and in doing so to reminds them to look up and consider macro issues such as global elites and ensuing social relations. Her analysis has resonance with Strasser's depiction of political networks, identity and social integration in Austria and also with the connection made by Neale between anthropology and wider social issues. He eloquently conveys how by understanding the plight of those in the field, in this case the Afghans, the researcher is compelled to take account of structures and the degree to which individuals have agency. Analysis of the political economy rather than self-absorption with the 'other' (p.223) is vital. In other words these researchers are concerned that anthropological research is about more than 'naval gazing', they advocate the examination of structural issues and so identify the importance of politics to this type of study. In so doing they also imply that while the researcher assumes a particular (subjective) position, other factors shape the research field. By necessity then, this research must transcend traditional disciplinary divides; a path riddled with complications.

The notion of subjectivity pervades the volume and is in sharp contrast to notions of the researcher as 'cipher' and acting free of vested interests (Yearley 2005). Many of the contributors examine the researcher's position, the constant negotiation between observation and participation the movement between outsider-insider positions and the extent to which objectivity can really exist. For me this ongoing analysis and debate made the collection worthwhile and triggered new thoughts, providing fresh perspective and creating an enhanced backdrop for conducting participant observation. While the reader may be skeptical that objectivity cannot be achieved, even to a degree, there is no doubt that the arguments promoted will spark further deliberations reminiscent of the Science Wars² (Sokal 1996).

² This debate was preoccupied with the perils of postmodernism; with the extent of social influences on science; and on the degree to which objectivity could ever really be achieved.

It would be impossible to review this robust collection of essays without singling out Chapter Nine for specific remarks. Evidently Neale is a well accomplished writer and his flair is apparent. It is an inspiring contribution for its value both as a written piece and for its content. He provides an illuminating account of the elitist nature of academia and indeed of wider society; he advances the notion of the power of the ruling elite. It is far removed from the stuffy, dry, prose often associated with academic writing. For example in discussing discrimination and public prejudices in relation to the choices made by recruitment panels in universities he suggests that 'One possible explanation is that invisible evil fairies fly into the ears of the interviewing panel and crawl up into their brains' (p.239). Meanwhile the content is critical. Neale notes the divide that is required to write for academic and activist audiences. Crucially he argues that challenging the majority can free one up from being inside the mainstream and may also better explain people's experience. This ideology frames much of the rest of the contribution with the themes of understanding and questioning assumptions; being politically engaged; and having an impact in the public domain being picked up elsewhere in the book.

Notwithstanding the extent of the reader's sympathy with the arguments advanced therein, *Taking Sides* is an impressive collection of accounts. It offers insights into methodology, but it is not a methodological text. The collection presents an array of anthropological case studies that examine social relations from below while also focusing on broader socio-political frameworks. It will be valuable to the novice researcher looking for guidance on how to do research. However, given the thought-provoking content, its real appeal will lie in the debate that is sure to follow among all categories of researchers. Deliberations on inter-disciplinary approaches; subjectivity and objectivity; power relations; positionality; and structure and agency are sure to follow.

Participatory Research in Conservation and Rural Livelihoods. Doing Science Together, by Louise Fortman (ed.). Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. pp. Xxx+284. £75 (hb); £29.99 (pb) ISBN 978-1-4051-7679-8 and 978-1-4051-8732-9

Fortmann brings together researchers from policy, academia and the community in search of science that is empowered, local and lay. To this end the volume aims to bring together knowledge that is produced by less powerful individuals and groups with that of the more influential in society. The contributors represent the range of different interests that one might expect to find in social-ecological research management. Alongside academics and scientists are farmers, members of local producers' associations and community members and it is hardly surprising that the meaning given to collaborative research varies across these different interest groups, often giving rise to tricky outcomes. Geography too is diverse, with case studies from Central and North America, Western Europe, Asia and Africa.

In a similar vein to *Taking Sides*, this book engages with the researched. Sharing the values expounded in Armbruster and Laerke, Fortmann is unequivocal that all people create knowledge. This is a central ethos of the book; it recognises the different roles and contributions that different people can bring to the research process. In a somewhat innovative way it does this by encouraging them to literally speak for themselves. The bulk of the chapters are organised in pairs: the first in the pair represents a conventional account that is written by a professional researcher, while the second is an account of the same project from one or more civil scientists. By considering the perspective of professional and of lay researchers, the book explores ways in which knowledge is situated. It shows how it is determined by common standards and patterns of behaviour, common approaches and assumptions all of which differ across and between interest groups. Hence issues of gender, power and equality pervade the analysis.

The contributors explore the challenges associated with the way in which research institutions produce knowledge, the type of practices that they endorse and the way in which certain individuals and knowledge are privileged over others. Rather than set up the normal binary of good and bad

science, a framework is established that considers science in two ways: as process and as goals. With this approach science is understood as a way of working and as a means of unraveling the elusiveness of the world. In and of itself this approach is not new; the way in which it is employed is innovative as it serves to circumvent the rehearsal of the usual arguments around epistemology. Perhaps more importantly it avoids the dismissal of knowledge because of its source and it gives credibility to those who are often silenced within the research process. Further, it overcomes limitations that emerge because of the way in which many theories have a male bias as they are based on male expectations of the world (p.4). Significantly, just as the book does not reject the value of conventional science, it does not consider that lay science ought to become a new source of knowledge or even a handmaiden to conventional science. Instead it promotes a complex interplay between the two.

Despite carefully establishing an alternative way of considering research and indeed science, traditional concerns typically targeted towards interdisciplinary approaches are examined throughout the book. Fundamentally this relates to the dilemmas of producing research that is both 'socially-robust and epistemologically eclectic' (Nowotny et al. 2001:198). A typical such quandary that is portrayed relates to the researchers' physical existence and how they present themselves to a community in order to achieve legitimacy and avoid association with pre-established hierarchies or overcome perceptions of remoteness (see for instance Ch. 6, 8; 10 & 11). One is mindful of Goffman's (1959) attention to the presentation of self. Self-presentation is equally important for the civil scientists where the social risks of participating were revealed as these individuals were often perceived as 'crazy' people (p.61) and so faced a degree of disconnection with their community. Doubt was shown to exist among both academics and lay researchers, some of whom questioned the credibility of collaborative research, perceiving it to be 'fuzzy' (p.152).

Gaps remain in the detail of how to conduct collaborative research. Many of the contributors make the case for giving a voice to an invisible, and sometimes, mobile workforce. Despite this empowerment, there is evidence of disenfranchisement elsewhere. The reader is given the impression that while grand achievements are made through active involvement, the ramifications are not always thoroughly considered. For instance while the key objective of those employed locally was to generate income, it was sometimes the case that participating in the research compromised that income (Ch.2, 7, 10). In other cases expectations were unmet such as the provision of childcare payments (Ch. 7) or the lack of concrete results (Ch.11). Another complaint was that the research was not conducted at a time that was absolutely best for the civil scientists (Ch.7). Tensions between professional and lay researchers were not always fully explained and I believe such an analysis would have been a valuable addition to the volume. The reality of conducting participatory research is that personalities matter, individuals do clash, compromise is not always possible and relationships can break down. But more than this the politics of choice are complicated; individuals are not free agents, they are constrained by other factors that lie outside of their sphere of influence; they exist within a complexity of power relations. Choosing to participate in this type of research has a cost and it is an oversight that the analysis within this volume does not always fully explicate that cost.

The book advances the argument that taking sides is an inevitable part of the process – even if that is to 'do nothing'. However there is no consensus on the position that the researcher assumes. Sometimes the assumption is made that researchers can assume a wholly neutral position (p. 174), while other contributors depict the politicized arena of the field (Chapters 10 and 11). In the latter case study the power of the researchers and of the community was limited due to district government officials' lack of capacity to formally recognize physical community boundaries. This was further complicated by uncertainty around the relationship between the research organization and the district government and the subsequent potential for the research findings to influence government policy. The mapping exercise that was undertaken here was naïve – it did not perceive that maps would be used as a negotiation tool by the communities with logging companies for timber permits

and harvesting. In the end the researchers recognized these limitations and identified the need to be realistic and operate within existing power relations. Meanwhile many in the community were unclear about their own position as constituting research or signifying action. While the ideology of collaborative research may be admirable, it is through its practice that it can become stuck. There is recognition that different individuals have distinctive, but legitimate contributions to make, even if they are not professional researchers. But the way in which values and ideologies can differ among those participating and the manner in which they are negotiated is not always fully considered in the analysis. This is a precarious omission as it can ultimately lead to apathy and disengagement from the community.

Nonetheless while the book is fairly idealistic in its ambitions for the creation of knowledge, it is not *entirely* unrealistic in providing a critical account of participatory research. Typical challenges of conducting participatory research were revealed including gaining access; the influence of gatekeepers; maintaining relations and achieving continuity in the field. The practicalities of collaborative endeavours are recognized, such as the long time commitment required to develop a history of engagement by building up meaningful, trusting social relationships (Ch 3, 4, 11). Operating within an extended timeframe is not normally an option for researchers as it does not normally correlate to the schedule of funding bodies, nor does it always correlate to the situation within the research field. This was ably demonstrated in Chapter 6 where issues of mobility and tenure associated with salal harvesting resulted in disjointed participation.

From a gender perspective participatory research was shown to have merit. The structured nature of gender inequalities was demonstrated through the way in which normal village meetings reflected the values of those who created them – typically male (Ch. 8). However the collection confirms the expectation that despite this, participatory research can shift belief about what is possible for many women. In many instances their mode of influencing was shown to be invisible, such as at home around the ‘kitchen table’ (p. 138), but opportunities were revealed where women created a visible forum that also carried legitimacy within their community. Possibly what was more interesting and worrying in the gender dimension was that for many women the reality of engaging in research meant that their workload doubled. By day they did the research and at night they caught up on domestic chores (p. 234). It has long been recognized that in subsistence livelihoods the choices made by one member affect the options available to others. This was very strikingly depicted through the example of tortillas ‘The men come down with their hands hot and are able to rest but women have to keep working, making tortillas, hauling firewood’ (p.233). Many of the women participants (Ch 12) highlighted how getting involved in participatory research should be a family affair, rather than an individual choice, illustrating the role of the family within farming as an economic unit. I would have loved for the book to critically delve further into the inequalities emerging as a result of the women’s active involvement in research. For example closer examination of the act of participation by the women might have revealed whether in fact it was an act of resistance to overcome the status quo of the structural gender inequalities or if it was motivated by other factors such as a desire to increase income.

The book remains ambitious in layout, content and in what it promises from the outset and it does not fail to deliver. It is perhaps in a form that is a little less polished than *Taking Sides*, and it could possibly be accused of disappointing in the development of some of the arguments by glossing over emerging issues. Nonetheless, it is a fascinating read for those engaged in research that is socially relevant and that crosses traditional disciplinary boundaries. Like *Taking Sides*, while it is not a methodological text, it offers insight into qualitative inquiry. Its stimulating content merits the attention of both seasoned researchers and those less familiar with doing this type of research.

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