

Preface

Development studies are more than most other disciplines characterised by a close relationship between theory and practice, but the implications of this are hardly studied. The close relations between aid and development studies may imply that the agenda for research, the concepts used and the causal links explored are heavily influenced by the development jargon and its often too simplistic notions about the root causes of development/underdevelopment.

The rapidly changing priorities in aid and the associated launching of new slogans and phrases are adding to the confusion as the concepts developed are often uncritically accepted by both aid practitioners and researchers. Concepts, words and notions are conferred to research and studies very often with little scrutiny of their origins, meanings or interrelations. Concepts such as sustainability, participation, empowerment, human rights, decentralisation and democratisation are examples of such notions which have history and connotations, but grounded in ideals developed in the West.

In addition, the development discourse abound with simplistic notions about causal links. The neo-Malthusian population - environment nexus is one such discourse which, being repeated again and again, has turned into a narrative seldomly questioned by practitioners (nor even by researchers). The associated crisis perspective presented by aid organisations, often used for justifying massive scale aid interventions, is another way in which myths and conventional wisdoms are maintained far beyond empirical reality. Other common assumptions portrayed relate to how "planned intervention" is expected to operate in homogenous, conflict-free and perfectly predictable environments, rather than as establishing arenas of competition, conflict and struggle.

Narratives and myths live in development discourse. They are sustained by aid organisations and governments alike, who often have common interests to pursue in ensuring a continuous monetary flow. The metaphors used and the orthodoxies portrayed are heavily influenced by Western thought: they are signs of modernity. As adopted and maintained by development practitioners, the outcome of policies and planned intervention may have a number of intended as well as unintended results, which further strengthen, even create, structural imbalances and processes of differentiation.

The papers presented in this volume are trying to approach the study of metaphors, myths and narratives each from their angle, but sharing a critical view on the way in which such metaphors and myths have been incorporated into current development thinking and practice.

The papers were presented, and are printed in this volume, under three different headings: 1) *Discourses in Development Research: Concepts and Metaphors*, 2) *Myths and Narratives related to the Study of Environmental Degradation*, and 3) *Myths and Ideologies related to Gender Equality and Rights*.

The papers were presented to the Nordic researcher course on Concepts and Metaphors: Ideologies, Narratives and Myths in Development Discourse, which took place at Dansk Folke Ferie's course estate at Karrebæksminde, Denmark 1 - 4 December 1997.

The researcher course was organised by International Development Studies, Roskilde University, in close collaboration with partners being members of the Ph.D. Network on Development and International Relations, located at Aalborg University. Funding for this network, obtained from the Danish Research Academy, also made it financially possible for IDS, Roskilde University to arrange the researcher course and to invite guest speakers from abroad. The funding made available from the Network grant is gratefully acknowledged.

The researcher course had a total of 35 participants, the majority being Ph.D. students from the Nordic countries.

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During the course, the participants had the opportunity to present their individual Ph.D. research work during special sessions, and get feedback from the participating speakers and lecturers. The participants' active participation in discussions and during presentations, as well as the interventions by the invited guest speakers, made the researcher course very successful.

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