

BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS/ REZENSIONEN

WHY THE WORLD NEEDS ANTHROPOLOGISTS

*Dan Podjed, Meta Gorup, Pavel Borecký,
Carla Guerrón Montero (eds.). 2021.
New York, NY: Routledge. 195 p.*

In 2013, the Applied Anthropology Network of the European Association of Social Anthropologists started their annual international symposiums on Why the World Needs Anthropologists leading to this edited volume. The book calls for a paradigmatic shift in the discipline that makes the concept and practice of intervention central in a future-oriented approach to responding to global issues such as “climate and environmental disasters, migration and refugee crises, the rise of identity politics and concerns related to the fast-paced technological advancement” (p. 1). With eleven contributions from scholars and practitioners, the collection delivers a practical resource on anthropological perspectives in addressing world problems and the needed knowledge and skills to enable anthropologists to be highly visible and desired as essential experts in the labour market. Through case studies, it gives real-life representations of what it is like to be an anthropologist who publicly and practically engages issues of our human and environmental conditions. In so doing, readers beyond the cohort of anthropologists are afforded theoretical and methodological insights on anthropology and how it is deployed in contributing to processes of solving different kinds of problems in various social settings. Overall, the book provides an anthropological toolbox for interventions towards

resolving social and environmental problems.

The title itself stands as a declaration of the importance of anthropology in our contemporary times that might come across at first glance as romantic, nostalgic, and lacking novelty. Historically, the utility and instrumentalization of anthropology in different and at times highly controversial political and economic contexts have long been scrutinised. The very term “intervention,” which is fraught with contentions, is addressed in the book by grounding it in the principle of responsibility with “always an eye towards the politics and ethics of [...] engagement” (p. 7). The emphasis on intervening responsibly is a good call for a truthful and accountable anthropology. It also rightly points out that anthropology is not itself the solution to the problems. Instead, it is how anthropological perspectives and methodologies are deployed in the process of problem-solving.

What stands out with this book is that it boldly offers options and blueprints to counter a trend of public misrecognition, an institutional weakening, and the devaluation of the discipline as being irrelevant in real-world problem-solving work. It presses to recast anthropology’s role in the vast world that anthropologists also make and are part of. Thus, the book tackles two interlinked issues of relations, the philosophical and the practical dimensions of science. It aims to reshape the discipline, to put it to work and be explicitly relevant in “continuously striving to make the world a better place” (p. 9),

and to show how to thrive as anthropologists with reputable visibility in any career field imaginable. Altogether, this is a tall order to fulfil. The targets are broad, involving ontological and epistemic premises and the ethics and politics of engagement, especially when considering the many expressions of anthropology's representation, use, and applications. The book's strength are the persuasive narratives by each contributor on the salience of anthropological tools for a nuanced understanding of complex problems, big and small. It is the extent of the intervention in problem-solving that stays arguable.

Some contributors to this volume work in academic institutions and universities who extend their scholarly-informed undertakings for public information and education in popular forms, policy debates and recommendations, and collaborative projects that speak to the discipline's ontological and methodological assumptions and designs. Other contributors work outside of academia, either as social entrepreneurs or as consultants and in-house experts of their own or other companies. Each contribution is structured so that authors first answer the thematic question of the relevance of anthropology, then share their biographical stories on how they became anthropologists with examples of engagements in their career to date. Each essay is concluded with five tips on the dos and don'ts in practice and the skills and knowledge that anthropologists should possess. While this part is most useful for early career scholars and students of anthropology, it will be insightful for all readers in various career stages across disciplines.

The introduction by Podjed and Gorup situates the book's aim within a pointed analysis of anthropology's woes. They refer to the discipline's colonial linkages and the

stereotypical images and identities bred by them. They criticise the separation of theory and practice, the conceptual divides between academic and applied work, the assumed lack of methodological rigour and theoretical engagement with the latter, and the hierarchisation of forms of research valorising the purely academic over the practical. To counteract such trends, the editors present exemplary cases variably associated with "engaged", "applied", and "public" anthropology.

The first two contributions are by Erikson, a professor of social anthropology, and Bohren, an applied environmental anthropologist, who both similarly discuss today's critical global issues and the important anthropological concepts and methodological premises: cultural relativism, ethnography, comparison on similarities and differences, situating diverse perspectives and contexts, or the relationships and historical interconnections of social, economic, political, and environmental conditions informed by the holistic approach unique to the discipline. Such an overview of the foundational approach helps newer readers of anthropology to follow each contributor's emphases on issues troubling anthropology, and the counterarguments and proposals based on their works and projects. Among these issues are the need to bridge the continuously growing boundaries between fields of studies through interdisciplinary collaborations with academic and non-academic partners.

The following chapters illuminate the relevance and advantages of bringing anthropology to various social settings and new forms of engagement. Breidenbach, a "digital-social entrepreneur", uses her anthropologically derived capacity for multiperspectivity to develop non-profit and non-hierarchical organizational innovations, and

co-founded Germany's largest crowdfunding platform for social projects (betterplace.org) and a think tank for digital-social innovations (betterplace lab). Pink pushes for an "interventional anthropology" in interdisciplinary designs and for an "anthropology of emerging technologies" in an increasingly technologically-bound world as she challenges notions that "technological innovation will solve social and economic problems" (p. 56). Jöhncke engages collaboratively with those beyond the university settings through "AnthroAnalysis", a centre for applied anthropology based at the University of Copenhagen that so far has completed over 30 projects on practical problems in social work and health. Winther's and Bouly de Lesdain's chapters focus on their transformative and bridging work between technical engineering, policy development, and anthropology in negotiating solutions to issues of energy sources and production, distribution and consumption. Ulk and Kramer engage with the business and corporate world through their own consultancies to offer new perspectives in corporate culture by applying anthropological theories on culture and culture change. Kirah extends the "anthropological mindset" as a "design anthropologist" and a psychologist to the fields of airplane and software design, arguing that products need to be designed not for, but together with customers. Nolan's contribution sits well in the volume, even if provocatively, as he turns the thematic question around to conclude on what he argues is really needed in this world. He calls it the "anthropological thinking" that everyone can learn, as "citizens, voters and decision-makers at all levels, across society" (p. 155), to gain an understanding of the "world around us in more grounded and authentic ways" (p. 156). He asserts that

anthropology should be taught across educational levels, not just in the universities, but also in primary and secondary schools.

Borecký and Guerrón Montero conclude the volume with five ground rules for an applied anthropology of the future. There was, however, no consensus on the question as to whether to recommend solutions or not. A critical analysis on positionality and situatedness of ethics and politics of engagement, beyond "personal preferences" (p. 173), would have provided a more satisfying and nuanced contextualization on the ambivalence. Also, consequences cannot necessarily be contained. Thus, it is perplexing when the editors juxtapose anthropology's existential worth in problem-solving with algorithms that are not "developed yet to provide complete solutions" (p. 14), as this goes against anthropology's unique perspectives and methodology, especially long-term fieldwork and an ethnographic practice that could fill in critical gaps, the social and cultural aspects of relations in variable contexts rife with uncontrollable or unpredictable outcomes. Likewise, it is noticeable that scholars and practitioners from other geographic regions beyond Europe, Australia and North America are not represented in a volume that poses a globally encompassing question, even if it was an initiative from a European network. Organizationally, it intends to activate and spread the network's advocated principles and goals within the region via its "satellite" events, which is an odd choice of word, since the term evokes images of hierarchies and centres of power.

Notwithstanding these bafflements, including probable accidental linguistic slip-page, the volume is a notable contribution for any introductory course touching on questions on the uses of anthropology and options for students and graduates of anthropology

facing precarity in a shrinking job market within academia. The book ends with an encouraging message that the future will need even more anthropologists, for they are particularly suited to make sense of complex situations and contradictory data. In reactivating reflexive debates on social change and

engagement, the book provokes deeper re-examinations on the *why* and *how* of anthropology.

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