

Public Anthropology in Changing Times

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Abstract

Public anthropology is a collective aspiration shaped by generally shared values and intentions within significant sections of social and cultural anthropology. The impetus behind the creation of the journal *Public Anthropologist* originates in this realm of ongoing discussions and actions inspired by the idea of pushing engagement and participation beyond academic borders. Given that the traditional triadic structure's assessment standards and their financial and political backers are being reshaped by broader social forces beyond the academy and that the audit culture of accountability, that is replacing earlier standards, has significant problems, we need ask: Where do we go from here? In these changing times, how can anthropologists be more relevant to the broader society in the hope of escaping the worse aspects of the audit culture? We need raise our public profile, we need make clear to the larger society anthropology's value in addressing the problems that concern them.

Keywords

public anthropology – *Public Anthropologist* – publications – engagement – audit culture

Public Anthropology

Public anthropology, a term initially coined by Robert Borofsky for a book series at the University of California Press, became popular in the late 1990s. It

has been both endorsed and criticized. Endorsements have emphasized the need for a shift in scholarly attitude toward society at large, while criticism has pointed out the potential overlapping with the notion of applied anthropology or the inalienable diversity of the discipline. While public anthropology has become increasingly popular, the concerns it builds on have been intrinsic to social and cultural anthropology since its early beginnings.

Prominent figures across continents and periods who helped develop the public presence of anthropology include James Frazer, Henry Lewis Morgan, Franz Boas, Gladys A. Reichard, James Mooney, Edgar Roquette-Pinto, Manuel Gamio, Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead, Zora Neale Hurston, Pearl Primus, Nirmal Kumar Bose, Bronislaw Malinowski, Fei Xiaotong, Ernesto de Martino, Siegfried F. Nadel, Fredrik Barth, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Mary Douglas, and Eduardo Mondlane, to name but a few. Each of them, in their own ways, conveyed important anthropological insights to a wide public audience.

James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* was widely influential, especially in the first half of the 20th century – being drawn on by a host of poets (e.g. Robert Graves, T.S. Elliot and William Butler Yeats), writers (e.g. Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce, and D.H. Lawrence), scholars (e.g. Sigmund Freud, Joseph Campbell and Camille Paglia) and philosophers (e.g. Ludwig Wittgenstein) for inspiration. Henry Lewis Morgan was a prominent figure in the founding of American anthropology. Besides actively supporting the Seneca in their fight against the Ogden Land Company (which the Seneca ultimately won), he was a New York state legislator in 1861, 1868 and 1869. (He twice unsuccessfully applied to head the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs.) Gladys Reichard is one of the most prominent scholars to have studied Native American languages in the first half of the twentieth century and a collection of her notes on Navajo society and language is still held by the Museum of Northern Arizona. Franz Boas, another key figure in the establishment of American anthropology, was widely known for his opposition to racism and fascism. In 1936, Boas appeared on the cover of *Time*, which called his book, *The Mind of Primitive Man*, “the Magna Carta of self-respect” for non-Western peoples. James Mooney provided a public record of the Wounded Knee Massacre in which more than 150 Lakota men, women and children were killed by the U.S. 7th Cavalry Regiment. Margaret Mead was a cultural icon. In her time, she was one of the most widely known and respected anthropologist in the world. At her death in 1978, there were tributes from both the president of the United States and the secretary-general of the United Nations.

Bronislaw Malinowski's books on the Trobrianders reached a wide public audience as did his 1930s BBC talks on science and religion. He was the

academic mentor to Jomo Kenyatta, an anti-colonial activist – even while at LSE – who became Kenya's first president. Pearl Primus was a pioneer dancer, choreographer and anthropologist whose work addressed the challenges of black life in America and promoted the richness of African dances. Her fine capacity to explore and perform the complexity of African dances has widely influenced both scholars and practitioners alike.

Fredrik Barth did ethnographic studies in eight distinct sites aimed at facilitating broader understandings of how people operated in their decision-making and, because of such work, was honored with a special Norwegian state scholarship. He also engaged in applied anthropology in Iran (for UNESCO) and Sudan (Darfur, for FAO). He became a public presence in Norway and beyond writing numerous newspaper articles, participating in a range of interviews, and having various programs about him. Nirmal Kumar Bose was a leading Indian anthropologist who was also active in the Indian freedom struggle with Mahatma Gandhi and was imprisoned in 1931 during the Salt Satyagraha. A prolific writer, he was the editor, from 1951 until his death, of the journal *Man in India*, the director of the Anthropological Survey of India from 1959 to 1964 and President of The Asiatic Society in 1972. Claude Lévi-Strauss was a world-renown anthropologist. No other anthropologist has represented his government abroad as a cultural attaché, been the subject of a Susan Sontag essay and a Robert Lowell poem, or been cited in an Agatha Christie mystery. Lévi-Strauss's hundredth birthday was a national occasion for celebration in France.

Eduardo Mondlane was an anthropologist by profession. He began working in 1957 as research officer in the Trusteeship Department of the United Nations but soon resigned that post to focus on political activism. He became an Assistant Professor at Syracuse University and helped develop its East African Studies Program. But again he resigned that post and moved to Tanzania to take the lead in developing a movement for national liberation, the Frente de Libertação de Moçambique or FRELIMO. He was assassinated in Dar es Salaam in 1969. The main university in Mozambique is named after him. Eduardo Mondlane University boasts one of the largest departments of anthropology on the African continent.

This listing, though incomplete, reminds us of the discipline's prominent past. It makes evident the ability of anthropologists to engage in key issues of social life in a variety of significant ways.

Amidst the diversity of traditions and perspectives, a basic definition of public anthropology relates to the capacity (and to some extent the duty) of anthropology to effectively address (not only in terms of publications but more broadly via different outputs, events, teaching, action and participation)

problems beyond the discipline. Public anthropology emphasizes the anthropologist's role as an engaged intellectual. It continues anthropology's commitment to being an ethnographic witness, to describing, in human terms how life is lived beyond the borders of many readers' experiences. But it also adds a commitment, through ethnography, to reframing the terms of public debates – transforming received, accepted understandings of social issues with new insights, new framings – and fostering social and political change that benefits others, especially those anthropologists work with.

However, there is no univocal definition of public anthropology, no univocal profile of the public anthropologist. The lively literature produced in the past two decades¹ and the difficulty in establishing an agreed upon definition, suggest considering public anthropology as a process more than a clear concept, a collective aspiration shaped by generally shared values and intentions within significant sections of the discipline. The impetus behind the creation of the journal *Public Anthropologist* originates in this realm of ongoing discussions and actions inspired by the idea of pushing engagement and participation beyond academic borders.

A mapping of the field shows that public anthropology is today a transnational, growing phenomenon. There are master degrees, permanent seminars and university courses in public anthropology.² There are centers and institutes of public anthropology,³ events, book series, blogs and journals sections.⁴ The Institute of Anthropology at the National Tsing Hua University makes its public anthropology's approach explicit: "Public anthropology allows

1 See for example Besteman, C. (2013). "Three Reflections on Public Anthropology" *Anthropology Today*, 29(6): 3–6; Beck, S. (2009). "Introduction: Public Anthropology" *Anthropology in Action*, 16(2): 1–13; Borofsky, R. (2000). "To Laugh or Cry?" *Anthropology News*, February: 9–10; Borofsky, R. (2000). "Public Anthropology. Where To? What Next?" *Anthropology News*, May: 9–10; Borofsky, R. (2011). *Why a Public Anthropology?* Kailua, HI: Center for a Public Anthropology; McGranahan, C. (2006). "Introduction: Public Anthropology" *India Review*, 5(3–4): 255–267; Osterweil, M. (2013). "Rethinking Public Anthropology through Epistemic Politics and Theoretical Practice" *Cultural Anthropology*, 28(4): 598–620; Purcell, T.W. (2000). "Public Anthropology: An Idea Searching for a Reality" *Transforming Anthropology*, 9(2): 30–33; Scheper-Hughes, N. (2009). "Making Anthropology Public" *Anthropology Today*, 25(4): 1–3; Vine, D. (2011) "Public Anthropology in Its Second Decade" *American Anthropologist*, 113(2): 336–340.

2 For example at the American University in Washington, D.C., University of Guelph, Università di Roma Tre, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

3 <http://www.publicanthropology.org/>; <https://www.fresnostate.edu/socialsciences/anthropology/ipa/>.

4 See for example Checker, M., Vine, D., Wali, A. (2010) "A Sea Change in Anthropology? Public Anthropology Reviews" *American Anthropologist*, 112(1): 5–6.

anthropologists to introduce their special training and skills beyond the confines of academia and into public, political, religious and other spaces through writing, lecturing, and community activities and political activism.”⁵ “Anthropology Cares for its Publics” was the theme of the 33rd Annual Conference of the Anthropological Association of the Philippines. In Scandinavia, two features stand out: the strong position of applied and commissioned anthropology, and its significant presence (particularly in Norway) in public debates and the media.⁶ Thus, *Public Anthropologist* responds to a major preoccupation for today’s anthropologists – how our research can contribute to improving the world – and it offers the space to reflect on the effects, challenges and opportunities of this effort.

Changing Times

It is a stressful time in anthropology as the discipline is challenged by various forces. Anthropology is increasingly being marginalized in the larger framework of scholarly and public debates in many countries. In some European countries, PhD programs have been closed in the past few years. Across Europe, funding agencies and government institutions increasingly promote hard sciences standards for research and evaluation. Anthropology is not prioritized in national and international research agendas.

In the United States, the earlier enthusiasm generated by various innovative disciplinary trends – from cultural ecology, to the turn to history, to post-modernism – have been superseded, within the discipline, by an intellectual wandering among diverse possibilities. Many wonder how to generate new disciplinary excitement while demonstrating anthropology’s value to the broader public that funds its research. As early as 1998 George Marcus wrote: “There are many specialized discussions and debates within the discipline arising from the multiplicity of subfields and specialties, but no longer any discourse at the center that self-consciously engages the identity of the discipline as such.”⁷ This issue increasingly finds resonance among anthropologists; “Anthropology Matters” was the theme of the American Anthropological Association’s 2017 annual meeting.

5 <http://www.anth.nthu.edu.tw/files/11-1207-8865.php?Lang=en>.

6 Bringa, T., Bendixsen, S., eds. (2016) *Engaged Anthropology. Views from Scandinavia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

7 Marcus, G. (1998) *Ethnography Through Thick and Thin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 248–249.

Though many in anthropology may want to turn inward to energize the discipline and themselves, financial constraints force them to look outward to the broader society to retain research funding. In the U.K., for example, the Research Excellence Framework (REF), which assesses the quality of research, insists anthropologists consider social impact – defined as “an effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia.”⁸

A key part of the problem is that the traditional academic structures that allowed anthropology to generate innovative, intellectual ideas – such as the above trends – remain in place while, at the same time, other, often external, forces are reshaping the academy and pushing anthropology to demonstrate its relevance to the wider society. They are not letting the old ways work as they once did.

The traditional triadic structural arrangement among universities, funding agencies, and academic publishers emphasized what might be summarized as claiming to serve the “common good” while actually focusing on a policy of “do no harm” for themselves and their political and financial supporters. As Mary Furner makes clear in her study on advocacy and objectivity, social activism was often set aside as academics joined the academy as “professionals” at the end of the nineteenth century.

The tension ... which characterized the professionalization process altered the mission of social science... studies and findings tended to be internal, recommendations hedged with qualifiers, analyses couched in jargon that was unintelligible to the average citizen. A fundamental conservatism developed in the academic social science professionals ... the academic professionals, having retreated to the security of technical expertise.⁹

This was evident in the late-nineteenth-century case of Richard T. Ely, a prominent tenured economist at the University of Wisconsin whose trustees sought to fire him for his activism.¹⁰ And as the discussion about academic politics of silencing¹¹ shows, things have not improved since Ely’s case.

8 The Higher Education Funding Council of England <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/rsrc/REFimpact/>.

9 Furner, M. (1975) *Advocacy and Objectivity: A Crisis in the Professionalization of American Social Science, 1865–1905*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 324.

10 Furner, M. (1975) *Advocacy and Objectivity*.

11 Nader, L, Graeber, D., Price, D., Wright, S. (2019). “Academic Silencing” *Public Anthropologist*, 1(1).

Government and private groups provide significant financial support for university-based research. If we use National Science Foundation's data for the United States, these groups collectively provided over 50 billion dollars in 2012. (American universities provided another 13 billion.)¹² Few believe these groups' funding is provided *carte blanche*. There is an implicit sense of accountability. The funding is expected to lead, in one way or another overtime, to results that have positive benefits for the larger society. The National Science Foundation requires proposals, for example, to specify the "broader impacts" of their research defined as encompassing "the potential to benefit society and contribute to the achievement of specific, desired, societal outcomes." In Europe, the European Research Council "expects that its grants will help to bring about new and unpredictable scientific and technological discoveries - the kind that can form the basis of new industries, markets, and broader social innovations of the future."¹³

However, as Adam Kuper suggests, "the grant review process rewards people who can write good proposals even if they failed to deliver on earlier granted projects. Frequently foundations and funding agencies do not seriously evaluate the research they fund."¹⁴ The National Science Foundation, for example, requires all grantees to submit a Project Outcomes Report upon completion of their research. Yet, many do not.¹⁵ Despite the rhetoric of these parties aimed at producing benefits for others, one has to wonder to what degree these funding agencies are actually focused on insuring this occurs. Keen suggests a similar pattern with governmental and private funding to development agencies: "Because aid is politically accountable to Western electorates – which consume only the images and reports of its impact and not the real things – there are few incentives to make it work better."¹⁶

One might suggest the same appearance of change, while not disrupting the powers that support and finance universities, also dominates academic publishing. Academic presses long for books that will have large public impacts and sales. They offer provocative books that seek to reframe existing perspectives, disrupt the status quo. But most of the books they publish are aimed at their primary market, university courses. Many of the books published could

12 National Science Foundation (2015). NSF Higher Education Research and Development Survey Fiscal Year 2015, Table 16.

13 <https://erc.europa.eu/about-erc/mission>.

14 Kuper, A. (2009). "Great Grants" (Review: *How Professors Think. Inside the Curious World of Academic Judgment* by M. Lamont). *Times Literary Supplement*, September 18.

15 Borofsky, R. (2019). *An Anthropology of Anthropology*. Center for a Public Anthropology.

16 Keen, D. (1999). "The Uses of Famine" (Review: *Famine Crimes* by A. de Waal). *Times Literary Supplement*, March 26: 28–29.

help transform intellectual frameworks, could help alter political perspectives if framed in broad terms, written in accessible language, and taken seriously by key decision-makers. But academic publishers primary authors are academics. They write in an academic style because they are often seeking academic promotions. They must make their books credible to other faculty. Consequently, their impact on wider audiences frequently goes unrealized.

What this triadic structural arrangement among universities, funding agencies, and academic publishers has meant is that, to a large extent, anthropology has frequently been over-specialized and turned in on itself. It represents the triadic structure's "agenda." It encourages anthropologists to appear intellectual exciting, offer provocative insightful possibilities that facilitate academic advancement without noticeably threatening their universities' financial and political supporters – of appearing to benefit others while, in reality, focused on "doing no harm" to important constituents as well as themselves. It is often unclear who benefits from the thousands of publications produced, for example, besides the academic authors themselves as they seek career advancement.

Anthropology is not alone in this trend. Other fields face the same problems, as publications by Paul Romer¹⁷ on macroeconomics, Lee Smolin¹⁸ on string theory in physics, and Paul Glasziou on biomedical research¹⁹ suggest.

This traditional triadic structural arrangement, focused on "do no harm," is now being disrupted by broader political and economic forces. As academic research increasingly needs more funding to support more projects, many question what is being produced by all the research, all the publications, all the funding (paralleling trends in higher education). Governments and the public at large want to know whether what they are funding is advancing knowledge and providing definite benefits for others. The answer is not necessarily clear. The New York Times reports:

The past several years have been bruising ones for the credibility of the social sciences. A star social psychologist was caught fabricating data, leading to more than 50 retracted papers. A top journal published a study supporting the existence of ESP that was widely criticized. The journal *Science* [one of the world's leading journals] pulled a political science

17 <https://paulromer.net/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/WP-Trouble.pdf>

18 Smolin, L. (2007). *The Trouble With Physics: The Rise of String Theory, The Fall of a Science, and What Comes Next*. New York: First Mariner Books.

19 Glasziou, P. (2014) "Reducing Waste from Incomplete or Unusable Reports of Biomedical Research" *Lancet*, 383(9913): 267–76.

paper on the effect of gay canvassers on voters' behavior because of concerns about faked data. Now, a painstaking years long effort to reproduce 100 studies published in three leading psychology journals has found that more than half of the findings did not hold up when retested.²⁰

This fits with a host of comments by prominent anthropologists regarding the discipline's limited ability to build cumulative knowledge. "In anthropology, we are continuously slaying paradigms [or trends], only to see them return to life, as if discovered for the first time," asserts Eric Wolf. "As each successive approach carries the axe to its predecessors, anthropology comes to resemble a project of intellectual deforestation."²¹ Elizabeth Colson writes:

Rapid population growth and geographical dispersal [within cultural anthropology] have been associated with the emergence of a multitude of intellectual schools, each of which stresses both its own uniqueness and superiority and the need for the whole of the social/cultural community to accept its leadership. This never happens, and even the most successful formula rarely predominates for more than a decade: At the moment when it appears to triumph, it becomes redefined as an outmoded orthodoxy by younger anthropologists who are attempting to stamp their own mark upon the profession. This has the therapeutic effect of outmoding most of the existing literature, by now too vast to be absorbed by any newcomer, while at the same time old ideas continue to be advanced under new rubrics.²²

Many publications, though interesting, produce assertions of uncertain, ambiguous value. They tend to be primarily accepted on trust or, in some cases, simply because they are published. The emergence and consolidation of so called "predatory journals" have exacerbated this problem and in some countries it is not rare to find a publisher that, upon receipt of a book proposal, follows with an invoice (regarding how many copies the author will have to buy to make the publication profitable for the publisher).

20 http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/28/science/many-social-science-findings-not-as-strong-as-claimed-study-says.html?_r=0.

21 Wolf, E. (1990). "Facing Power. Old Insights, New Questions" *American Anthropologist*, 92: 586–596. Alfred Kroeber says that anthropologists "are subject to waves of fashion"; see Kroeber, A. (1948) *Anthropology*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 391.

22 Colson, E. (1992) "Social/Cultural Anthropology" Wenner-Gren Foundation Report for 1990 and 1991. New York: Wenner-Gren Foundation, 51.

This uncertainty as to what a host of publications represent is an important factor behind what is sometimes termed the “audit culture” or the quantification of research results – focused on how many publications are produced in which journals (or by which publishers) and how many academic colleagues cite these publications in their work.²³ As many emphasize, standardized forms of assessment and accountability are problematic.²⁴ They are part of a broader “evidence-based” culture which, Sally Merry suggests “provides an example of the dissemination of the corporate form of thinking and governance into broader social spheres.”²⁵ Deborah Rhode refers to a Carnegie Foundation report indicating more than a third of university faculty believed their publications were mostly assessed in terms of quantity rather than quality. (At schools with doctoral programs, the figure was over 50 percent.)²⁶

Nonetheless, whatever their flaws, these efforts at quantification now play a key role in the academy. Anthropologists are no longer allowed to define the value of their work in their own terms. Today, too much money is at stake. Those funding the research want concrete measures – however imperfect they are to those within the discipline – and to push research in certain directions.²⁷

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- 23 Strathern, M., ed. (2000). *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- 24 See for example Shore, C., Wright, S. (2015). “Audit Culture Revisited: Rankings, Ratings, and the Reassembling of Society” *Current Anthropology*, 56(3): 421–44.
- 25 Merry, S.E. (2011). “Measuring the World: Indicators, Human Rights and Global Governance” *Current Anthropology*, 52(3): S83–95. For a broader reflection, see also Merry, S.E. (2016). *The Seductions of Quantification. Measuring Human Rights, Gender Violence, and Sex Trafficking*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- 26 Rhode, D. (2006). *In Pursuit of Knowledge. Scholars, Status, and Academic Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- 27 Anthropologists find themselves faced with a difficult balance between the need to please their own institutions and funding agencies on the one hand and the responsibility for exposing policies that favor the reproduction of inequality and injustice on the other. Fitting too closely with the expectations of funding agencies may have significant political implications. Would a project proposal be funded that claims, from the very beginning, that the only way to address the so called “migration and refugee crisis” in Europe is to open European borders? When applying for funding researchers often have to “fit with the call” and dilute their political vigor if they wish to be granted funds. At the same time, a study in *Studies in Higher Education* reports researchers frequently exaggerate the presumed impact of their research in the direction of the grantor’s priorities in applying for grants. Chubb, J., Watermeyer, R. (2017). “Artifice or Integrity in the Marketization of Research Impact? Investigating the Moral Economy of (Pathways to) Impact Statements within Research Funding Proposals in the UK and Australia” *Studies in Higher Education*, 42(12): 2360–2372.

In brief, the pattern for demonstrating academic achievement, within the traditional triadic structural arrangement among academic institutions, funding agencies, and university presses, is being disrupted by broader forces – relating to the marketization of education and research,²⁸ increased research funding by external funding agencies and, with that, an increasing demand for quantifiable accountability. Few anthropologists doubt they need to conform in some manner with the overall tenor of the audit culture if for no other reason than they do not have the finances to fund their own research. At most institutions faculty submit their publications to departmental promotion committees. As Rhode suggests, many believe their publications are simply counted not read. Nonetheless, that is the “hoop” faculty must jump through for career advancement.²⁹

One is reminded of Marx’s statement that “Men [and women] make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past.”³⁰ Given (a) the traditional triadic structure’s assessment standards focused on appearing to benefit others but, in reality, focused on “doing no harm” to universities and their financial and political backers are being reshaped by broader social forces beyond the academy and (b) the audit culture of accountability, that is replacing earlier standards, has significant problems, we need ask: Where do we go from here? In these changing times, how can anthropologists be more relevant to the broader society in the hope of escaping the worse aspects of the audit?

The transnational impetus embodied in today’s public anthropology constitutes an appropriate response. We need raise our public profile, we need make clear to the larger society anthropology’s value in addressing the problems that concern them. There is no returning to the old structures many anthropologists grew up with. To quote the 2016 Nobel Laureate Bob Dylan, “The times they are a’changin’.”

28 Collini, S. (2018). *Speaking of Universities*. London: Verso Books.

29 The situation becomes more dramatic when these trends combine with the precariousness of starting an academic career. New generations of anthropologists struggle to find a balance between job (in)security, fundraising for one’s research (very often job positions are connected to the candidate ability to attract funding) and the need to publish a lot quickly.

30 Karl Marx, in Smelser, N., ed. (1973). *Karl Marx on Society and Social Change*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 165.

Public Anthropologist

This is where the journal *Public Anthropologist* comes in. It offers a forum for inquiring about critical social issues of our time while exploring how to gain greater public relevance – not only to heighten the discipline's public profile but, in doing so, to offer opportunities to soften (if not replace) the quantification endemic to the audit culture with more qualitative assessments. It solicits debates on how can anthropology concretely contribute to social and political change.

We suggest five points to ponder as contributors explore a range of topics in a host of ways.

(1) First, we emphasize the nexus between ethnography and critique. Many ethnographers deal with problems of wider public concern. We see that, for example, with recent books such as *Nightmarch. Among India's Revolutionary Guerrillas* by Alpa Shah,³¹ *Private Oceans. The Enclosure and Marketisation of the Seas* by Fiona McCormack,³² and *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail* by Jason De León.³³ These works demonstrate ethnographers' ability to combine fieldwork research and critical thinking with reflections that resonate with a society's major preoccupations. The ongoing challenge for each of us is to make the ethnographical-critical approach accessible to non-anthropologists (including other scholars, experts, journalists and the general public).³⁴

Ethnography remains at the core of anthropologists' work. Comparison, on the other hand, has been de-emphasized recently. "The sheer number of comparative articles and books published" in the early 1950s reminds us "that energetic debates about the intellectual place of comparison are missing among today's anthropological agendas."³⁵ Think of the brilliant and controlled comparisons of Nadel's "Witchcraft in Four African Societies" or Eggan's analysis of kinship terminologies among North American Plains Indians.³⁶ A renewed

31 (2018) Hurst Publishers.

32 (2017) Pluto Press.

33 (2015) University of California Press.

34 This seems sometimes easier for anthropologists working outside of pure academic boundaries such as, for example, Gillian Tett, Marta Turok or Marcela Lagarde.

35 Nader, L. (1994). "Comparative Consciousness" In R. Borofsky, ed. *Assessing Cultural Anthropology*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 85.

36 Nadel, S.F. (1952). "Witchcraft in Four African Societies" *American Anthropologist*, 54: 18–29; Eggan (1954), Eggan (1968). Eggan, F. (1954). "Social Anthropology and the Method of Controlled Comparison" *American Anthropologist*, 56: 743–763. Eggan, F. (1968) "Kinship" In D. Sills, ed. *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 8: 390–401, New York: Macmillan.

focus on comparison opens up exciting possibilities for the discipline. One might compare at the local level, for example, how democratic hopes are corrupted by political ploys in Nigeria, Hungary and the United States. Or how, again at the local level, democratic hopes have been rekindled in France and Indonesia? Or why do populist ideologies take hold in local communities in Australia (with One Nation), in Germany (with Alternative für Deutschland) and in South Africa (with the Economic Freedom Fighters)? Such questions represent traditional, comparative anthropology. But they also represent cutting edge research about current political problems that have implications far beyond the local communities involved – as anthropology should have.

(2) Second, we see the need for moving beyond the “do no harm” ethic embedded in the traditional triadic structural arrangement and strive, instead, to focus on trying to benefit, trying to help, others beyond the academy. The original phrasing of the Hippocratic Oath in Epidemics, I, 11 reads, “As to disease make a habit of two things – help, or at least, to do no harm.” The phrase “first, do no harm” – prioritizing “do no harm” over helping – is attributed to Thomas Sydenham, an English physician (1624–1689). The “do no harm” ethic seems today somewhat self-serving. It allows anthropologists to skirt certain moral dilemmas and obligations. When things are falling apart politically and economically in a community being studied, is doing no harm a reasonable standard to follow or should anthropologists be trying to, in some way, help those who are hurting?

To be sure, “helping others” is not an unproblematic attitude, especially when politically and hierarchically institutionalized in the separation between givers and receivers (as occurs in development and humanitarianism).³⁷ What we suggest here is an aspiration for reciprocity, public engagement and kindness. In the preface of *Against Charity*, Daniel Raventós and Julie Wark remind us that the

word kind, in old English cynd(e), is of Germanic origin and related to *kin*. The original sense was nature or innate character so it came to mean a class distinguished by inherent characteristics and, by the fourteen century, courtesy or noble deeds expressing the feeling that relatives have for each other. There is a sense of equality built into this word. Fraternity too. And respect.³⁸

37 De Lauri, A., ed. (2016). *The Politics of Humanitarianism. Power, Ideology and Aid*. London: I.B. Tauris.

38 Raventós, D., Wark, J. (2018). *Against Charity*. Chico, CA: Counterpunch, 1.

Demonstrating anthropology does indeed benefit others, not just says it does, offers a path to public support, public significance. One question we should address is: who is the “public” of public anthropology? Thomas McIlwraith is right when he says that there are different scales of public(s) and the first one anthropologists have to consider is the people who have shared with them their lives and entrusted them with their stories.³⁹

(3) Third, as several contemporary public anthropologists have highlighted, anthropology needs to find ways to make its analyses count more in public debates. Thomas Hylland Eriksen writes about the need to communicate research findings to the outside world and to plainly show the potential efficacy of a public anthropology both in form and in substance.⁴⁰ Many anthropologists aspire to write books that gain public recognition and, in doing so, shape public policy. But this rarely happens. Anthropologists usually need the assistance of groups with social support outside the academy. An effective strategy often involves targeted transparency – targeting one’s research to those who have a ready use for it and, as a result, will publicize and apply its findings in the larger society. We would add a caution. Anthropologists need to be careful about subordinating their goals to the goals of those with resources and power. Still, if done properly, it can mean anthropological insights, anthropological understandings, can play an important role in the public sphere. We might take note of a prominent debate in the 1920s between the American journalist Walter Lippmann and the American philosopher-educator John Dewey.⁴¹ Lippmann suggested social scientists should provide their analyses to decision-makers who would then use them as they saw fit. Dewey emphasized that professionals should focus on educating the broader public, not just decision-makers, about social issues. The goal is to build democratic communities with active citizen involvement, not exclude them.

(4) Fourth, anthropologists need to explore the politics behind the assessment of research outputs. Universities have a long history of using publications to assess faculty as well as raise their own status within the broader society. Chad Wellmon and Andrew Piper observe, “publications are discrete objects that can be counted and compared. They have become the academy’s ultimate

39 <http://publicanthropologist.cmi.no/2018/03/14/how-public-is-public-anthropology/>.

40 Eriksen, T. (2006). *Engaging Anthropology. The Case for a Public Presence*. London: Bloomsbury.

41 https://www.infoamerica.org/teoria_articulos/lippmann_dewey.htm.

markers of value.”⁴² But there are significant distortions in the publication process. Bourdieu writes, judgements of quality and value are “contaminated ... by knowledge of the position [an individual] occupies in the instituted hierarchies.”⁴³ Wellmon and Piper report faculty at high status universities have significantly more papers accepted for publication in prominent journals than faculty at less prestigious universities.

Not only must we understand the politics behind these assessments, we must also find ways to reframe them. The American Anthropological Association has recently approved new guidelines intended to assist tenure and promotion committees in assessing the quality of new, public forms of anthropological scholarship not typically accounted for in existing guidelines.⁴⁴ Indeed, the ways anthropologists are able to produce and disseminate research findings today include, in addition to traditional academic publications, blogs, art performances and installations, events, audio-visuals, and commissioned reports. Instead of focusing on publications as something to be counted (and, following Rhode, likely not read), we have to consider the whole spectrum of forms of public engagement anthropologists have and ask: What is the broader significance of the problem focused on in a research output? To what degree does the scholar successfully address it?

(5) Fifth, we believe in the value of experimental, innovative publications. The pressure of “publish or perish,” the arithmetic calculation of quality in intellectual work, the dominant role played by a limited number of university departments, and the cautious attitude of certain academic presses have collectively fostered a standardization of anthropological writing. Within the academic evaluation system, the journal in which a scholar publishes has arguably become more important today than the article itself (especially if it is not read).

While this reflects an ongoing process of “sameness” and flattening in the criteria used to evaluate scientific work, it also poses a series of questions regarding the destiny of anthropology as a discipline engaged with both diversity and critique. To push writing beyond common standards might well be considered an added value in the production of anthropological knowledge. Recent examples of creative writings inspired by the personal “anthropological journey” of the author but driven by different forms of expression include, for

42 Wellmon, C., Piper, A. (2017). “Publication, Power, and Patronage: On Inequality and Academic Publishing” *Critical Inquiry*, 21 July 2017 (Updated 2 October 2017), <https://criticalinquiry.uchicago.edu>.

43 Cited in Wellmon, C., Piper, A. (2017). “Publication, Power, and Patronage.”

44 <http://www.americananthro.org/AdvanceYourCareer/Content.aspx?ItemNumber=21713>.

example, Renato Rosaldo's *The Day of Shelly's Death: The Poetry and Ethnography of Grief*,⁴⁵ Françoise Héritier's *Le Sel de la vie*,⁴⁶ Marc Augé's *Bonheurs du jour*,⁴⁷ Clara Gallini's *Incidenti di percorso*,⁴⁸ and Ruth Behar's *Lucky Broken Girl*.⁴⁹

Accepting the Risks

As a community of scholars, we are faced with the demands of the present. The growing demand for a more public anthropology is generating pertinent results in terms of intellectual creativity and effective practice. We are, however, constrained by a trap of our own making. Many have turned in on the discipline focusing on their own intellectual interests – not those of the broader public. As a result, beyond a few notable exceptions, we lack today the intellectual prominence and political power to resist the audit culture's inroads. The quantitative measures prove attractive to administrators because they do not perceive the public value in the anthropological publications they read. The publications often seem esoteric.

Only by engaging with the problems that engage the broader public – by becoming a more public anthropology – can we mobilize public and political support to soften the audit culture's excesses and find ways to move beyond them. If anthropologists can demonstrate the value of their work to the broader public, how it benefits those beyond the academy, then the discipline will seem less esoteric, more comprehensible, to those who fund it. Qualitative measures can be used to show who benefits in what ways because the benefits are understandable, are clear, to those outside the academy, especially if they are embedded in stories. In embracing a more public anthropology, we raise the discipline's value to others, we raise its public prominence. This facilitates exciting new research questions, exciting new possibilities and more funding to support them. *Public Anthropologist* offers the ideal forum for debating the opportunities, challenges and implications of moving in this direction. In the process, we might articulate promising priorities of a public anthropology. We might push for interventions that shape the terms of public debate and

45 (2014) Duke University Press.

46 (2012) Odile Jacob.

47 (2018) Albin Michel.

48 (2016) Edizioni Nottetempo.

49 (2017) Penguin Random House.

delve into the dialectic between studying norms and values and promoting them.⁵⁰

In demonstrating anthropology's value, anthropologists should speak up and speak out about the dangers and the dilemmas we collectively face in ways that is understandable and effective. Being a public intellectual and constructing a public anthropology requires an engagement with both ethics and politics.

To bridge profound and durable dilemmas with concrete instances of ordinary life, *Public Anthropologist* welcomes articles that speak directly to other scholars and to the wider public on issues related to war, rights, poverty, security, access to resources, new technologies, freedom, human exploitation, health, humanitarianism, violence, racism, migration and diaspora, crime, social class, hegemony, environmental challenges, social movements, and activism. Two major goals of the journal, in relation to these critical issues of our time, are to "emotionally engage, educate, and move the public to action" (Tedlock 2005: 159) and to reinvigorate anthropology's public voice(s).

It is worth remembering that public anthropology does not come without risks.⁵¹ As Didier Fassin makes clear, speaking truth to power "may lead to unpleasant moments when those who feel threatened try to ... discredit [an anthropologist's] work, block his or her career, ... or prevent the continuation of his or her program, especially when it is conducted in a foreign country."⁵²

Yet we believe these risks are acceptable to the extent that the alternative seems worse: a retreat of anthropology into the vicissitudes of its internal (academic) dynamics that others, beyond the discipline cannot follow, the irrelevance of its public presence, and a submission to the audit culture's demands.

50 Fassin, D., ed. (2012). *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell.

51 See for example Andersson, R. (2018). "The Price of Impact: Reflections on Academic Outreach Amid the Refugee Crisis" *Social Anthropology*, 26(2): 222–237.

52 Fassin, D. (2017). "Introduction: When Ethnography Goes Public" In D. Fassin, ed., *If Truth Be Told. The Politics of Public Ethnography*. Durham: Duke University Press.