

ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE CITY: METHODOLOGY AND THEORY

Edited by

Italo Pardo and Giuliana B. Prato

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Reviewed by

Eleanor Rimoldi, Massey University, Albany

The editors of this timely collection of essays are based at the University of Kent and are the general editors of Ashgate's Urban Anthropology Series. The series addresses such current issues as citizenship, governance, multiculturalism, cosmopolitanism, global restructuring, legal, moral and economic conflict, and other major areas of interest that have emerged with the development of urban anthropology.

The volume under review here is of particular interest in that the eleven chapters relate a wide range of research sites (India, Italy, Macedonia, Peru, Malaysia, Ireland, Boston, China) to broad issues in urban research framed by significant theoretical/methodological and ethical concerns highlighted in the introduction. In some ways, urban anthropology, once seen as secondary to the classic exotic study of cultural isolates now acts as a form of rescue anthropology for the discipline over all.

In the introduction, Pardo and Prato see the methods of anthropology strengthened and made even more relevant through urban anthropology's unbroken continuity with the past in the discipline. For this to be true, the past must in some part be re-written. For example, the primary principle of 'holism' is seen to be impossible in cities but, they say, it never was entirely true in the past study of tribal 'isolates'. In urban research, anthropologists could recognize this and admit to it because of the common perceived complexity of urban society. The fact that tribal or subsistence society is also complex was not always immediately obvious or represented. But through dialectical analysis of the impact of industrialization and urbanization on traditional cultures their intricate modalities are revealed even as they are dissembled. Ironically,

new ways of being holistic have been discovered in terms of globalization. It is indeed easier now in our complex world to trace the interconnections between the micro and the macro – our isolate is the whole world and from every possible angle. This is a very complicated dialectic but a pleasing one. As Pardo and Prato sum up in their introduction to these essays

...if there is a single point that this volume does make, it is that anthropologists should stay unequivocally committed to ethnographic methodology that links empirically-based analysis to theory. It would be a mistake to fail to recognize that the in-depth knowledge offered by long-term anthropological fieldwork has a contribution to make to our understanding – and hopefully to the betterment – of our increasingly urbanized world (p.20).

In my own experience as a graduate student in Social Anthropology at Auckland University in the 1970s, continuity was apparent in the way that Professor Ralph Piddington had exposed us to the work of anthropologists who worked in both traditional tribal field sites and in cities. It has seemed natural for me to continue that tradition in my own career through my research in Auckland city as well as on Bougainville in Papua New Guinea and in teaching Urban Anthropology first at Auckland University and now at Massey University. For me, the great value of this new collection of essays is not only in the diverse range of field sites explored, but also in the wealth of references to early and contemporary research in urban anthropology of use in both teaching and research.

Jonathan Parry's chapter (Comparative reflections on fieldwork in urban India: a personal account) illustrates the tension between the participant observation method and the concept of a holistic account which is made all the more difficult in the study of cities.

A study that really treated the slum as if it were some kind of homogeneous 'primitive isolate'... would hardly be anthropology at all in that it...would not only betray the principle of holism but also the whole point of participant observation, which is to be able to tell us how things really work on the ground (p.43).

However, by studying in detail the Banaras burning *ghats* and the associated workforce necessary to generate the institutions that support the nature of this sacred city, Parry claims that he is able to '...illuminate the distinctive character of the whole by focusing on limited parts' (p.44). He suggests that this has

always been the case in anthropology and the problem of representing the whole in urban research is 'a difference of degree not a qualitative difference in kind' (p.45).

Pardo in Chapter 3 writes about the objection to his research from mainstream British Anthropologists in 1983 when he chose to locate his doctoral research with the Neapolitan poor. However, his research practice was consistent with classical anthropological research in that he followed the principle that a

distinctive characteristic of anthropology as a discipline is that field-workers go and live with the people they study; they do not simply carry out participant observation at specific times....Having gained knowledge of 'the context' in which key actors operated and of their relationship with, and use of, their social and cultural environment, I focused on their family life and patterns of socialization and leisure; their religious and other cultural performances; and their professional and political activities (p.63).

Pardo's research illustrates a continuity in method but it also illustrates the way in which urban anthropology has expanded anthropology's reach into the world of the power elite, or 'studying up', which not only reveals the complexity of western urban society but the way in which it is, and has been entangled with so-called 'isolates'.

In Chapter 4 Giuliana Prato, who carried out research in Brindisi, a South-Italian city, also talks about having to defend urban anthropology.

...the complexity of the world in which we live should not translate into some academic dispute, nor should it necessarily induce disciplinary insecurity.....Bearing in mind that most of the world population now live in cities and that urbanization will inevitably grow further, it could be said that contemporary urban anthropology is anthropology (p.98).

Her work focused on new forms of political action and was less interested in the idea of 'city types' than in what has been become the globally significant movement for democratic representation.

In Chapter 5 Ilká Thiessen discusses her research in Skopje, capital of the Republic of Macedonia. She defines herself as a political/feminist anthropologist, rather than an urban anthropologist. She argues against the view 'that

in the context of globalization, the rural marginalized settings of traditional anthropology are doomed' (p.102). For example, she sees Skopje as a 'new rural-urbanity'.

'Urban' can be elevated to more than a specific locality; it is an identity without a necessarily specific spot on the map. In the same vein, being from the Balkans is more an expression of values than of locality.... For me, the city Skopje is delocalized; it is in fact right here at the desk where I am writing this chapter, in Metchosin, Canada, overlooking the Pacific and the Victoria harbour. Skopje is in my heart. And it is there, I believe, that the research site truly is (pp.114–115).

In Chapter 6 (Contested spaces: street vendors in the Andean Metropole of Cusco, Peru) Linda J. Seligmann continues the theme of continuity in anthropological method.

The principal methodological point of this essay is to demonstrate that the lives of street vendors have the capacity, ethnographically and historically, to shed light on the policies and practices that dynamically structure city life and to which vendors actively contribute (p.118).

Street vendors are an ideal focus for urban anthropologists as their lives cross so many boundaries of production, distribution, and value in relation to both material and symbolic goods. It is often the street vendors who give the first and lasting impressions on tourists and visitors to a city whether through the tastes and smells of the food, or the material objects that display indigenous cultures (or for that matter the novelty of imported goods for the local market). In her conclusions Seligmann says: 'Cusco, as a city, has unique characteristics, such as the burden and attractiveness of symbolizing the Inca Empire, present, past and future. It is also defined by the many vendors who occupy it' (p.131).

Christian Giordano's research (Celebrating urban diversity in a rainbow nation: political management of ethno-cultural differences in a Malaysian city) has identified a co-existence of marked ethnic, religious and cultural diversity based not on cultural homogeneity but on '*unity in separation*' in an urban environment where diversity is especially strong. He carried out research in George Town on the small island of Penang with a population of Chinese, Malay and Indians. Research took place over ten years but here is centered on the multicultural staging during the 2008 celebrations for the inclusion of

George Town (together with its sister city Melaka) in the *World Heritage Sites* list drawn up by UNESCO. Giordano comments on a diverse range of methods needed in urban research: historical (to identify the past in the present); participant observation, interviews with experts, political actors, activists, newspaper articles, conferences and public debates around specific multicultural heritage as reason for the inclusion of Penang in UNESCO's list.

In Chapter 8 Marcello Mollica (Political Manipulation: Death, Dying and Funeral Processes in Northern Ireland) explains how privacy issues and the need to manage risk in sensitive situations became of major importance in his research primarily in Londonderry city centre. To some extent his method was constrained by the violent situation and participant observation was used less and interviews more.

This chapter has offered an empirical investigation of the means employed by the Republican community of Dungiven, in the broader Northern Irish scenario, to intensify the 'memory' of a local hunger striker, Kevin Lynch.

...my 'participation' to events depended on the intensity of meanings that social memory and memorials had for the attendant audiences (p.169).

He also conducted interviews with school children about their 'death memories'. Perhaps more than other of the anthropologists in this collection, there is less focus on the nature of urban anthropology itself, and I would perhaps characterize his research as symbolic anthropology and event analysis in an urban setting.

In her chapter, Henrike Donner ('Between the Verandah and the Mall: Fieldwork and the Spaces of Femininity') recognizes early urban fieldwork like the Chicago School in the United States and British Africanists but still holds to the idea expressed throughout this collection that urban research is somehow still seen as less desirable than fieldwork away from home (p.177). However, many of the anthropologists in this collection have in fact conducted fieldwork both at home, or in urban settings, as well as away or in rural or traditional societies. I tend to think that the situation has shifted recently and few young scholars are prepared to invest the time, money and effort in going to remote, unfamiliar, or difficult field situations. So perhaps it is time to reassert the need for research in remote places where the researcher can learn the source of the skills seen as so useful today in urban research as suggested in the introduc-

tion to this book.

Donner is interested in the gendered city but in this particular essay her focus is very much on her own experience as a woman in the field which seemed constrained not only by gender, but by class.

Perhaps by way of contrast, in Chapter 10 Elisabeth Lund Engebretsen, a young, lesbian anthropologist with, as she says, a ‘Scandinavian mellow and laid-back disposition’ (p.208), seems to have negotiated her way through the high risk territory of same-sex sexual cultures and identities in Beijing where lesbians (*lala* women) were stigmatized. Her discussion of her research methods and her reflection on her practice in the field is especially interesting and valuable for other anthropologists undertaking urban fieldwork. She also has some valuable insights on the ethics of research in high risk situations and takes the view that

Categorical ethical principles cannot be determined prior to fieldwork, as events, interpretations and their contexts are beyond the fieldworker’s control and power. Major ethical considerations in my research concern the intersecting themes of risk, disclosure, confidentiality and consent (p.207).

Engebretsen’s account of the history of social anthropology in China shows that she is aware of the intellectual and disciplinary context *there* rather than just at home. The Association of Chinese Urban Anthropology was not formed until 1992, but

...since the late 1970s China’s reform policies have radically improved the possibilities for undertaking scholarly research. ...most anthropological publications based on first hand observation in urban China have started to emerge only very recently.... [In China] Anthropology as a discipline ...is most commonly housed in departments such as ethnology, ethnic minority studies and sociology (pp.196–197).

In my opinion, this is one of the best chapters in this book. It is an honest, richly detailed account of fieldwork but more than that it locates western anthropology in relation to history and development of anthropology in China. We could do with more of that.

The final chapter by Fernanco Monge is a contribution to the literature on

port cities. His research is multi-sited (Boston, Barcelona, Cape Town, San Francisco), comparative, and *in* the city.

Public spaces, old and new, the interaction of the built structural form and urban planning policies with the way in which people live the cities are some of my ever-returning areas of concern in the field (p.215).

Monge's discussion of the variety of methods needed and sources of data is very useful and the city becomes an almost human entity as he describes the rich source of data available in archives and libraries 'where parts of the memories of the cities are kept' (p.215). This chapter illustrates another, perhaps more applied, approach in that his aim is to reveal broad urban processes and structures of use to policy makers and agencies concerned with the social and cultural dimensions of the waterfront and how these are addressed in a variety of port cities.

This book is a very readable (in spite of a scatter of typographical errors) and indeed inspiring collection of essays that both critique and promote anthropology in and of the city. I would be happy to include it as a required text in my own urban anthropology course.

QUEER STYLE

by Adam Geczy and Vicki Karaminas

London: Bloomsbury Books (Subcultural Style series), 2013. 192 pp.

RRP. \$35.00 AUS. ISBN 978-1-84788-196-0.

Reviewed by

Peter Lineham, School of Humanities, Massey University.

This is a superb book, the very best model of its kind, modelling academic, engaged and dispassionate study of a subject much in need of such a treatment. Eschewing high theory for accessible examples using an eclectic range of methodologies, it is also very carefully balanced between male and female genders and carefully explores and explains a range of styles including trans, cross and other styles, and also the ways in which today the codes are no longer as tied to sexuality as they were in the past.

The heart of the book is parallel accounts of the emergence of homosexual male and female styles. With patience and care and thorough research, the authors establish the ways in which the emergence of a dressing style established an alternative identity, compared to predominant gendered fashions. The interaction with the dandy image is carefully explained. The emergence of counter images and new models is also handled skillfully. The work on lesbian culture was new to me, and I was impressed by the care with which new research was carefully weighed against existing writing. The authors are not frightened to address awkward subjects, including the underlying values in the sadomasochistic appeal to Nazi themes.

Queer style is produced and expressed within western culture and can be used to explain aspects of contemporary culture. The authors do so skillfully. There is at the end a fine chapter on a few selected examples from cultures other than western, including Japan, Albania, Polynesia, India, Singapore and Thailand. Each of these is explored with excellent attention to known research, in contrast for example to broad generalisations which we often hear about *fa'afafaine* for example.

The authors are Sydney academics, and they have produced a book in which Australian mardi gras is used comfortably alongside familiar American and European examples. The 'poseur' aspect of gay writing is happily minimal in this book. It is a secure guide to an interesting but complex subject.