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Robert Borofsky: An anthropology of anthropology: is it time to shift paradigms? Kailua, HI: Center for a Public Anthropology 2019. xiii + 347 pp., 5 images. URL: https://books.publicanthropology.org/an-anthropology-of-anthropology.html

I recently received an email invitation to download this book, I thought not coincidentally, a week and a day after Dan Jorgensen recommended the California Series in Public Anthropology, for which Robert Borofsky is the Founding Editor. This was in relation to a question I posted about anthropology and journalism on the wonderful Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania listserv. One would think I would be in favour of Borofsky's endorsement of public anthropology, given my interest in journalism, and I am, but I have a hard time finding my way through his book and indicate why here.

Never before in the history of science have I known a new paradigm to announce itself with such a fanfare or with so many endorsements from as many preeminent scholars as does the Public Anthropology paradigm offered by this book. To be fair, many of these scholars say that Borofsky's book is worth reading and debating. I have nevertheless thus far missed the debate. Among the things the author does in the first chapters is criticize much anthropology for failing to advance knowledge and create intellectual progress. He makes heavy use of citation indexes as a measure of this failure, citations of previous work being relatively few or of the 'bump and go' variety, using an American football metaphor to indicate that scholars merely acknowledge the literature without seriously engaging it, thus serving opportunistic careerism while scholars actually go their own ways. Scholars are supposedly caught between the careerist imperative of acknowledging their peers and forebears and the apparently more important need to show originality and innovation. They therefore

largely produce 'unsubstantiated conjectures' and 'uncertain ambiguous knowledge claims'. Borofsky correctly claims that citations are a poor measure of scholarly value: 'Often a publication's intellectual value is assessed by the degree to which others cite it. This is a flawed standard' (113). Yet, the moment one goes to download the book, one is encouraged to do so by its Google analytics, showing it has been downloaded in over a hundred countries in just one year, Turkey and Brazil being among the top seven countries where it has found its way to people's hard drives. But there is no way to tell how many of those are of the bump and go variety, or that I have now downloaded the book twice, or that this is not more careerism, trying to stay ahead of the curve and seeking out critical discussion.

Borofsky cites Anthony Wallace's description of theory in cultural anthropology where Wallace says it is 'like slash-and-burn agriculture', destructively clearing then replanting the same old field (1966:1254). But Borofsky's venture can hardly be described as anything other than a ground-clearing operation. By his own criteria, he is likewise failing to advance knowledge or create intellectual progress. His procedure amounts to a kind of anti-intellectualism that is usually associated with our worst political impulses. Doing good also includes making meaning, which is of greater necessity in trying times. And anthropologists as intellectuals are uniquely situated to do just that, besides their ethnographic engagement with suffering. Anthropology need not be reduced to a kind of ethnographic engineering.

I have to wonder if, from a Pacific Islander's perspective, having come to understand that they have a unique Pacific Way, they would not be as aghast as I am at the enthusiasm with which academic anthropologists sometimes overturn their ancestors. Borofsky claims to be doing an 'anthropology of anthropology', but he does not seem to have done the ethnography: I have known some of the people that he analyses as apparently unremitting careerist opportunists turning out original tomes talking past one another personally, and I can tell you that this was not their primary motivation.

Here is what is missing from Borofsky's account: anthropologists are people studying other people who are different from themselves but are part of the same history as themselves, a history that is always already constantly and continually changing, not to mention contested. The world changes that have taken place since the inception of anthropology, not that many years ago, are absolutely staggering. Yet, Borofsky adopts a false static objectivism to assess evolutionary progress in the sciences and social sciences because he has an inadequate view of history. Anthropology has always been a part of this history, as have the peoples anthropologists have endeavoured to study. The history of anthropological scholarship can be fairly easily impugned with reference to a narrow, dehistoricized view of scientific progress. However, it can also be appreciated for its historically situated forays into the ventures of other peoples and the lessons and perspectives it and its interlocutors have learned from those engagements.

Just one case in point: the author says we need to go from a weak 'do no harm' ethic, which he claims just serves the purpose of maintaining the status quo in an academic hierarchy, to a strong 'do good' Public Anthropology ethic. But to be fair, 'do no harm' comes from the classic period of anthropology, which was largely devoted to the critique of ethnocentrism and endeavouring not to be ethnocentric oneself, so the idea was not to impose Western ideas and values or impose external change. It was naïve to think one could escape participating in change. But in these circumstances the 'do good' alternative is hubristic in the extreme insofar as it presumes to know where history is going, or what the consequences of the changes it brings about are going to be. One might make an exception here of Paul Farmer's and similar projects

because they are so specifically focused on limited measureable outcomes directly related to physical well-being. The 'do good' Public Anthropology paradigm echoes the ethical naiveté of colonialism. The 'do no harm' anti-ethnocentric ethic was part of the knowledge that anthropologists endeavoured, apparently quite successfully, to pass on to students and colleagues in other disciplines in order to create educated citizens and do real practical public good, rather than simply reproduce institutional hierarchies. Our anthropological ancestors, like ourselves, were human beings operating in the historical world in the best ways they knew. And many of them were quite splendid at it. The only problems ensue from the metaphysical idealist hubristic muddles in which we often land ourselves, which are serious problems.

It is not possible in a short review such as this to undertake the more thorough critique that would be possible of Borofsky's book. He is wrong about Thomas Kuhn in that Kuhn did a historical social analysis of science and assumed that science is a part of history rather than history a part of science, if I read him correctly, whereas Borofsky employs Kuhn as a problem-solver. He is wrong about science in that he assumes in his arguments that scientific progress is predicated on reliability (replicability, which Borofsky incorrectly calls 'validity' – he uses 'reliable' to mean 'honest') and not discovery and falsification (Borofsky uses 'falsification' to mean 'fraud'). Thus he faults Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington (1987) for failing to replicate Margaret Mead's study "Sex and temperament in three primitive societies" (1935) precisely and thus bring scientific progress while they actually clearly falsified her findings regarding the Chambri.

Borofsky narrows the idea of hegemony from that of 'the dominant fundamental group' to 'key university administrators', thus obfuscating the fact that these administrators belong to the larger universe of the dominant fundamental group. Thus, in 230 pages of analysis and critique of self-fulfilling institutional academic hierarchies, there is not one mention of social class, while it could be reasonably argued that the educational system exists primarily to reproduce the social class system and only secondarily to produce knowledge. There is only one 'bump and go' reference to Marx, who played a major role in anthropology's intellectual and institutional history. Besides the missing Marx, Borofsky makes much use of the neo-liberal-leaning Economist magazine's exposé criticisms of academic fraud, irreproducible results and tenure-mill publication analyses, the mainstay of his critical argument, which can only be seen as part of the corporate world's anti-intellectual assault on and takeover of academics, along with the privatization of everything else left in the public sphere.

Borofsky begins the middle chapters of his book by criticizing Colin Turnbull for not himself feeding the Ik, whose misery he eloquently described in his book "The mountain people" (1972), and bemoaning his inability to affect the social, institutional and environmental forces that had created their plight. By the end of them, however, he has to admit that even the most prominent anthropological activists often have frustratingly little effect on public policy, as their research gets caught up on the blizzard of information, misinformation and poisonous political culture wars and agendas that comprise contemporary public life in the United States and elsewhere. As a result, he can only offer a list of suggestions for how to have greater impact. Along the way, he points out the glaring inequalities between most anthropologists and the communities they study, but then apparently embraces developmentalist views that aim only to alleviate extreme poverty and suffering, assuming the market will take care of the rest, thus leaving aside issues of human equality. In considering adequate measures for doing public good in lieu of publications, he also recommends the entirely unethical practice of making anthro-

pological research data public, much as must be done in the physical sciences and biomedicine, in order to make them more 'reliable' – reliable in the sense of trustworthy, rather than scientifically replicable, thus privatizing the research done at public institutions by putting them in control of the public market place.

Nevertheless, the author is not wrong about everything. He clearly describes what is essentially a crisis of overproduction in anthropology, of PhDs and publications. He writes that

> this chapter [2] makes clear the 'do no harm' paradigm's basic flaw: the focus on positive appearances – claiming to serve the broader society – while in fact mostly enhancing the prestige of individual faculty and their universities. The upbeat tone of this paradigm's message disguises that its focus is mostly on supporting the political and financial status quo (121).

This charge, of course, could be levelled against the 'do good' Public Anthropology paradigm as well as any other that makes moral claims for itself from a comfortable institutional position. But the financial aspect is indeed crucial. The post-war boom is over, and the crisis of overproduction has gone beyond the point of diminishing returns, exacerbated by the increasing concentration of wealth. What is actually going on in the real history of the world is not so much moral scientific progress as the hollowing out of the middle classes and universities by a new global elite. In this situation, the imperative, for those who can manage, is exactly what Borofsky is calling for. But Borofsky's moral tale should be replaced by a more sober history.

I have to add, lest I be misconstrued, that all is not bad. I suppose that we are going to persist doing our best despite our metaphysical muddles, practicing ethnographic ethics, as we always have, in the history in which we find ourselves. I hope it will be understood that we are all in this history together, and always have been. And there is no one in particular leading it, though many have more power than others. Borofsky's command of the literature he summarizes so well in his anthropology of anthropology is impressive and intimidating, even without the ethnography of anthropology, as are the achievements of many activist anthropologists. The Founding Editor of The California Series in Public Anthropology is more right than ever regarding the need to speak truth to power. I think I may have just done that.

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