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How to cite

LARSEN, Peter Bille et al. Anthropological engagement in the international sphere: a conversation grounded in Swiss experiences. In: Tsantsa: Journal of the Swiss Anthropological Association, 2022, vol. 27, p. 108–129. doi: 10.33058/seismo.30827

This publication URL: https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:161466
Publication DOI: 10.33058/seismo.30827

ANTHROPOLOGICAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE INTERNATIONAL SPHERE

A Conversation Grounded in Swiss Experiences

Peter Bille Larsen, Mô Bleeker, Isabel Käser, Esther Leemann, Susan Riva, Raphael Schapira, Yvan Schulz, and Ellen Hertz

Abstract

As anthropologists increasingly embark upon the study of the international sphere, this often builds on different forms of engagement within and around organizations, processes, and institutional corridors. The co-authors, building upon a round table exchange, address the advantages and dilemmas of anthropological engagement in the field of international governance, including humanitarian work, diplomacy, international organizations, the Swiss federal government, NGOs, and multinationals.

Keywords: *engagement, human rights, international governance, multinationals, activism*

Roles, contributions, and dilemmas of anthropological engagement in international governance

Peter Bille Larsen, University of Zurich

As anthropologists increasingly embark upon the study of the international sphere (Müller 2013), this often builds on different forms of engagement within and around organizations, processes, and institutional corridors. What are the different roles, contributions, and dilemmas of anthropological engagement in the international governance field? How does anthropology inform, and vice-versa, become informed by, such engagement? Disciplinary attention to local perspectives and multiple voices, I would argue, make anthropologists particularly sensitive to the power-ridden negotiations of representation and voice taking place, prompting careful navigation of engagement in politicized and powerful arenas.

The anthropological encounter with complex realities intermeshing global politics, bureaucracies, social movements, and how these relate to local lives is both fruitful and challenging. Global governance regimes and their effects, indeed, are no longer confined to multilateral elites and high-level processes, but increasingly connected to everyday consumer practices, social media campaigns, and activism. The international sphere is omnipresent from climate change negotiations and sustainable development goals to changing migration regimes and development cooperation. Anthropology not only offers critical insights, but

DOI 10.36950/tsantsa.2022.27.7801

also particular opportunities for engagement in such global village conversations. Ranging from awareness raising to advocacy, anthropologists are often acutely sensitive to the decision-making and action panorama offered both for themselves and in collaboration with their interlocutors.

What are the specific knowledge angles, activities, and contributions taken up by or attributed to anthropology in the international sphere? Based on a roundtable discussion, this debate underlines the diversity of anthropological engagements, knowledge production, and dilemmas in the international sphere.[1] As I look back on more than two decades of different forms of anthropological engagement in the NGO and international sphere; personal experiences have ranged from field level engagement building on the symbolic capital of anthropologists around the local, cultural, and "savage slot" (Trouillot 1991) towards employing ethnographic method and anthropological analysis of global policy arenas (Larsen and Buckley 2018; Larsen 2015, 2017). Engagement is understood here as a reflexive process of positioning with societal conversations outside academia rendering explicit and acting upon how knowledge ties into – and challenges – practices. What then are some of the lessons and dilemmas emerging?

First, as demonstrated by all authors, whether as staff members, consultants, experts, or activists, roles and practices of anthropologists are not confined to the position of academic observers simply choosing the international sphere as a subject for reflection. Although engagement is at times seen as an "alternative" leaving behind academia, the testimonies gathered here demonstrate a far more productive encounter. Indeed, it is often the other way around – that of multiple forms of anthropological engagement leading to new forms of ethnographic curiosity and theorization. In the case of Birgit Müller, for example, working with the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) led to an ethnographic focus on multi-stakeholder dialogues (Müller 2011), just as part of my own involvement in preparing international guidelines on community participation led to theorization about soft guidelines as an international governance phenomenon (Larsen 2013). Engagement does not hinder solid analysis (or vice-versa). If organizational involvement may translate into academic analysis, much research, however, remains in the grey literature of project reports, internal memos, and policy papers reshaping organizational narratives and practices far more often than informing academia.

Second, if contractual work may be a starting point for certain forms of anthropological access, engagement is rarely limited to the initial job description. Contributions often evolve over time due to methodological sensitivity to diverse organizational realities, contradictory representations, or unexpected questions. It is not that the anthropological roles and contributions are in flux, but rather that there are only few pre-defined anthropological positions

[1] The roundtable organized in March 19, 2021 involved contributions from Tine Stærmose, anthropologist and diplomat with the International Labour Organization, Isabel Käser with the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs and Mô Bleeker as a Swiss Special Envoy for Dealing with the Past and atrocity Prevention. Raphael Schapira speaks about the "Latin America is Moving Collective", an initiative to build bridges between anthropology and activism, and a Yvan Schultz presenting about a recent book project on multinationals. An additional written contribution was received by Esther Leeman, University of Zürich, and Susan Riva, Carleton.

in the international sphere. Indeed, due to changing regional, and global dynamics, the international sphere constantly triggers new fields of anthropological engagement and minefields of dilemmas. The following debate reveals how anthropologists engage with global governance in highly diverse areas, but also through multiple positions and epistemological stances. Engagement, from this perspective, is a not pre-given positionality, but rather one of a set of choices in arenas.

Third, several contributions highlight the complexity of navigating highly politicized and powerful arenas from land politics in Cambodia (Leemann), over gender politics and diplomacy in the Middle East (Käser) to the regulation of multinationals in Switzerland (Schulz and Hertz). This includes dealing with the complexity of power-ridden negotiations of voice and representation taking place between civil society, state, and corporate voices. Whether dealing with consensual language – *langue de bois* – of international bureaucrats or social movements, a common dilemma evolves around the friction between the gloss of harmony of multilateral diplomacy (Müller 2013), anthropological counter-narratives, and conflicting representations.

Fourth, anthropological engagement generates multiple forms of knowledge production. Whereas many anthropologists have transferable skills to become directly involved in growing NGO and IO cooperation as project staff, analysts, or even activists, the engagement potential is far more potent. Critical anthropological questions and topics can challenge taken-for-granted assumptions about "doing good". Whether it is about challenging global norms and international policy prescriptions, contradictory NGO realities or the complexity of achieving social justice, anthropological engagement is not merely about informing and applying knowledge, but one of co-creating new ways of rethinking social processes.

Fifth, engagement is often dynamic involving changing modalities of analysis, writing and conversational style over time. Much like the return visits of anthropologists to old fieldsites allowing for thick description and the reinvention of research questions in the face of social change, the intimate involvement with international processes involves dynamic engagement with the villagers of international governance; its traditional leaders and bureaucrats, new migrants and consultants on the block, and diverse ways of being, expanding, and "doing the international".

In the following pages, professionals, trained as anthropologists, share glimpses of their hands-on experience stemming not only from different sectors of international governance (humanitarianism, environmentalism, human rights, education, business engagement, bilateral cooperation, and peacebuilding), but also their multiple positionalities as researchers, organizational staff, advisors, educators, or activists. While an obvious point for some, it is not untrivial to underline the resulting diversity of politics of knowledge, epistemological and practical engagement.

Drawing on experiences with AIDS prevention, memory, and transitional justice, Mô Bleeker stresses the role of rigorous, scientific, responsible, and emancipatory anthropology. Isabel Käser, in turn, mobilizes feminist anthropology to critically inform efforts to promote "Art in Peace Mediation". Esther Leemann, as an advisory board member of a grassroots organization in Cambodia, mobilizes anthropology in work against land-grabbing as well as challenging stereotypes of indigenous peoples in Swiss school classes. Susan Riva

weaves together virtual global teaching, anthropology, and capacity building as a field of future forming research and transformational pedagogy. Raphael Schapira, as part of the "Latin America is Moving" collective, seeks to bridge academia and activism through the construction of social alternatives grounded in the work of Latin American social movements. Back in Switzerland, Yvan Schulz and Ellen Hertz unravel the insights of writing as "public intellectuals" in favour of the Swiss Responsible Business Initiative. Outcomes of such engagement are rarely straightforward nor a one-off event, but rather invite long-term conversations and dynamic contributions. The contributions demonstrate not only the fundamental relevance our discipline in understanding global (dis)orders and contributing towards more socially just and ecologically sustainable practices, but also the emergence of new terrains and modalities of engagement.

The collapse of certainties: a golden age for engaged anthropology?

Mô Bleeker, University of Fribourg

As an anthropologist, engaged in societal transformation and the prevention of violent conflicts, the creation of space for horizontal dialogue is central to my work; such kind of dialogues, the least asymmetrical possible, that seek to contribute to a recognition of *the other* in his or her difference and needs, that generates concrete, dialogical responses to existing issues or needs, or – even better – that enables joint cooperation towards solutions.

During the last decades, parallel to the dismantling of the regulatory role of the state, the notion of *obligation of the states,* correspondent with the *rights of the societies,* or in the case of violent conflicts or human rights violations, with the *rights of the victims,* has largely imposed itself as international standards. In this context, today we are witnessing an enormous diversification of actors, needs, and problems that could be solved through non-violent means and that could be settled by creatively mobilizing a combination of rights and duties of states, society and citizens. Dialogue processes nowadays also include non-state actors (armed and civilian), the private sector, international organizations, interested stakeholders, all of them with their different quality of *duty bearers and/or rights holders,* all of them central partners in any dialogue and negotiation process. Hence, making sure that partners are prepared for such dialogues is crucial. In a nutshell, on the one hand, *social subjects as bearer of rights,* citizens, and communities, shall be aware of their rights, their needs, obligations and feel empowered to act as partners, and on the other hand, the *duty bearers, such as state, government, private companies,* shall be aware of their obligation to respect and fulfil such rights and be equally empowered to fulfil them.

Creating conditions for constructive management of diversity happens in many different settings through mediation, facilitation, negotiation, in schools, neighbourhoods, or cities, between religious groups, between government and non-state parties involved in a violent conflict, to name a few. Think about mediating a peace agreement or a cooperation protocols between different legal systems, think of minority groups working with city authorities

to develop a "urban charters for diversity". Think about facilitating dialogues among violent youth gangs, or among communities involved in participatory budgeting processes. Or think about victim groups and government negotiating a transitional justice policy or unions negotiating socioeconomic and ecological policy with government, and so forth.

Anthropology is particularly well equipped to play a central role in these kinds of interactions. On the one hand, it can help in revealing the diversity of ideal perceptions and material architectures at stake (Godelier 1984) as well as the multiple ways to relate to the world. On the other hand, it may also help to display multiple options for imagining, cultivating, and managing diversity. And at the same time rigorous and responsible, but also supportive and emancipatory anthropology can provide space for absent or discriminated narratives to be heard and underline the manifold challenges and opportunities for a world choosing to embrace human diversity in a holistic and durable manner, rather than exclusionary paths.

Several concrete examples come to my mind, where *engaged anthropology* played a significant role in this regard. In the nineties, while searching for solutions to AIDS prevention among extremely marginalized adults in Switzerland, anthropological concepts and methods were helpful to design participatory investigations and dialogues involving all stakeholders to find sustainable and local, tailor-made solutions and maximize the impact of prevention (André and Bleeker 1993). These innovative participatory assessments convened different worldviews – even illegal ones – in one space allowing a cooperative process towards joint decisions to take place.

Much later in Colombia, while working with the Historical Memory Group (*Grupo de Memoria Histórica),* my anthropological background was instrumental to cooperate in the design of the historical memory methodology, including communities' narratives about the impact of the long bloody conflict and their recommendations to address this legacy. As a result, the widespread dissemination of the report *"Basta ya"* (National Historical Memory Centre 2012), but also the realization of multiple decentralized and participatory historical memory initiatives largely contributed to discredit and delegitimize the dominant narrative that presented this conflict as if it had no lethal consequences. Inaudible and divided in the past, victim groups joined efforts, their voice became louder and undermined the "legitimacy of the war", playing a crucial role in imposing the moral need of peace negotiations as the only way to end this bloody conflict.

In the Philippines, I was mandated by the signatory parties to the Bangsamoro Peace Agreement, the government of the Philippines and the Islamic Liberation Front, to chair the Transitional Justice and Reconciliation Commission TJRC. Its mandate included the development and recommendation of a set of appropriate mechanisms to address legitimate grievances of the Bangsamoro people, to correct historical injustices, and to address human rights violations and marginalization through land dispossession. The recommendations included concrete measures that will bring about the reconciliation of the different communities that have been affected by the conflict. One of the main challenges was to devise a genuine participatory process so that it would generate such ownership and legitimacy that the parties of the peace agreement would feel enabled to endorse the report and implement the recommendation and that the mobilization for a full implementation would continue beyond the existence of the TJRC. The approach designed with Filipino colleagues involved a *listening*

process with affected communities and survivors, the compilation of hundreds of archives and testimonies, the realization of specific investigations and dialogues with all stakeholders, the elaboration of a TJRC report including public policy recommendations to be publicly endorsed by the peace panels. Today, this report remains a widely accepted and legitimate benchmark and the mobilization for the implementation of its recommendation continues.

Engaging with the multiple facets of diversity. lies both at the heart of anthropology and of societal transformation processes. Against the market-based monopolization imposed by the dominant neo liberalism, engaged anthropology can contribute imagining, engineering, and maybe designing new ways to address the need of peaceful coexistence in diversity. By doing so, engaged anthropologists may contribute to the further implementation of the "principle of hope" (Bloch 1991) embedded in tangible initiatives; because "anthropology, as a discipline, is the best venue through which [...] an undying faith in the richness and variability of humankind (can be shown)" (Trouillot 2002, 230).

Reflections on feminist research in diplomacy and situating "Art in Peace Mediation"

Isabel Käser, Visiting Fellow, London School of Economics

Due to the scarcity of academic job opportunities at a post-doc level and/ or the wish to apply and expand their knowledge in a more "hands-on" setting outside of academia, many scholars branch out into the NGO or governmental spheres. This was also true in my case, when I took on the role of project lead for an initiative by the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), which explores the potential of including art and artistic practices into formal mediation and peace processes. This project entitled "Art in Peace Mediation" was initiated by a team of diplomats, practitioners, and scholars, among others Dagmar Reichert, founder of *artasfoundation,* and ambassador Alexandre Fasel.[2] The idea behind the project is based on the acknowledgment that art plays a key role in post-conflict reconciliation processes (Mitchell at al. 2020), and the assumption that these practices could perhaps also be moved into the formal processes – to facilitate dialogue, bridge gaps, and foster a mutual ground upon which negotiations could be held (artasfoundation 2015).

During my one-year mandate (2019-2020), I conducted research guided by questions such as; can art play a more prominent role in formal (Track-I) peace processes? Does art enable dialogue between conflict parties on an equal footing? Can art help facilitate a new language to talk about old grievances and new shared visions? To me, this was a visionary and important project that I embarked on with great enthusiasm. Having worked on gender and war with a focus on the Middle East, and on the Kurdish Women's Movement in particular for the five years prior to this assignment (Käser 2019, 2021a, 2021b), I saw it as a wel-

[2] For more details on the project see: Art in Peace Mediation: https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/united-kingdom/en/home/representations/embassy-in-london/embassy-tasks/culture/art-in-mediation.html (accessed Sept 1, 2021), and: Artasfoundation is a Zürich-based organization, working on the intersection of mediation, post-conflict, and art: https://www.artasfoundation.ch/en/foundation (accessed Sept 1, 2021).

come new opportunity to shift my focus and expand anthropological knowledge into the world of mediation and peacebuilding.

Alongside an ever-changing conflict landscape, mediation approaches have also been adapting. For one, as the number of protracted crises and conflicts proliferate, the discipline and practice of mediation has become increasingly sophisticated and professionalized. This has led to a surge in innovation efforts and an attempt to make peace processes more inclusive by training more women mediators, increasing gender sensibility, and bringing civil society actors to the table. In a similar vein, this project set out to explore whether the engagement of artists helps to more fully capture the complexity of a protracted conflict, offer new channels of communication in negotiations, and make peace processes more interdisciplinary, transparent, sustainable, and inclusive.

Despite two decades of feminist organising advocacy, scholarship, and activism that followed the UN Resolution 1325 (2000), mediation and peace building remain a largely male-dominated world. Women have to go the extra mile not only to become mediators, but also to be present as part of official delegations at peace talks (Bensky 2020).[3] During the first week of the assignment, I was warned that due to the novelty of this project, I would potentially encounter resistance from some (male) mediators and that I would have to deal with quite a bit of "male ego".[4] Nevertheless, a feminist anthropologist with a focus on gender studies, I began this research with the question; where are the women and what are they doing in this complex puzzle that is a peace process? Are they already using creative means to make their voices heard and create paths for them to the negotiation table? Not wanting to reinvent the wheel, or to "bring art to conflict zones", which would have smacked uncomfortably of ("post")-colonial power relations, I reached out to several different women mediation networks, which over the past decade or so have become more prominent, and to women artists and practitioners to get a sense of what is already happening at this nexus of art, conflict, and mediation.[5]

My research showed early on that art is already – and always – "there"', before, during and "post"-conflict.[6] Women and youth, particularly in the Global South, are using creative tools (poetry, dance, theatre, music, embroidery), mostly but not exclusively on the community level, to make their voices heard and speak across community and conflict lines – but these practices are not always taken seriously as "art" or brought into the process by those mediators who parachute in. The relevant question that needed to be explored was rather;

[3] For details on the first UN resolution on Women, Peace and Security, Security Council Resolution 1325, which affirms women's central role in conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction, see Peace Women: https://www.peacewomen.org/SCR-1325 (accessed May 9, 2021).

[4] While the "male ego" is certainly a force to reckon with in international diplomacy, I did not face substantial resistance. Overall – and without wanting to reinforce gender binaries – I found that women are more open to experiment with creative and new tools, but I also spoke to a number of men who were either already using the arts, and who, while not think this was the missing puzzle piece in mediation, were open to discussing the idea.

[5] See for example Women Mediators Across the Commonwealth: http://www.c-r.org/programme/women-mediators-across-commonwealth (accessed May 5, 2021).

[6] Feminist scholarship has shown that the distinction between pre-during-post makes little analytical sense and that violence instead moves on a continuum, see Cockburn (2004).

what kind of art is being used and practiced and what mediators do with them? After conducting over 60 interviews, I came to the conclusion, that not only are art and cultural elements already "there" but that the "good" mediators are using it when they deem it appropriate; be that to include a shaman at a certain stage in the process or having a poet as part of the mediation team to bridge the gap between different armed movements (Käser and Mitchell 2021).[7]

The final report highlights the key themes of timing, power hierarchies, and access, sketching out examples where art "worked", while also drawing attention to potential pitfalls when working with art in conflict landscapes. I found that whether art and what kind of art "works", is highly context specific but that a collaboration on equal footing with local artists could offer the mediator a new window into society, if the necessary frameworks are in place. These findings might be relevant to those designing mediation trainings, or mediators looking for another toolset when confronted with a deadlock in a mediation process.

This was not my first experience working as a scholar by training for the Swiss state, but it reinforced my understanding of how much anthropologists are needed to bring to these projects our willingness to ask the uncomfortable questions, as well as our high tolerance for contradictions and complexities. In my case this included a feminist and post-colonial criticality, a hunch that creative practices are already there and that instead we have to ask whose voices and knowledges count and are deemed relevant, when thinking through and designing new and internationally relevant projects.

Anthropologist on the advisory board: Contributions and dilemmas of anthropological engagement in knowledge production

Esther Leemann, University of Zurich

Leaving the field has never been a clear cut for me. I still have diverse entanglements with people I physically left behind in Nicaragua and Cambodia, where flows of information go in both directions even after many years. Students who were children when I was in the field are now about to graduate; the first ones from poor rural families ever, in disciplines like mathematics, agrarian engineering, or law, which promise job security. Many anthropologists have long-standing individual connections. But with my field in Cambodia, my long-term engagement has been much more extensive and at times as demanding as a full-time job besides my official job as senior research and lecturer at the University of Zurich. I am a member of the advisory board of an indigenous grassroot organization, which is contesting the grab of customary lands and territory by rubber companies. This involves supporting community members in very practical ways to cope with the enforced shift from swidden to permanent agriculture. Furthermore, it means becoming part of the social change that they

[7] In terms of methodology, I should emphasize that the set-up of this project meant that I was not able to do an ethnography as I would have normally: access to formal mediation processes is strictly limited and the global pandemic that sent us all home meant that from March 2020 onwards, I conducted most workshops and interviews with artists and mediators online.

aspire to (Kirsch 2010) and "generating the kinds of knowledge they ask and need us to produce" (Hale 2006, 113; see also Rasch and van Drunen 2017; Johnston 2010). The grassroot organization has grown from a handful of people to several thousand members within a few years.

As former swiddeners, used to growing stuff where fields first have to be wrested from forest, Bunong villagers proved to be masters of adaptation, trial, resourcefulness, perseverance, and patience. The allies at their side ended up in their advisory board: two anthropologists, a linguist, a social worker and a journalist. Bunong activists have seen this kind of relationship as a proper basis for collaboration across and along various lines of power (Kirsch 2010; Mullins 2011; Kotaska 2019). Villagers have learned to defend indigenous rights, stage protests, stay in one place and not let their fields lie fallow, write complaints, negotiate with plantation managers, become forest conservationists, report to donors, form groups specialized in coffee, pepper, rubber, and honey, grow and market products that were unknown to them ten years ago. As an anthropologist, I have learned to deal with multiple forms of engagement and roles.

As an advisory board member, I mediate the gap between Bunong *Lebenswelten* and other political, cultural and social realms; between indigenous swiddeners' ways of knowing and understanding and the entanglements of Swiss based corporations and the Cambodian state in struggles over territory and profits. This engagement also entails a critical examination of my role and positioning as "privileged anthropologist" (DiGiacomo 1997, 94; see also introductory text by Larsen), given the discipline's entanglement in structures of control and power, which emerged during colonialism and continue into the present (Harrison 1991; Abu-Lughod 1992; Maldonado-Torres 2007; Quijano 2000). We experience that in conversation with actors involved in the land conflict – be they corporate or government staff, supporting organizations, or donors – authority and value remain attached to the White Euro-American advisory board members rather than the Bunong from whom we derive our knowledge (Kaur and Klinkert 2021). We discuss how to confront such legacies and their implications, and how to deal with the dilemma of instrumentalizing our privileged social position to give voice to Bunong ontologies and epistemologies, but at the cost of perpetuating a hierarchy in which the Bunong are perceived as merely objects instead of subjects with own voice (Kaur and Klinkert 2021; Alonso Bejarano et al. 2019). Moreover, multiple questions arise between international human rights ideals caught in bureaucratic treadmills and villagers' need for immediate solutions to very down-to-earth problems. Where do we grow our crops now that our land has been given away for rubber production and wildlife conservation? How do we get our young men out of prison, whose rights as indigenous people to farm swidden fields conflict with both conservation and corporate interests? How do we get a coffee sorter from Vietnam across the border during a pandemic?

As advisory board member I also strive to regularly provide concise information on the current human rights situation of Bunong communities that will satisfy the need of supporting stakeholders or the media for "evidence" to take action and sustain their involvement. Anthropological engagement informed by sound knowledge can make a difference in how violations of indigenous rights are perceived and addressed in governments and organizations. It can also be helpful to sensitize the grassroot organization for building and sustaining

strong networks of organizations that reach far beyond Cambodia and are transnational, as are the rubber companies and conservation projects (Kirsch 2010).

Long-term engagement as an advisory board member allows for important scientific insights based on continuity of intensive interactions with villagers, government officials, and organizations. Framing information in a way that it is accessible to a broader audience not only in Cambodia but also in Switzerland challenged my own way of understanding and thinking about the Bunong. Moreover, it proved useful to find effective ways to communicate complex issues so that state officials and ever-changing organizational staff would better understand what was at stake and counter their impression that the land conflict case was too complicated to resolve and therefore not worth trying again. My involvement in endless phone calls, long email exchanges, and more recently Zoom meetings helped me understand the fatigue of community representatives, the burden of responsibility, the despair when conflict resolution processes drag on for years to no avail. The mechanisms at work are difficult to understand through interviews alone; only participant observation, our signature method, provides insight into how things work from an insider's perspective. As Lye Tuck-Po recently stated in an online lecture on what is crucial for any anthropological engagement: our job is to do good research.

But there is a dilemma when it comes to scholarly and other forms of engagement: when I publish my scientific work, I rarely mention my involvement as an advisory board member, on the advice of a colleague well acquainted with funding mechanisms who warned me that otherwise my reputation as a scientist might be at stake. It is a pragmatic decision as presently, the value of anthropological engagement for knowledge production is not yet recognized in the broader academic community, especially not in other disciplines that may be critical in funding processes. Although anthropologists like Johnston (2010) already some time ago rejected the thesis that such engagement means a sacrifice of scholarship, a change of professional self-concept may still take a while. I argue that anthropologists are skilled at maintaining the delicate balance between different roles, for example, being both participant and observer in the field. We are aware of the responsibility to critically reflect on the possibilities and limitations of different roles in knowledge production and are quite capable of doing so. That is why I adhere to the value of continuous engagement for the people I have physically left behind not only for a change of their situation, but also for the sake of producing good research.

Engaging in anthropology through virtual landscapes and international education partnerships: Flying through the window when the door is locked

Susan Mossman Riva, Creighton University

Landscapes of virtual learning and sharing are places where engaged anthropologists can generate future forming research and transformational pedagogies (Gergen 2015). Experiences involving international online teaching, blogging to share autoethnographic research, as well as virtual learning communities will be presented to show emerging *"glovircal"*

engagement.[8] Teaching online courses within the medical anthropology program at Creighton University in Omaha Nebraska, while living in Switzerland, reinforced the conviction that online learning landscapes can bring together students and professors within virtual spaces that foster international partnerships, learning communities, and transformational learning processes, while providing higher education to professional students and students that are refugees or in war zones that cannot participate in traditional university settings. Teaching online requires a form of engagement that is sensitive to students' social and cultural contexts. Not only does anthropology's comparative and holistic approach provide a dialogical space through engaged discussions concerning evolution, kinship, gender, biocultural diversity, and structural violence that are presented through the course materials and literature, but online learning also generates a relational space for intercultural mediation when students respectfully share their different viewpoints that are shaped by their specific contexts using ethnography.

Medical anthropology uses the autoethnographic method to relate personal experiences that inform analysis about larger social happenings. Furthermore, autoethnographers write to transform relations by creating space for healing conversations and reflections in relation to illness experiences and also social phenomena like adoption. (Riva 2019). The current pandemic has generated a "global illness narrative" eliciting a search for meaning (Kleinman 1988) and subsequently has given rise to "conflict narratives" that have emerged from global fault lines. These "conflict narratives" can be better understood using a medical anthropology framework in conjunction with narrative methods that elicit shared storytelling (Riva 2009). The emergence of new ways of relating – global and local lifeworlds mediated by virtual interconnectedness – increased because of lockdowns and social distancing. Such forms are not merely "glocal" (Rifkin 2019, 45), but could be termed *glovircal* with coinciding global, virtual and local spaces of encounter. Within this planetary context, these new forms of storytelling engendered by international relations and collaboration may also provide a vehicle for global emancipatory processes to unfold through the cultivation of virtual learning landscapes that are being spawned in this era of "glocalization" (Rifkin 2019, 35).

Meaningful relationships are fostered through scholarship and fellowship. Relational connections within glocal contexts show how contributions to global transformation can be co-constructed, using references including Paul Farmer who models engaged anthropology through committed partnerships, relationships, and friendships that embody a form of radical self-giving discussed in conversations with Fr. Gustavo Gutiérrez (see Griffin and Block 2013, 86). By engaging in dialogical processes that are directly linked to current events, cultural epidemiology allows students to better understand the pandemic, looking at other epidemics and how cultural and social determinants shape health outcomes.

At Creighton University, in the Department of Cultural and Social Studies, online courses are offered to international students within the medical anthropology program. Students

[8] I use this term to describe how the global and local or "glocal" have become increasingly "glovircal" realities connected by way of virtual landscapes. https://www.sagw.ch/fileadmin/redaktion_seg-sse/Jahres tagungen/2021/SSEMeeting2021_fullprogram.pdf (accessed Dec 30, 2021).

from Afghanistan that were part of the Jesuit Worldwide Education Program were included within an online course for the first time at Creighton University in 2018.[9]

They formed part of the "Jesuit Higher Learning in the Margins" program, whose headquarters are located in Geneva, Switzerland. The program seeks to provide knowledge through higher education to enhance students' ability to find culturally appropriate solutions to the problems they are facing. Specifically, students participated in the course "Introduction to Anthropology: social and cultural determinants of health". Beyond anthropological contents, the course also elicited international encounters and connections, reinforced by the aforementioned academic partnerships.

Students living in the United States participated in discussions with students from rural and urban areas throughout Afghanistan. The Afghans were working in learning centers where they were not only part of a bachelor's degree program, but also teaching within their communities. These students are not only committed to their communities, but they challenge traditional cultural models. The young women especially take risks as they emulate a new form of leadership, teaching in their community learning centers while they learn useful new skills.

Other students within the Jesuit Higher Learning in the margins connect from refugee camps. Many young people yearn for the chance to study but cannot leave the refugee camps. Online learning platforms and partnerships offer the possibility for the growing numbers of young adults confined in refugee camps to connect with universities that are dedicated to providing higher education for students in the margins.

Intercultural – anthropological – skills are critical to lead such a diverse group of students. Intercultural mediation is one practice that can be applied within the virtual classroom using narrative conflict resolution methods (Riva-Mossman 2009). In this way, interdisciplinary approaches buttress the anthropological online classroom by incorporating adult learning pedagogies that reinforce learning as well as resolution processes, providing a stimulating and inclusive learning space.

Students were, for example, asked to write learning narratives explaining their cultural context as well as how they believed the course could help them in their future life work. One Afghan student explained that education provided a weapon against political forces seeking to limit access to education and democracy. All of the students explained how they planned to use their knowledgeability gained from the holistic and comparative approach of anthropology to serve their communities (Riva 2020b).

Higher education partnerships, in this sense, can contribute to both local and global transformation by offering online programs to students in the margins even in geopolitically complex settings. Nonetheless, these relationships may have unforeseen consequences – and even risks – for participants when political circumstances change. With the decision to pull NATO troops out of Afghanistan, students may possibly be at risk, especially female students. The university and program partners were forced to suspend courses for Afghan students enrolled in Fall 2021 because of the political situation that rapidly evolved, creating a climate of insecurity and uncertainty. Further analysis of the situation is needed to evaluate how to continue offering higher education programs without endangering participants.

[9] https://www.jwl.org/en/home (accessed July 07, 2021).

Another dimension of engaged anthropology in the virtual sphere may be illustrated by the experience of creating the book website for *Homing In: An Adopted Child's Story Mandala of Connecting, Reunion, and Belonging* (Riva, 2020a). The book and website together involved a teaching story dimension that shares knowledgeability and transformative practices and processes.[10] The book has become a teaching story mandala, (Jung and Shamdasani 2009; Sweet 2006) weaving together ethnographic practice with online teaching materials that correspond to each book chapter, developing anthropological reflections that are freely offered to an international readership.[11] Having become aware of the difficulties of many people to have access to higher education, the website is a way to offer a social science learning space while building a learning community platform (Wenger, McDermot and Snyder 2002).

These examples of virtual engagement show how technology can mediate our relationships even during periods of confinement and lockdowns that may require prolonged social distancing. The revolution taking place in higher education calls for the co-construction of international institutional partnerships that can respond to social and political tensions that are increasingly challenging more traditional approaches (Gleason 2018). Participating in this era of "glocalization" and enacting the Green New Deal will require lifelong learning partnerships that allow citizens to engage in the current economic transformation, resiliently transitioning to new forms of employment engendered by the Sharing Economy (Rifkin 2019).

The pandemic, the political conflicts in Afghanistan, as well as the global ecological crisis all require collaborative and interdisciplinary approaches with a clear role for internationally engaged anthropologists that cultivate committed relationships and "glovircal" communities of practice.

"It may also be possible for colleagues to forge cross-disciplinary alliances and collaborations with activist groups so that problems of social suffering are more widely established on the agenda for research and scholarship" (Wilkerson and Kleinman 2016, 201).

Exploratory forms of engaged anthropology that use narrative methods to increase understanding about students' needs through learning narratives, while fostering interconnectivity and international collaborations and partnerships, have been recounted. The relational transformations that have been elicited by the pandemic, accelerating "glovircal" connections, reveal the potential for online learning communities to flourish. When we engage through technologies that provide access to new virtual spaces and digital habitats, we co-construct multifarious relationships that open windows to new frontiers of relatedness (Wenger, White, and Smith, 2009). By flying out the window and connecting virtually, we can map new relational flyways, even when doors are locked or closed, as the global migration crisis demonstrates. How can we further develop virtual learning landscapes, future forming in a way that can more effectively respond to the human suffering that spans across international borders?

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[10] http://www.susanmossmanrivawrites.com

[11] The mandala metaphor is in reference to Swiss psychiatrist C. J. Jung and Saint Hildegard Von Bingen. Both used representations of mandalas to express their lifework. The book's website is an example of an ever-growing teaching story with documentaries, videos, pictures, and articles that provide a virtual framework for an international readership.

Anthropological activist engagements

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Anthropological activist engagements are one form of international engagement bridging the social struggles of grassroots movements with academic practices of knowledge production. Taking the example of the transnational Latin America is Moving (LAM) collective in which I participate, in this short contribution, I showcase our online events involving different kinds of actors allowing participants to engage with new perspectives. By this means, different kinds of practices and forms of knowledge creation inform each other, feeding back into the actors' specific activities.

The Latin America is Moving collective aims at bringing together academics, activists, and teachers from Europe and Latin America to give visibility to struggles regarding human, ecological, and labour rights in Latin America and beyond. It was founded in 2019 thanks to the initiative of two young scholars who, inspired by Paulo Freire, wanted to engage with social movements and activism in Latin America based on their PhD training in anthropology. As a small group of early-career scholars and professionals from Latin America and Europe, we engage with social movements, seeing activism and academic work as entangled and mutually thriving on each other.[12]

As LAM collective, we feed academic concepts and research back into broader debates. Our guiding idea is that we do not want our audience to be mere repositories of knowledge but active participants in a critical discussion and, ideally, give them a sense of power. We strive to bridge different forms of engagement like sharing and support, teaching and public education, social critique, collaboration, advocacy, and activism (Low and Merry 2010), partaking from the idea that Anthropology as a discipline is well-positioned to bridge academia and activism because it emphasizes the anthropologist's positionality as part of the professional endeavour and deconstructs self/other dichotomies (Abu-Lughod 1992). We recognize that the world needs anthropologists (Podjed et al. 2021) but feel the need to understand better how we are complicit with (global) power structures that shape the ethnographer-interlocutor relationship and influence the social imaginaries stakeholders have of each other (Paerregaard 2007). In that sense, we pick up anthropology's ideal of social transformation of the 1960s and 1970s but add to it the discipline's self-reflexive turn of the 1980s (Armbruster 2008).

In December 2020, we organized an online event on the impeachment of former Peruvian President Martín Vizcarra and the related mass protests occurring in November 2020. Our event responded to the unfolding political and social developments in Peru. Our Peruvian panellists, a student activist living in Germany, a union leader who is also a street cleaner, together with a lawyer and researcher, painted a detailed picture of contemporary Peru thanks to their diverse professional backgrounds. They highlighted the need for a new constitution that serves all Peruvian citizens and helps end the exploitation of people and the

[12] See https://sites.google.com/view/latin-america-is-moving/about-us (accessed July 12, 2021) for a more detailed description of our work.

environment, often by foreign companies. Other online events have addressed topics like migrant (im)mobility in Ecuador, women agrarian collectives in rural Brazil, art and activism in Chile and Costa Rica, mining in Brazil, Ernst Bloch's philosophy of hope, and activism-based research in El Salvador. For us, these events are part of exploring "new forms of knowing-being-doing" (Osterweil 2013, 616), in which engagement and theoretical practice inform each other in entangled ways.

The global COVID-19 pandemic reveals the wounds left by decades of neoliberal expropriation in health, education, and labour rights, reinforcing inequalities based on gender, race, class, and place. Social movements offer more sustainable answers to these challenges through their resistance against destructive systems of different kinds. Highlighting these alternatives is a pressing task given the multiple crises humankind faces in the age of the Anthropocene. We align our work with the proposals from below, like feminist and ecological collectives emphasizing the *Buen Vivir* and post-extractivism. These proposals construct collective imaginaries that build a future based on caring for life, as highlighted by Arturo Escobar in his opening speech for the Social, Ecological, Economic and Intercultural Pact for Latin America.[13]

Through our series of events, we hope to contribute to inducing social change in Latin America and Europe. We believe that "epistemic politics" and "theoretical practice" (Osterweil 2013) are part of decolonizing ourselves contributing to positive social and political change in a (post)-COVID-19 reality. As our responses to the pandemic must go beyond a mere new set of economic policy toolboxes, we try to start thinking alternatives by getting acquainted with and participating in activists' struggles in Latin America and Europe. We consider that this form of anthropological engagement in the international sphere allows creating a "feedback loop" between social analysis and activism, in which each sphere can learn from the other by critically engaging with the other's positions.

Anthropologists as public intellectuals: Our experience with the Swiss Responsible Business Initiative

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What happens when anthropologists take the role of public intellectuals to support global justice? What can they contribute to public debate at both the national and international levels? What are the benefits, risks and challenges of such engagement? In what follows, we suggest answers to these questions based on our experience promoting the Responsible Business Initiative (RBI) in Switzerland through a book we published in September 2020 (Hertz and Schulz 2020). We hope that our assessment can shed light on one of the many ways anthropologists can put their expertise to the service of a noble cause, give back to the communities that support their work and infuse new meaning into their professional activity (see Low and Merry 2010). We also highlight some of the limits to our intervention in the public

[13] The recorded event can be accessed on the campaign's website under https://pactoecosocialdelsur.com/

sphere and emphasize the need for forethought and training in non-academic skills if we wish to attain our target audiences.

The issue of corporate responsibility

The issue of corporate responsibility takes center stage in discussions about globalization and its negative repercussions, including social injustice and environmental degradation. Multinationals are, by definition, active in several countries at the same time. Through global value chains, multinationals have gained new business opportunities but also face new challenges. In particular, they frequently operate in territories governed by states that are either unwilling or unable to enforce environmental protection standards and protect human rights. This issue became particularly apparent in the 1990s in connection with labor rights violations, thanks to the global anti-sweatshop movement (De Sousa Santos and Rodríguez-Garavito 2005). In reaction to intense pressure from civil society, multinationals and other corporations have increasingly joined or launched programs aimed at improving their track record in terms of ethical behavior. These programs, which are carried out under the banner of "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) (Vogel 2005), take many forms, but have in common their non-binding character. They are routinely – and somewhat misleadingly – referred to as *soft law*, since there are no sanctions if a company does not abide by its own voluntary commitments (Abbott and Snidal 2000).

Dissatisfied with this situation, a large coalition of Swiss civil society organizations (CSOs) launched a popular initiative entitled the *Responsible Business Initiative* (RBI) that sought to introduce a legal mechanism for making multinationals accountable in Switzerland for their wrongful activities abroad. Launched in 2016, the RBI progressively gained support from large numbers of Swiss citizens and generated a lively public debate, which was met with vigorous opposition from corporate representatives, lobbies, and their allies.[14]

Social scientific work on CSR

Based on our training in law and our previous research experience, we were convinced that the RBI represented a valuable attempt at dealing with the issue of corporate responsibility, so we decided to write a short book in support of it (Hertz and Schulz 2020). The book, which benefited from the valuable assistance of Wiebke Wiesigel, draws on scholarship in anthropology and cognate disciplines (e. g., political science) on CSR programs and corporate engagement worldwide. It echoes the scepticism found in this body of literature, for we conclude that voluntary norms are not sufficient to prevent serious human rights violations and environmental degradation, and that truly binding rules (*hard law*) are therefore needed. We also stress the fact that longstanding efforts to devise an international treaty on corporate

[14] The RBI was narrowly rejected on 29 November 2020.

responsibility that would have binding force globally have thus far failed, and that hope currently lies with efforts to produce legislation at the national or regional level.

Our book is essentially a work of popularization: short (less than 100 small pages), light (few bibliographic references), and addressed to a general audience (plain language). It focuses on the Swiss context, which explains why we opted for a Swiss editor (Seismo), a collection focused on Switzerland (*"Penser la Suisse"*) and the use of two Swiss official languages (French and German). In short, the book was meant to be not only engaged, but also engaging, especially for policymakers and "thought-leaders".

Our explicit objective was to convince even sceptical voters to back the RBI. We wanted to achieve this by providing high-quality empirical data-and a nuanced account. We were careful not to sacrifice intellectual rigor and critical thinking simply to buttress our arguments (see Ortner 2019). For us, it was clear that activism should not hinder solid analysis, as Larsen argues in his introduction to this volume. This distinguished our posture from that of some of the other participants in the public debate, who sometimes resorted to sensational images and discourses or made unsubstantiated claims and questionable predictions (see Hertz and Schulz 2020, 9). Even though engaged anthropology addresses first and foremost non-anthropologists, it must nevertheless be recognizable as "good enough anthropology" (Scheper-Hughes 1992, 28) by experts in this field (see Kirsch 2018, 220). In our case, we made sure that social scientists in general would not find fault with our book by keeping them in mind while writing it.

On a personal level, this book also represented an attempt to overcome such uneasy feelings as indignation, powerlessness, or fatalism, which scholars can sometimes be prone to. Indeed, our engagement stemmed from a deeper urge to trigger change beyond the limited scope of anthropology, scholarship, and our respective field sites.

Participation in the public debate

At the time the book came out, public debate on the RBI was raging and accusations had started to fly. This climate of tension forced us to be very clear as to how we positioned ourselves – or, as Larsen (this volume) puts it, which "choice" we made in this given "arena". We were faced with several challenges.

With regards to our allies (i. e., other supporters of the RBI), we had to identify reliable interlocutors who had the right type of expertise and establish solid collaborations with them. We also had to make sure these people understood that our contribution to making the RBI a success would diverge from theirs, and that this did not pose a problem for them. This required time, effort, and careful consideration, as taking our distance from the work CSOs had done previously, though necessary, was tactically and relationally difficult. We struggled in particular in one of our chapters, which relied heavily on CSO reports on Swiss gold refiners, and eventually decided to publish it as a separate piece (Schulz, Bolay, and Hertz 2020).

With regard to our adversaries, we had to make sure that we simultaneously debunked their invalid arguments and acknowledged their valid ones, for the sake not only of intellec-

tual honesty but also of rhetorical efficacy. Separating the grain from the chaff was not easy. It required, among other things, that we make forays into areas beyond our core expertise, and that we (as authors) exchange extensively between ourselves. For example, when assessing the Swiss business lobby's assertion that the RBI would have negative effects on the Swiss economy, we had to admit to the plausibility of their argument without giving it overdue force, recognizing that our more positive predictions were as fragile as their negative ones.

Finally, with regard to the media, we had to attract journalists' attention, and to make sure they would understand our message, relay it properly, and not instrumentalize it for their own or anyone else's purposes, for the media are a key actor in what Larsen (this volume) refers to as "power-ridden negotiations of representation and voice." Indeed, if there is a lesson to learn from our experience, it is that media contacts must be nurtured in advance, and the necessary press releases and soundbites thought through *before* throwing oneself into the arena. In our case, we found it difficult simply to get journalists to review our book, a reminder that academic contributions are often seen as less "sexy" than those of politicians or other public figures, and therefore not something that journalists necessarily seek out. We also did not anticipate the way new issues, polemics and the controversies would arise and sidetrack the debates (e. g., on CSO funding sources or the RBI's alleged "neocolonial" character). In sum, if anthropologists want to act as public intellectuals in the fight for global justice, they need to prepare themselves not only through solid scholarship but also by establishing contacts, by learning journalistic rhetoric, and by simplifying their arguments without distorting them.

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