

***Applying Anthropology in the Global Village*,
edited by Christina Wasson, Mary Odell Butler and
Jacqueline Copeland-Carson, Walnut Creek, CA: Left
Coast Press, 2012, 326 pp.**

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Introduction

Applying Anthropology in the Global Village is the work of eleven applied cultural anthropologists, all Americans and all female. The work is innovative and fascinating in many respects. It is the first volume that I am aware of integrating a broad discussion of the effects of globalization on local issues, as seen in the actual work of practicing (applied) anthropologists. While *Localities* is often concerned with aspects of the humanities, this volume is more concerned with a social science point-of-view (more on this below).

Second, the book reveals in very practical, tangible ways how global forces impact local peoples and social groups as well as a multiplicity of other levels of human activity, including regional, national and international ones. On this issue, the contributors discuss at length how selected global forces are affecting local populations, how these groups respond to and mediate these impacts in myriad ways, and how social

scientists working in applied settings analyze and assist varied groups and clients in handling these complex issues. The volume also considers how the interface of global and local issues affects the work and professional practices of applied anthropologists (all social scientists) themselves.

Third, the range of sectors covered is fairly broad, including global health, community development, transportation, migration, human trafficking, global climate change, technology design and others. Though the volume focuses on applied anthropology and has many practical aspects, it does not neglect broader intellectual concerns, including theory and how theory relates to social science work and practice beyond academia. In this review, I discuss the book's major themes, issues and contributions, especially its relevance and importance for a broad, non-anthropology centered audience. I am particularly interested in how the volume may relate to programs in international or global studies, and I will focus several of my comments on this issue as well.

The Nature of Anthropology, Applied Anthropology and Local / Global Issues

The discipline of anthropology, the study of human beings, is organized in varied ways in different national settings. In the United States and Canada, the discipline is organized into four main subfields: 1) cultural (or social) anthropology, which studies the ways of life of contemporary human groups, 2) physical or biological anthropology, which examines human origins, evolution, variation and remains, 3) linguistic anthropology, the study of human language and communication and how they relate to human society, and 4) archaeology, the study of the physical, material remains and life patterns of past human societies. Typically North American anthropologists specialize in just one of these

subfields, although they usually must study all four at the doctoral level. Broadly speaking, anthropologists study virtually every field of human knowledge and endeavor, though from distinctive perspectives. Anthropology is perhaps unique as a discipline that draws upon all three of these major fields of human knowledge: the biological and natural sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. In several Asian countries, such as Japan and South Korea, these subfields all constitute related but separate disciplines. Related to *Localities*, cultural anthropology in this region is largely viewed as a human science, related to the humanities.

Applied anthropology means the knowledge and theories of anthropology put to use to solve practical problems. The number of applied anthropologists is the largest in the United States, which is where two of the world's largest societies focusing on applied anthropology are based: the Society for Applied Anthropology and the National Association for the Practice of Anthropology.¹ Applied anthropology is usually not considered to be a distinct or fifth subfield of anthropology in North America. Even though a huge percentage of new Ph.D. and M.A. graduates in North America get jobs outside academia, the majority of the most prestigious anthropology departments in North America fail to offer specialization in the field or many courses on the subject. Despite this, a broad variety of universities and colleges offer degrees at the undergraduate and graduate level in the field, a few at the Ph.D. level.² The reasons for the tensions between applied anthropology and academic anthropology in the United States are many, including the negative history of the U.S. government employing anthropologists for covert, ethically questionable research during the Vietnam War³ and often

1) <https://www.sfaa.net/>, <http://practicinganthropology.org/>.

2) http://www.copaa.info/programs_in_aa/list.htm, accessed September 30, 2015. Though there are many fine programs listed here, note that none of them are Ivy League or “public ivy” schools.

3) Satish Kedia and John van Willigen, 2005. *Applied Anthropology: Domains of Application*, Westport, CT, Praeger, Chapter 1.

difficult relations between postmodern academic anthropologists and applied anthropologists.⁴ Despite these challenges, applied anthropology continues to break down barriers in increasingly varied, exciting fields, including business anthropology and design anthropology.⁵ Applied anthropologists are university-based anthropologists who often do research for clients outside the university, while practicing anthropologists work exclusively in non-university settings, either public or private.

As a discipline, anthropology has long been engaged in the study of different localities. Since its emergence as a distinct field of study in the late nineteenth century, anthropology has often focused on up close, in-depth, immersive study of local communities, groups, and cultures, especially through the distinctive research approaches of ethnography and participant observation, both of which anthropology largely pioneered. Despite its frequently intensive study of local societies and issues, anthropology has also examined global and international issues since its earliest days, including race, human evolution, the global diffusion of human culture, language and technologies, and more contemporary work on globalization and local impacts and responses to it.⁶

As a professor who teaches both political science and applied cultural anthropology under the umbrella of international studies, one of my

4) A well-known postmodern anthropologist, Arturo Escobar, condemns applied anthropology work in the field of international development in *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, 2012, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press.

5) See Ann T. Jordan, 2013, *Business Anthropology*, 2nd Ed., Long Grove, IL, Waveland Press for an introduction to this dynamic field. Much of the exciting work in design anthropology is showcased at the annual EPIC (Ethnographic Praxis in Industry Conference) conferences (<https://www.epicpeople.org>).

6) Marc Edelman and Angelique Haugerud, 2005, *The Anthropology of Development and Globalization: From Classical Political Economy to Contemporary Neoliberalism*, Malden, MA, Blackwell.

primary concerns here is to assess the usefulness of this volume for students who are studying global issues, especially in the field of international studies or global studies. International studies (also often called international affairs or international relations) is a cross-disciplinary field involving the study of international issues through the social sciences, especially those affecting public policy, i.e. diplomacy, war, international trade and economic policies and related topics. Historically, anthropology, with its frequent study of local human groups, and international studies, with its common emphasis on top level / global issues and leaders, found few opportunities for deep integration and collaboration.

Today this is changing, as students in many countries hunger to work and make a difference in the lives of people affected by global issues, for example, in the current refugee crisis from Syria, Iraq and elsewhere as many millions flee to other countries in Europe and the Middle East. As I tell my students, virtually all global policies and decisions impact local peoples and communities in some way. How can we make sense of these issues? Books like *Applying Anthropology in the Global Village* are sorely needed. How effective is this work?

Major Themes, Arguments of the Work

As noted in the helpful introduction and conclusion, a major goal in this book is to make better sense of local and global connections, and how those connections play out in the work of applied anthropologists and those they serve. There are many highly varied domains in which applied or practicing anthropologists work, including education, international development, business, public policy, social welfare, agriculture and health.⁷ The range of domains represented by the contributors to

7) Kedia and van Willigen, Chapter 1.

Applying Anthropology in the Global Village is similarly wide: infectious disease, transport, housing, human trafficking, climate change, aging, immigration, child welfare, global health and the design of high technology products. Interestingly, at various levels, these issues are both local and global, though sometimes their global or local connections are not so obvious at first glance.

The book employs a novel concept, the “global village,” which has appeared in other publications and scholars’ work. While anthropologists formerly focused their research on highly localized areas and human groups by intensively studying them for one to three years or longer, due to globalization, social media and increased high speed connections, the “village” is often much more fluid and dispersed. Here “global village” refers to the increasingly varied, dispersed nature of human groups, relations and connections. The book seeks to make sense of “translocal” dynamics and social change processes as revealed in actual case studies of the work of applied anthropologists.⁸ Related to “global village” are discussions of what “community” means. In the past, anthropologists defined communities as a “...geographic locality, a subpopulation within a larger settlement or organization, a group of people with a shared culture with or without a geographic basis.” Today, new concepts such as “global locality” have emerged, meaning the various contextual levels at which a particular group of people are connected: local, regional, national, and international. These connections are not necessarily geographically-based, but related to family ties, communication, shared cultural connections, and so forth.⁹

Applying Anthropology in the Global Village also includes certain assumptions about what globalization means, based on past work by

8) Jacqueline Copeland-Carson, Mary Odell Butler and Christina Wasson in Christina Wasson and Mary Odell Butler, et al., 2012, *Applying Anthropology in the Global Village*, Walnut Creek, CA, Left Coast Press, pp. 7-10.

9) Mary Odell Butler in Wasson and Butler, et al., p. 44, pp. 23-24.

anthropologists, including the views that globalization involves complex flows of people, capital, images, commodities and ideologies, adaptation by local groups, that it flows from multiple centers (not just the West), and that human cultures are no longer geographically bounded but interconnected with numerous political and economic contexts around them. The authors argue that their unique perspective as applied anthropologists provides valuable insights on the ground-level meanings and implications of globalization, as they observe and study how global forces affect actual human groups on the ground, and test and strengthen the usability and validity of different theories of globalization in real life situations.¹⁰

There are brief descriptions of the type of work that applied/practicing anthropologists often do, namely seeking to understand the needs and issues of their clients and the populations/groups they research, and seeking to advocate, mediate or broker on their behalf. The authors also present extensive discussions of case histories and their actual work. This provides us with helpful, practical examples of what their work means in practice, and students of international and global studies with actual pictures of what their work might look like in the future if they employ similar research and communication methods to serve vulnerable groups.

Many of the case studies in the book are very practical and interesting. Personally I enjoyed the chapters on infectious disease (Butler), housing and community development (Copeland-Carson), global climate change (Fiske) and technology design (Wasson and Squires) the most.¹¹ After a helpful overview of the concept of global locality, the global public health system, infectious disease and anthropological views of those

10) Copeland-Carson, Butler and Wasson in Wasson and Butler, et al., pp. 11-13.

11) Butler in Wasson and Butler, et al., Chapter 1, Jacqueline Copeland-Carson in Wasson and Butler, et al., Chapter 3, Shirley J. Fiske in Wasson and Butler, et al., Chapter 5 and Christina Wasson and Susan Squires in Wasson and Butler, et al., Chapter 9.

issues, Butler provides an outstanding, detailed treatment of her research on tuberculosis control on the U.S.-Mexico border.

In her fascinating essay on housing and community development issues in a globalizing U.S. city (Minneapolis-St. Paul), Copeland-Carson's essay opens with helpful overviews of global migration, U.S. community development, and relevant anthropological perspectives. She continues with an extensive yet lively discussion of her own work in developing alternative funding for the housing needs of Muslim immigrants in the region, and a very practical analysis of lessons learned from the case study and her own extensive work in this area.

Fiske's essay opens with helpful background perspectives on global climate change and relevant anthropological perspectives and theories on environmental issues. She continues with extensive discussion of relevant international and U.S. political institutions affecting climate change issues, and a case history of her own "bottom-up" advocacy work and that of other anthropologists on climate change issues. Fiske concludes that in the U.S., anthropologists are well-positioned in various policymaking bodies to make a truly positive difference in how climate change affects vulnerable nations and indigenous peoples worldwide.

In their essay on the role of design anthropologists in technology design, Wasson and Squires briefly review the history of the highly valuable contributions of anthropological and ethnographic perspectives to the design of information and communication technologies, including technology and international development issues. Next they discuss their findings from extensive interviews with 15 anthropologists who work in the field of design anthropology, which is particularly helpful because this experience is broader and more varied than the experiences of Wasson and Squires alone (though they both are two pioneers in this area). Their case examples and conclusions about the contributions of design anthropologists to the design of technologies serving developing countries and the future growth of design anthropology are extremely

insightful.

Jean J. Schensul and Mary Odell Butler provide an outstanding conclusion to the book. They examine key questions and themes raised by the volume, including the increasing interconnectivity of the “global village,” lessons and insights on how people actually experience the “globalized locality” on the ground level, how local peoples experience and sometimes challenge neoliberalism (a key theme in several essays), how applied anthropologists and other activists can challenge or mitigate the negative aspects of global policies on local populations, and implications of these issues for policy issues and the future of practice in a “globalized” applied anthropology. Interestingly, Schensul and Butler see a “glass half full”; they are optimistic about the capacity of applied anthropology to make increasingly valuable contributions to challenging global issues.

Conclusion

Applying Anthropology in the Global Village is a pioneering and valuable volume that is rare and is the first of its kind to specifically focus on the implications of global forces on local human groups and upon anthropological and social science practice. It is very useful, therefore, for non-anthropology researchers to help them more tangibly picture what globalization is doing to actual peoples on the ground, in real situations, beyond merely a philosophical or theoretical level. The book is also very useful for students and scholars in international and global studies, to help them better envision the same processes, and how they can be involved in dealing with such issues in their future careers.

There are a couple of weaknesses I see in the book. Though truly fascinating, it only focuses on U.S. based case studies. A more global volume would be helpful, including contributions by applied and

practicing anthropologists from a broad variety of geographic settings. A high number of practicing anthropologists in the U.S. have only studied up to the M.A. level, not the Ph.D. level. It seems interesting and important to include essays by such practitioners on global-local issues as well. Finally, this book or a similar future work should also include work by scholars or scholar-practitioners who do ethnographic or similar research but who are not themselves anthropologists. This could broaden the appeal of this work and deepen its findings.