The anthropology of ambiguity: Theory, praxis and critique

Regardless of any ambiguity in the meaning and treatment of the term, 'ambiguity' is often defined as possessing double meaning and double sense. Indeed, it is seen as both provoking confusion as well as a holding place from which clarity can emerge. This collection aims to engage with the concept of ambiguity in anthropological theory and praxis from a range of socio-cultural, circumstantial, temporal, geographic, spatial, and infrastructural perspectives.

Positioned alongside now dominant expressions of 'uncertainty' in a world affected by the global pandemic, this collection seeks to think beyond the immediacy of the unknown brought into being by recent viral contagion, labour precarity and (geo)political tension. Rather, it seeks to position ambiguity as an ethnographic and/or theoretical mode of expression, a point of contention or critique, a genre of storytelling and sense making, a cultural or ritualistic process or impediment, or a narration or counter-narration of concurrent, future or past events, including doublethink and doublespeak processes. It seeks to highlight the multiplicity of the term, including: the productive nature of ambiguity as a mode of engagement, involving openness, flexibility and improvisation; the hesitation and doubt in action, relation and decision-making inherent in ambiguous environs; and ambiguity as a form or mark of indifference, silence, suspension and urgency. This may include perplexity, mistrust, fear, speculation, or the arrangement of probability and potentiality in defining order and chaos.

The volume is inspired by, but not beholden to, financial instability, border violence, geo-political conflict, health emergencies, natural and manmade disasters, and environmental degradation, as well as complexities within humanitarian aid and development projects, all of which have come to strongly characterise everyday life for communities around the world over the last two decades. It is from these various points of entry that we encourage submissions that pay attention to the ways anthropologists do, write and theorise about ambiguity. We also encourage submissions that contemplate how events, states of being or processes bear upon the production of ethnography, anthropology's central methodology. We therefore invite papers that consider processes of reasoning and logic making, including that of risk management practices and the shifting values in contexts marked by ambiguity. Additionally, the types of methods and methodologies that increase in value as fieldworkers conduct research in such settings/or about such concerns are also encouraged.

In doing so, this volume seeks to highlight the generative moments contained in situations marked by ambiguity, noting how ambiguity is an underlying attribute of socio-political dynamism both in its constructive and destructive modes, or a concept that deals with the unknown, or investigates it as the essence of elements that create/regenerate modes of uncertainty: asking how (un)certainties are witnessed, perceived, experienced or acted upon.

In this call for abstracts, we encourage traditional book-length chapters, reflections on creative practice, photographic essays, and creative textual pursuits. In terms of image and creative content, ambiguity may be fluid in the imagery from a visual point of view (style, form) or perceived in the

interpretation of the images/text. Ambiguity may also be associated with the condition/context in which the images/text have been created or be at the heart of the event/subject they represent. Based on the number and quality of submissions, there is scope for a multi-volume series with priority given to:

- Ambiguity related to health, environment, infrastructure and economy;
- Ambiguity related to political, bureaucratic and legal discourses, including development and humanitarian aids projects;
- Ambiguity related to the liminal, including dreams, dream cultures and dreamscapes.

Abstracts consisting of a title and 200-words will be accepted until Friday, 18 December 2020. Selected abstracts will be invited to submit their full work by the end of March 2021.

Submissions as well as enquiries or requests for additional information can be sent to:

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- Mahnaz Alimardanian, La Trobe University, Melbourne, and PIIR Consulting
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