



**The Trouble with Community: Anthropological Reflections on Movement, Identity and Collectivity.** Vered Amit and Nigel Rapport. Anthropology, Culture and Society series. Thomas H. Eriksen, Katy Gardner, and Jon P. Mitchell, eds. London: Pluto Press, distributed in the U.S. by Stylus Publishing, 2002. 186 pp.

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*Community* is a foundational concept in education and the social sciences. Anthropologists of education speak of professional communities, communities of practice, democratic communities, community-school relationships, thought communities, and we describe the community contexts in which our field studies are conducted without stopping to consider whether we are standing on firm epistemological and methodological ground. A Kwakiutl village, Harlem, Schoenhausen and Roseville, West Haven, Trackville-where would we be without the convenience of imagining the community as simultaneously geographic place, locus of culture, and tangible aspect of identity and experience? *The Trouble with Community* presents a dialogue between two theorists of modernity who critically examine community as a methodological, theoretical, phenomenological, political, and legal construct. In so doing, they grapple with profound questions about the role and practice of anthropology in a world of movement, globalization, sociocultural disjunction, and postmodern incredulity.

Vered Amit draws upon ethnographic research among Armenians in London, professionals in the Cayman Islands and Canada, and youth groups in Quebec to explore epistemological challenges associated with the study of identity, collectivity, and social engagement. She examines the ways in which received notions about community have distorted and limited anthropological research and theory. She is clearly alarmed by anthropologists' tendencies to employ outdated notions of collectivity, which in turn rely on "oppositional categories of identity" (p. 5) to frame research questions and interpret findings. Although anthropologists are less inclined today to use locale as a metaphor for culture, Amit argues that they have not yet challenged "the politics of multiculturalism and nationalism [that] have increasingly featured claims couched in terms of insistent and essential cultural and communal differences" (p. 4). Nor have they addressed the ephemeral nature of relatedness in a world characterized by transitory face-to-face contacts and both voluntary and involuntary global mobility. Amit's insightful analysis suggests a number of new directions for anthropological research and theory.



Whereas Amit critiques how anthropologists think about culture, community, and identity, Nigel Rapport examines the problem of how anthropology might foster a more just and justifiable world order. Building on the work of Ernest Gellner, he examines the nature of "democratic individuality" (p. 92-96) and the political, philosophical, and legal basis for establishing a transnational system that would protect the sovereign rights of individuals. Central to his argument is the assertion that all human beings are creative and capable of conscious, skeptical, "ironic" reasoning about the social world: they know that social conventions are changeable, arbitrary, and open to interpretation. His vision for the future is democratic and humanistic, emphasizing individual agency, tolerance, movement, and choice. I found Rapport's passionate defense of the Western liberal political tradition and his detailed discussion of the tenets of existential anthropology to be challenging, thought provoking, and surprisingly persuasive.

Reading this book has me thinking in new ways about democracy and education. It is a difficult balancing act: teaching about culture and society without reifying cultural differences; cultivating skepticism while preserving hope; encouraging self-understanding without pandering to narcissism. Although not a central focus of the book, a number of challenges for teaching, curriculum design, and the academy emerge. How should we teach about culture and collectivity in light of 21st century trends, such as religious fundamentalism, voluntary and involuntary global migration, ethnic and religious group warfare, terrorism, and ascribed, essentialized notions of self and other, that pervade academic discourse, the mass media, and our everyday experiences? What does it mean to educate for liberal democracy? Can science be distinguished from other forms of cultural expression? Should social scientists and educators work to create a new, democratic, global political and social order?

Researchers focusing on transnational labor mobility, diaspora, multiculturalism, community studies, and ascribed cultural identities (those defined by race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, religion) will find this book of interest. Scholars interested in theories of modernity, social cohesion, human rights, democracy and education, existentialism, political and anticipatory anthropology, and postcultural anthropology will also find this book has much to offer.

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