

# Прикази Reviews Comptes rendus

## **How Can a Person Become an Anthropologist?**

**Gerald Mars. 2015. *Becoming an Anthropology: A Memoir and a Guide to Anthropology*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars. ISBN: 1-4438-7692-5. 235 pp. Price: £19.90.**

“Becoming an Anthropologist” is a story of a life and a brilliant career that moves from a simple question, which many students ask starting their studies in anthropology: “How can a person become an anthropologist?”

Each one of us, who works in academia and leads the new cohorts of students in the exploration of the discipline, struggles formulating a decent and straightforward answer. We know quite well to be an anthropologist is not just a matter of academic degrees achieved during the years nor the result of erudite readings and sophisticated lucubration shared being set on a comfortable armchair. As Gerald Mars shows it is primarily the result of everyday practice and experience churned with deep reflexivity. In this respect, the autobiographic narration presented in the volume shows the experience gained since the youth creates the fertile ground on which anthropological thought can mature.

Moreover, the volume offers a conspicuous number of examples for better appreciating the actual applicability of anthropological analysis in contemporary

world. The autobiography, in fact, turns to be a form of self-ethnography through which Mars scrutinizes the various social contexts he lived. In so doing, putting into practice the tools of anthropological enquiry, he describes different realities, from the streets of Manchester and Blackpool, to the Army, as well as different academic contexts on either side of the Atlantic Ocean. In so doing, he highlights the different contributions all the experiences had in making him an anthropologist.

The biographical account is the basis for a thorough self-ethnographic work aimed at analysing the social contexts in which the author lived. The ethnography is completed with a plain style able to provide a detailed description of the actors, social practices, ways of interaction, shared knowledge and beliefs of different social realities. This documentation is the base on which Gerald Mars offers its theoretical contribution to adopting and developing Mary Douglas’ Cultural Theory. The theory classifies social contexts on the basis the different degree of dominance in every society, which are “how people relate to groups such as family, clan or neighbourhood, and the constraints and rules to which they are subjects.” (p. 199). The model provides four ideal types of social organization which the author uses as a compass to organize and present the different context to which he participated in his life. In so doing, he draws effective parallelism between distant realities

across the world challenging the common assumption which would distinguish a priori between Western and non-Western societies. The contribution, thus, follows a thread of research embedded in the British anthropological theory, which is the study of social structure and their development.

However, the book can be read for a further relevant contribution that it gives to the debate about identity and belonging. The book is structured as a succession of moments in which the author enters and leaves different social contexts. For each one of them, Mars describes the cultural process he undertook that allowed him to understand the group and become part of it, by learning the language and jargon, customs, and embodying the local worldview. In this respect, the book finds its collocation within the ethnographic literature, providing an example of how to learn to become part of a different society or a social group is a fundamental aspect of the anthropological profession. In particular, it shows that the very same methodological and theoretical tools used for becoming participants

of and understanding distant societies can and must be used to approach and have a deeper insight of the very society one is born in. Thus, the book is an autobiographical example of how the life and work of an anthropologist is spent by “making strange familiar and familiar strange”, and ethnographic fieldwork does not apply only to specific moments spent in distant parts of the worlds, but is rather a matter of approach to every life and the social surrounding.

Coming to a conclusion, the book is an approachable reading for less experienced readers who wants to familiarize with aspects concerning ethnography and the history of the discipline. However, it can be enjoyed also by trained scholars interested in the anthropology of British and American culture, deepening the theme of anthropological education and the use of autoethnography.

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