
The economic fallout resulting from the 2008 global financial crisis has thrown serious doubt on neoliberal capitalism’s central promise: prosperity for the masses through profitable entrepreneurship. The image of a massive meltdown with toxic consequences for future generations unfortunately offers a more accurate portrayal. Yet at the same time it is difficult to imagine modern society without entrepreneurs; for instance, our material lives are enveloped in global supply chains that are moved by entrepreneurial innovation and ingenuity. This important contradiction of modern capitalism requires new theoretical vistas that help move beyond unhelpful, cartoonish stereotypes of entrepreneurs as either global capitalism’s superheroes or supervillains.

Richard Pfeilstetter’s new book posits that anthropology is uniquely prepared for that, particularly through the intellectual vehicle of the gift. With an extensive, critical review of classical anthropological debates, Pfeilstetter reminds us that objects or services in gift economies circulate between various groups based on the promise of reciprocity, forging close social ties wherein economic/entrepreneurial behaviour is expressed. But how is it possible for gift-giving to combine selflessness – associated with the solidarity of gift-giving – and selfishness – often seen as a precondition for the capital accumulation that creates entrepreneurial profits?

Pfeilstetter carefully scrutinises this well-known gift paradox, closely following Marcel Mauss’ solution: gifts create a debt and, when the gift is reciprocated, interest is paid. To avoid the collapse of solidarity, it is necessary that the gift-giver presents debt in altruistic terms, thus keeping the calculus implicit: ‘if our gift is suspected of asking for something in return, it ceases to exert the moral force that compromises the receiver. Only if the gift appears as such, can it generate liabilities. This is how the gift combines utilitarian self-interest with free loans’ (p. 98). In other words, entrepreneurial success depends on the capacity to obscure one’s real intentions, namely making money, and consistently project oneself as a friend of the community. To advance anthropological understandings of entrepreneurial behaviour it is therefore necessary to simultaneously consider its economic and social grounds.

Because Pfeilstetter resorts to rather sketchy discussions of apt illustrations (‘ethnographic short stories’ in his parlance, p. 97), in my view he succeeds only partially in achieving his ambitions. His own work on Art4Good, a social enterprise based in Vienna where recovering drug addicts manufacture designer bags, illustrates my reservations. We are presented with Gina (pp. 99–102), a leading figure in the company, who explains the importance of communicating the social background of Art4Good.
At the same time, she points out how her initiative benefited from that of Freitag, another Austrian designer bag company, whose globally acclaimed designs she carefully imitated. Beyond Gina’s self-reports, we are offered little information about the business community in Vienna, and we have no idea, therefore, whether mimicking is an accepted part of entrepreneurial life in that city, or whether it has been subject to intense contestation (as one may expect), which could eventually work against the company.

Despite these reservations, I value the book especially for its attempt to reclaim entrepreneurship as a core problem for academic anthropology; the topic became suspect during the so-called critical turn in anthropology when its practitioners sought to deconstruct neoliberalism. Reclaiming entrepreneurship in anthropological discourse is urgently needed in view of the formidable economic problems the globe currently faces. The book’s discussion of the history of entrepreneurship in anthropology (pp. 55–89) is excellent and warrants in my view a central place in a specialised Bachelor’s or Master’s course on the anthropology curriculum. Of special value is the inclusion of non-anthropological thinkers such as Joseph Schumpeter and Mark Granovetter, whose intellectual worlds are indeed akin to that of economic anthropology.

In sum, elevating the gift as a central vehicle in the study of entrepreneurship in itself holds a lot of promise for intellectual advancement. The later parts of the book, however, leave the reader with the impression that this requires more ethnographic depth than is offered, particularly towards scrutinising the social grounds of entrepreneurial behaviour. Extended case studies, such as those developed by Manchester School anthropologist Norman Long (Pfeilstetter briefly mentions Long’s acclaimed Romero case, pp. 71–72), point the way towards this objective.

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To highlight what this carefully composed and multi-layered book is all about, the preface starts with the eviction of people living precariously alongside the railway tracks in Khon Kaen, a city of Isaan, northeastern Thailand, which occurred in 2016. Yet, this book is not only about showing how far Thailand’s military government is prepared to go with regard to dealing with informal settlements, but particularly about the political processes unfolding among residents of informal settlements who began organising themselves and, ultimately, about what characterises democratic politics.

The background story is apparently easy: alongside the railway tracks in Khon Kaen, houses have been built and settlements have emerged on land that is owned by the State Railway of Thailand (SRT), albeit without having official lease agreements and without permanent housing registration. State organisations, NGOs and networks
aim to come to lease agreements with the SRT, for which there are certain require-
ments that entail some rather tangible preconditions, such as that leases can only be
offered to communities cleared from any structures within a designated no-build zone
on each side of the rail tracks. This becomes even more a bone of contention given that
alternatives for those already dwelling illegally in this zone are rare.

But there are also less tangible requirements, such as the production of unity and
harmony within the community in conjunction with proving one’s will and capacity to
improve. Together with ever-changing procedural rules and demanding bureaucracy,
the pathway to signing a lease agreement is unforeseeable, prone to failure, full of
potential for conflicts and frustrating for all those involved. More recent developments
and their destructive effects – the military coup of 2014 on the national scale and the
evictions in the wake of the building of elevated rail lines in Khon Kaen in 2016 – high-
light the vulnerability that has reigned from the onset but also the stamina of activist
residents to stay with the trouble.

Disagreements are the red threat running through the book, each chapter focusing
on different sets of actors and organisations: residents, activists, community architects,
networks and state organisations aim to turn informal settlements into secure and
ideally permanent ones and, at the same time, ‘trespassers’ into proper citizens (hence
the book’s title, *Citizen Designs*) and encounter multiple disagreements thereby. ‘Citi-
zen designs’, at the same time, refers to the ways in which residents come to see them-
selves as citizens with important political implications.

What will draw the attention of scholars interested in materiality and architecture
is the discussion of the aesthetic politics involved in house construction and improve-
ment. Elinoff shows how residents’ choice of modern, solid materials deemed beau-
tiful is part of the attempt to become recognised as citizens and to reduce the risk of
eviction. However, community architects’ experiments with ideas of sustainability of
vernacular designs (in line with the value assigned to modesty within the frame of
the sufficiency economy that is engrained in the national participatory urban planning
scheme, Baan Mankong) do not quite fit with the residents’ own visions of proper
housing.

Only the social side of dwelling in the settlements alongside the railway tracks
remains somewhat opaque to the reader. The intrigues, conflicts and schisms of com-
munities that are hinted at would have allowed a closer examination of the sociality
in the settlements. That being said, the book succeeds in portraying the residents as
knowledgeable and reflective political actors, posing uncomfortable questions. What
is more, the author appears to make a point by deliberately focusing on this political
and public side of actors who are not invariably recognised as such by officials and
urban planners.

Timely, rich in detail and perspectives, and written in an engaging style, *Citizen
Designs* is at the same time about a particular moment in the history of the city of Khon
Kaen in Northeastern Thailand and about what housing design and the struggles of
unrecognised residents and the state’s attempt to manage them tell us about the nature
of politics from an anthropological viewpoint. The detailed account of the situation in
Khon Kaen and the cross-references to the Red Shirt movement will also make this
book a valuable read for scholars interested in politics in contemporary Southeast
Asia. It is highly recommended to students and scholars working in the fields of urban anthropology, housing, politics, urban planning and infrastructure.

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In this volume, twelve anthropologists at different career levels at German universities reflect on their experiences of doing fieldwork together with their children and being accompanied by others such as caring grandmothers or partners. Despite the enormous variety of situations that fieldworkers’ families face in the field, the researchers focus on the ethics of accompanied fieldwork, the production of ethnographic knowledge, the institutional support structures, funding and logistics. The editors attempt to go beyond individual accounts to pinpoint the theoretical and methodological implications of accompanied fieldwork. They develop critical reflections on gender-biased academic realities from the diverse narratives contained in the chapters.

In the first part, titled ‘Positionality, similarity and difference’, Julia Pauli starts drawing on her ethnographic experience in Mexico and Namibia with her anthropologist husband and their daughter. She reflects on the importance of similarity between herself and her interlocutors in the fieldwork. In the next chapter, Corinna Di Stefano analyses how pregnancy shaped her field research in Guadeloupe and Martinique. Simone Pfeifer focuses on her media practices to communicate with her home-based family during fieldwork in Dakar. Michaela Haug analyses difference, distance and closeness from her experience of returning to long-term fieldwork among the Dayak Benuaq (Indonesia Borneo) as a mother of three.

The second part, devoted to the production of ethnographic knowledge, opens with Tabea Häberlein’s chapter showing the ways in which she learned to deal with different forms of sociality as child, foster mother, biological mother and social grandmother in Togo and Germany. Her research context, characterised by a multiplicity of kin relationships, drives her to speak about her entangled family. Rosalie Stolz shares her field experience on kinship and sociality among the Khmu Yuan in Laos with her husband and their son. The title of the next chapter ‘We will go on vacation, while you work’ resumes ironically accompanied field experience of Anne Turin in South Africa. She explains how her husband, mother and aunt supported her with her 20-month-old daughter to conduct research, and the tensions arising from the expectations of the accompanying adults. She also recognises the positive effects of this family presence in the field, adding to her insights on her infrastructure project’s research. Leberecht Funk’s experience of bringing his wife and children to the Taiwanese island of Lanyu, where he conducted his PhD research on socialisation of emotions among the Tao people, is one of the most impressive in the volume. It stresses the ethical dimensions
of accompanied fieldwork as a research method, arguing that nobody is able to foresee what intercultural problems might arise when staying in the field for a long period of time.

The final part of the volume, focused on the construction of the field, begins with Mario Krämer’s paper on how the presence of his wife and three small children in South Africa and Namibia, and his responsibility for caring for his family, affected his methodological approach and his position in the field. Tabea Schiefer explores the limits and opportunities of doing fieldwork, as student mother and researcher, with her daughter, husband and sister-in-law, among whisky consumers in Scotland and Germany. Andrea Hollington discusses the impact of children’s sounds and voices on linguistic fieldwork and sound recordings. Finally, Felix Girke reflects on going and being in the field with (and as) a partner with a child. Starting from disciplinary history on anthropological couples, it problematise the difference between ‘in the field’ and ‘on fieldwork’, explaining his experience doing research in Yangon, Myanmar with his wife and his son.

The afterword, written by Erdmute Alber, uses the metaphor of a tightrope walk to describe the sometimes risky balancing act of managing academic careers alongside mothering. These last lines of the book encourage us to continue thinking about the production of anthropological knowledge with or without children. She invites us to take into account the experiences of families who do not fit the standard family normativity of heterosexual couples and gender binaries.

Being a Parent in the Field is not the first book addressing the complex issue of fieldwork with children, but it is one of the first that, despite being written in English, does not reflect the experiences of Anglophone ethnographers. It is an excellent initiative that not only makes visible the difficulties that ethnographers – more women than men – experience when doing long-term participant observation, but also points to the need for changes in national and local research agencies to adopt policies oriented towards gender equality and work–life balance. As a whole, it is an inspiring publication, with insights valuable both to students and early-career researchers, as well as more seasoned ethnographers engaged in fieldwork. At its best, this volume stands as a tasting platter of the many ways in which accompanied fieldwork can be both rewarding and deeply challenging.

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