

Platenkamp, Jos D. M. and Schneider, Almut (eds.). 2019. *Integrating Strangers in Society. Perspectives from Elsewhere*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 229 pp. Hb.: 96.29 €. ISBN: 9783030167028.

Book review by

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In light of recent migration processes to Europe, social anthropologists Jos D. M. Platenkamp and Almut Schneider convened a conference *Integrating Others: Perspectives from Elsewhere*, which took place at Münster University, Germany in December 2016. Anthropologists were to reflect on how they were received by those among whom they conducted their field research. Considering the relevance of the papers presented, deemed by the conveners to go beyond ethnographic accounts, these are collected in the volume reviewed.

The defining methods of social anthropology, long-term field research in another society and comparative analysis, were brought into the foreground in this well-timed, commonsensical and conspicuously simple question. Modes of social integration and assessment of socio-cultural differences may indeed contribute to one's knowledge building and to the public debate on the integration of immigrants in Europe. The core argument of the editors, namely, is that the anthropological experiences shared unveil different ways of interacting with strangers and signal peculiarities steering present discussions on the issue.

The volume opens with an introduction by co-editor Jos D. M. Platenkamp, which critically addresses current debates on the integration of "strangers" in European societies and outlines the values of the Western cultural hemisphere in which these debates are grounded. By doing so, he places the argument into a particular conceptual framework.

Namely, these, often contesting values, inform different types of identity, such as Christian, legal, human, uniform, and determine ways how the stranger is (to be) regarded.

Platenkamp reminds the reader that it is the host who assigns the guest with social identity according to the latter's society's classification of "own" and "other" people and that debates reflecting the overall superiority of European societies pay no attention to how this is accomplished in non-European societies. Having summed up the twelve contributions of stranger-anthropologists, he, in the final part, offers a comparative view on their accounts with regards to the question of the volume.

The collection commences with, geographically most proximate and culturally most impacted by the "Western" world: Sinti in northern Italy and Inuit communities in the Canadian Arctic. These are followed by Kanak in New Caledonia, Maori in New Zealand, Lanten in Laos, Tobelo and Tanebar-Evav in Eastern Indonesia, Banyoro in Uganda, and Gawigl and Siassi in Papua New Guinea. The final contribution refers to an industrial township in Odisha in India. According to Platenkamp, the volume is structured according to the role of the anthropologist in the society in question. Whereas Sinti and Inuit instrumentalise the researcher as the one who shall assist at transmitting and preserving cultural knowledge for the benefit of their own society, the societies of Asia and Oceania employ anthropologist as their spokesperson who shall (re)present their society to the world.

The contributors Elisabeth Tauber, Frédéric Laugrand, Anja Nicole Stuckenberg, Denis Monnerie, Toon van Meijl, Joseba Estévez, Jos D. M. Platenkamp, Cécile Barraud, Raphaela von Weichs, Almut Schneider, Pieter ter Keurs, and Christian Strümpell, sharing conceptual backgrounds, provide a wealth of empirical data reflecting a considerable cultural diversity between the societies concerned. Also, the straightforward manner in which authors reflect on their fieldwork experience is a value in itself, also for the methodological and ethical (re)considerations (T. van Meijl). Regardless of the differences in style of writing and the degree of personal involvement and self-reflection that accompany such approach, all of which make for a dynamic reading, the contributions provide an informative and comprehensive ethnographic account on how own and other are classified in the society under study, making the comparison feasible.

In different lengths and depths, the texts address historical processes which the respective societies had experienced and the relevant context in which the research took place, and they offer an analysis of the societies' classification of social relations as parameters which determine the way in which the researcher comes to be integrated into their society.

Owing to the history of the discipline, European colonial imperialism and how it may define anthropologists' engagement in the societies studied and field research as a whole is discussed in particular. In contrast to what one might expect, contributors experienced no difficulties due to their coming from a former colonial country. Foreign or autochthonous origin of the society, its dominant or submissive position in relation to other societies are tackled as well as the researchers' possible bearing upon the classification of strangers in the respective societies. Many of these aspects are commonly expressed in language and myths of the societies under scrutiny.

In general, the presence of a foreigner proved necessary for the embeddedness in its cosmological origin of the society in question. Thus, anthropologists take part in exchange rituals and ceremonies—particularly in life cycle rituals and annual rites—as a foreign visitor as well as a local member of society. Namely in the course of his or her stay, the anthropologist, usually by means of exchange in ritual and non-ritual context, becomes linked to the other members of that society, be it consanguineally, affinally, or by adopting a name. The dual identity of the researcher is true of all societies studied in these contributions, with the exception of the Sinti. Platenkamp argues that this privileged position of the researcher as a kind of member of the host society as well as a foreigner reflects the confidence in one's own cultural identity which in turn must be assessed by other societies. Every society is thus merely a part of the universe as a whole, which is the key message communicated by the volume.

In the context of people from “non-Western” countries coming to “Western” countries, our long-established idealised perceptions of the non-Western world came to be contested. Not only is the anthropologist a “stranger by vocation”, but he also acts as an advocate of the societies and cultures he studies as well. By offering knowledge on other societies and by questioning our values which manoeuvre present migration debates, this book accomplishes these tasks fully. By offering a comparative view, it represents an important and rare, endeavour to enhance our understanding of the integration processes. In fact, it proves itself a starting point of, or a basis to, any public discussion aimed at adopting migration and other relevant policies of the European Member States.