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Involving Anthroponomy in the Anthropocene: On Decoloniality


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Involving Anthroponomy in the Anthropocene: On Decoloniality

by Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020, pp. 208, ISBN 978-1-351-00023-9

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Finally, as to the relevance of *Voice, Choice, and Action* to the human development and capabilities scholarship, the research proposed is especially valuable for two reasons. First, the authors engage directly with Sen's work on human development, and make an important step by explaining clearly how Sen's theoretical work can be used to reflect on the priorities for setting up a research agenda on issues of public health. It also presents concisely how the capabilities approach as an evaluative framework can help better understand the problems of certain deficits and disadvantages during childhood (applied to particular cases). It is a valuable example for how to properly put theoretical research into practice, and how to transform practice into meaningful action and change in the communities in which the work is done.

Moreover, Earls and Carlson embark on a valuable task at the theoretical level. They reconceptualise Jurgen Habermas' theory of communicative action through a capability lens. That is, considering Habermas' understanding of the deliberative citizen as an ideal to achieve, the book (successfully, I believe) uses Sen's capability approach to devise the various conditions, conversion factors, and functionings required for an individual to be able of becoming a deliberative agent. It not only proposes this theoretical merge between capability theory and deliberative democracy, but it puts it into practice in order to assess its validity in real-world circumstances.

I consider that the book is a valuable read for researchers on childhood in any discipline, particularly those interested in understanding the complex process through which participatory research methods with children are put into practice.

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Involving Anthroponomy in the Anthropocene: On Decoloniality by Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020, pp. 208, ISBN 978-1-351-00023-9

As humanity faces the challenges of the Anthropocene, Bendik-Keymer reminds us that everybody is not evenly responsible for our planet's current state. Placing the burden of the contemporary planetary crisis on the processes of colonialism, capitalism, industrialism and imperialism (i.e., colonial modernity), this book provides a much-needed moral and conceptual grounding for doing decolonial work through the notion of 'anthroponomy', an engagement with human development in relation to their environment.

The term anthroponomy, derived from Kant's enlightenment thought, refers to a study of the normative human (what the human '*ought to be*') as opposed to the empirical human (what the human '*is*') – a remit of anthropology. From a decolonial perspective, Kant's thinking appears colonial for privileging liberalism over 'other' norms of governing human development. Yet, Bendik-Keymer's notion of anthroponomy neither advocates liberalism nor a study of 'other' forms of norm-making. Instead,

Bendik-Keymer suggests decolonising ‘our’ (the colonising, racialising, and modernising peoples’) inherited norms, so that ‘others’ (the colonised, the racialised, and the indigenous) can make their own norms and participate in organising “autonomous lives together” (p. 131).

Chapter 1 critiques the discourse of the Anthropocene for concealing specific processes of colonial modernity responsible for the planetary crisis. In contrast, anthroponomy offers a moral orientation to our planetary situation that demands being accountable to difference and disagreement within one’s community and with other communities (p. 14). Contrary to the liberal paradigm that has abetted the expansion of colonial modernity on a planetary scale, anthroponomy proposes a relational morality that is accountable to those with no part in contemporary society, including past and future generations.

While liberalism advocates freedom for all, chapter 2 shows how upholding liberal freedom sometimes leads towards blatant disregard of the colonised, racialised and indigenous populations. To avoid hypocrisy, Bendik-Keymer suggests fostering “community politics” (p. 37) based on “good relationships” (p. 58) and shared governing norms. Good relations must nurture respect for each other and be responsive to disagreement and histories of legitimate distrust, hurt and trauma.

Chapter 3 expounds two temporalities through which we can relate to past and future generations. Elaborated through a letter written to his late mother, the author uses “spiral time” and “overtone time” (p. 50) to reach out to his colonial ancestry and his prospective descendants. Modern (linear) time alienates us from past and future generations. Instead, accepting non-linear temporalities, and not merely tolerating them, allows the author to hold his ancestors accountable for colonialism, while his descendants hold him accountable for his actions. Relating to past and future generations generates responsibility towards the planet and others in the present.

To bring responsibility and trustworthiness in community politics, chapter 4 calls for “emotional and relational maturity” (p. 75). This maturity arises from accepting different ways of sense-making without imposing one’s sense onto others. Here, land becomes a mediator – a third in a relationship between two agents. Relating through and with land would preclude making it into an extractive resource – potentially supplementing the capability approach’s scepticism towards development processes purely involving economic growth and capitalist production.

In reorienting the Anthropocene towards decolonial practice, chapter 5 demands “self-determination” (p. 108) against the ongoing project of colonial modernity. Many modern nation-states are created through colonial theft of land and many development projects are complicit in colonialism by supporting the institutions of the modern nation-states. Bendik-Keymer suggests that anthroponomists must actively deny modern nation-state’s claim to land so that indigenous sovereignty over their ancestral lands can be restored.



Resisting colonialism means resisting the totalising tendencies of modernity that seek to keep people and systems in their place by making them into objects for domination. In chapter 6, the author calls anthroponomists to treat humans as “ontologically free and anxious” (p. 128), and let people make sense of their anxieties without imposing senselessness upon them. Moreover, instead of fixing a goal on behalf of all humanity (and therefore totalising the future), anthroponomy proposes an “open-ended and open-bordered” (p. 133) process built around an evolving goal. This evolutionary orientation distinguishes Bendik-Keymer’s decolonial work from the more revolutionary and reactionary tendencies of the Marxist and post-development theories.

Ultimately, Bendik-Keymer invites us to take up anthroponomy elsewhere on our own terms. Julia Gibson's critical response in the book's afterward deploys anthroponomy on Ryder Farm in the US. Gibson, having inherited a share of the homestead land occupied since 1795, now runs the Ryder Farm along with her extended family. Gibson's thought experiment shows that Bendik-Keymer's notion of anthroponomy leaves the settler colonialists' (i.e., her family's) future too comfortable, since it does not seek to radically disrupt the status quo. Thus, to counter settler colonial mentality, Gibson finds anthroponomy useful but insufficient. Effectively, Gibson calls for more conceptual and practical tools along the lines of anthroponomy.

This book's contribution to development studies lies in recalling and undertaking the work of righting the wrongs of 'our' colonial modernist history. Considering anthroponomy, development theory and practice could learn to resist the impulse of helping 'others' become more modern, whether through structural adjustments or capacity building programmes. Albeit well-meaning, helping others improve their capabilities could also impede them from making sense of the world on their own. After all, "a history of violence [perpetuated by colonial modernity] is more than a history of disagreements" (p. 153). Thus, we must collectively make room for alternative norms of governing human development to come into being on their own, and learn to work through our disagreements with them and their capacity to face to challenges of the Anthropocene. This book shows one possibility of decolonising in the Anthropocene and invites us to create others.

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Teaching Quality of Life in Different Domains Edited by Graciela H. Tonon.
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Quality of Life (QoL) has become an increasingly important concept in recent years across the world as climate change, political and social unrest, economic instability and, more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic, have forced into the global spotlight the gross inequalities and divisions within and between countries and regions. The most vulnerable among us, whose circumstances continue to worsen as inequality continues to grow, are hardest hit. It is within this global context that this timely volume has been produced. Indeed, writing, as I am, from the global South, a particular strength of this book for me is the inclusion of contributors and content from diverse parts of the world presenting perspectives from both the global North *and* the global South.

In her introduction, Tonon locates the discussion of the concept of QoL within the social sciences more broadly, arguing for the significance and relevance of the social sciences and of QoL and, therefore, the importance of teaching students to understand