



Anthropology Book Forum

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MOORE, AMELIA. 2019. *Destination Anthropocene: Science and Tourism in the Bahamas*. Oakland, California: University of California Press, 216 pp.; ISBN: 978-0-52029-893-4

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After attending a ‘Climate Change and Tourism’ workshop, an NGO worker from the Bahamas remarks to her colleague, “Isn’t it a bit ironic that they want to combat the rise in tourism-related greenhouse gas emissions in the Caribbean through the promotion of more tourism to the Caribbean?” (p.94). This is the central conundrum that animates Amelia Moore’s book, based on ethnographic fieldwork in the region where she became imbricated in various scientific projects that sought to decipher and simultaneously constitute the Anthropocene. Anthropologists working in “picturesque” conservation areas will be familiar with this frustrating paradox, where laments about the deteriorating value of ecosystems is accompanied by deliberations about attracting tourists as a means to increase environmental value. I therefore greatly appreciate a systematic, book-length critique of this phenomenon.

The book is a call to practice and theorize an Anthropocene Anthropology, which does not take the term and the urgency it begets at face value, but rather makes it an object of critical enquiry. It examines the wide-reaching consequences of the ways in which “Global Change Scientists,” as she terms them, conceptualize anthropogenesis. People responding to this emergent scientific idea of the Anthropocene in turn remake the world through their reactions. In this context, the Bahamas, Moore shows, is a multi-faceted frontier. It is the frontier of Climate Change, as a small island considered to be most vulnerable to its impacts. It is also a resource frontier anew, where a nexus of science, capital and society makes it a product for touristic consumption. The Bahamas, as a product of a global imaginary, is thus being forged in the crucible of the Anthropocene idea (p.6).

As concerns about anthropogenesis grow, Chapter One of the book documents the efforts that Global Change Science (GCS) makes to study this relation between the social, the biological and the chemical. A new paradigm of interdisciplinary field-study emerges under the banner of biocomplexity, meant to overcome the narrow focus on species associated with the concept of biodiversity. Moore argues that biocomplexity, as an ostensibly well-meaning effort to include social analysis in the study/creation of the Anthropocene grossly oversimplifies the social life of the Bahamas. It reduces the social lives of fishers and their rich, complex interactions with the environment to their livelihood interests. Those with fishing interests are stereotyped as opposed to marine life protection and those with tourism interests as sympathetic to conservation efforts. This is one of the many ways in which GCS, overtly and covertly, helps produce the Bahamas as a tourism resource, by depicting climate action and neoliberal marketization as compatible.

Chapter Two delves into the imaginary of the Bahamas as educational islands. Privileged children from the Global North come to hotels refurbished as sites of hands-on climate change education. They are implicitly trained to be teachers, capitalists, investors, scientists and so on, who will offer solutions to climate change in the future. Meanwhile the islanders themselves are interpellated as passive subjects, who are either objects of study, or subjects whose deficient environmental consciousness needs to be remedied. Much like the colonial imaginary of the islands as living laboratories for anthropological knowledge, the hierarchy of those who study and those who are studied remains intact in the climate subjectivities being forged in the Anthropocene.

Chapter Three “introduce[s] a healthy skepticism with regard to the popular use of the vulnerability paradigm as a trope in the Anthropocene” (p.90). The perception of vulnerability, epitomized in popular images of small islands soon to be swallowed up by rising sea levels, Moore shows, is ahistorical and apolitical. Furthermore, this discourse is beneficial to a regime of experts who offer technical solutions through their ability to define vulnerability in the first place. In such definitions, tourism emerges as both “the vector and the victim” (p.83). Vulnerability thus mediates a form of speculative capitalism, which brands and then sells the islands to those who fear its disappearance and (absolved of guilt) consume-it-to-save-it.

Chapter Four tells the story of the invasive lionfish as a keystone species for GCS. In the Anthropocene worldmaking (p.116) that fisheries discourse engenders, local fishers are conceptually aligned to the invasive species, tourists remain immune to this imaginary of

unwelcome outsiders, and the solution offered is to literally consume these marine invaders into oblivion. In such Anthropocene simplification, the role of global and national demand in constituting the fisheries economy (over-extractive or not) remains unacknowledged, as does the vulnerability of fishers to both climate change and to these specific forms of blame.

Chapter Five discusses blue holes as time capsules of planetary history and as natural laboratories for marine paleontology. Blue holes, akin to marine sinkholes, are also sites where science and tourism converge, inasmuch as their scientific study helps market Bahamian geology as a heritage tourism product. The state therefore has high stakes in research about the blue holes, since in addition to tourism, it also constitutes a primordial identity of the Bahamas as a repository of *long durée* planetary history. Again, global scientists and tourists are considered to be both capable of diving into these blue holes and having the right conservationist attitude towards them, while those who have lived near these blue holes are sidelined.

This book expertly exposed the insidious nexus between neoliberal marketization, a global conservation outlook, and scientific practice. Yet, we do not find the scientists' own voices reflecting on their entanglement in these global structures. Do they at all reflect on the irony that the book so wonderfully captures? One also is left wanting to know more about where this book is positioned vis-à-vis a long tradition of critiques of conservation and development. While Anthropocene anthropology should emerge as a distinctive subfield, some of the critiques in the book are reminiscent of the charges levelled against development – as a form of depoliticization, as a mode of disciplining subjects, as co-opted by neoliberalization, and so on. We get glimpses of this engagement in the endnotes, for instance, when Moore discusses how biopower is transformed in the Anthropocene. More such reflections, not relegated to the endnotes, would have helped Anthropocene Anthropology perform a necessary task, as urged by Barnes et. al. (2013) – of exposing the continuities between older discourses of development and ostensibly newer climate change thinking.

Overall, this accessible and concise book does well to caution us to see anthropogenesis in the Anthropocene as a “contextual framing for perceived problems rather than a definitive diagnosis of the present” (p.139). In the Bahamas this contextual framing comes with an alarming dose of simplifications (Scott 1998) perpetrated by GCS – such that residents are simplified as targets of surveys, children as targets of outreach, and fishers as barometers to measure environmental

perceptions (p22). The book is a stellar effort to denaturalize both the Anthropocene and anthropogenesis and expose instead the global, classed interests that are served by such naturalizations. Researchers, students and policy makers interested in climate justice would particularly benefit from engaging with this work.

Works Cited:

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