

Finding yourself into a war as an anthropologist: responsibility and reluctance

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A number of Africanist anthropologists have carried out fieldwork in countries where the war has blown up after their fieldwork or blew up when they were in the field. Others decide to go for fieldwork in countries that are at war. Approaches anthropologists have taken towards this occurrence are of different kind. Some have tackled it from the view point of an anthropology of suffering; some others have navigated the chance of being in a context where security treat provides the adrenaline of being in the middle of important happenings; others have felt the obligation of keeping carrying out their researches also under threatening conditions. In some cases the work of the anthropologists who stay in these situations share similarities with those of certain journalists: you feel the responsibility and, on the other hand, you are caught in the situation. This paper, will tackle some of the issues related to the event of finding yourself into a war, especially if you are a convinced pacifist. Reflexivity has been discussed as an important aspect of an epistemology of the anthropological knowledge. This essay also discusses this aspect and how perceptions of the war an anthropologist find her/himself can depend on her previous contact with the war. A final remark is that anthropologists should be more aware about the implications of becoming involved in research in a country at war.

