

Temporalities of War

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The commitment to a deep engagement with people and place leads anthropologists to face difficult choices when their research site is engulfed in conflict. At one level, safety considerations regarding oneself and one's research subjects need to be weighed against continued involvement in a setting in which the anthropologist's perspective is especially relevant. On another level, the ways in which anthropologists choose to communicate and write about conflict-ridden regions can help understand apparently incomprehensible violence. At the same time, the ethics of care that even under normal circumstances attunes the anthropologist to the politics of unequal socio-economic means, of representation, and of the use and misuse of the knowledge produced needs to take into account the higher stakes of wartime. This paper argues that the different temporal scales in which anthropological enquiry unfolds, versus those of events and actors brought on the scene by complex emergencies, often work at cross purposes with each other, generating unresolvable contradictions. Case material will be drawn from Sierra Leone.

