Bruce Kapferer & Marina Gold (eds). *Moral Anthropology: A Critique*. Critical Interventions. A Forum for Social Analysis, Volume 16. New York, Oxford: Berghahn. 2018. 208 pp. ISBN 978-1-78533-868-7 (hardback); eISBN 978-1-78533-869-4 (eBook).

SCALING UP IN TIMES OF CRISIS

At least since Thomas Kuhn and his theory of tectonically shifting 'paradigms', scientists across the board have been accustomed to thinking in terms of 'turns' (that are rhetorically more efficacious than mere 'shifts'). Within the disciplinary formation of anthropology, one might recall the cultural or textual turn of the 1980s, which itself was a reaction to the structuralist and cognitivist turns, that has since given way to various other turns such as the ontological, or indeed, the moral turn. Referring to a disciplinary subformation emergent since the early 21st century, 'moral anthropology' or 'the anthropology of ethics' is now ripe for its first full-length critique. Enter cultural and social anthropologists Bruce Kapferer and Marina Gold, who have compiled and edited a pocket-sized anthology of thirteen critical think-pieces, the subjects of which range from moralism within moral anthropology (Holbraad, Kalb, Gold, Friedman), to an examination of empathy as 'transformative ethical technology of affirmative praxis' (Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos), to a staging of moral anthropology vis-à-vis animism in contemporary London (Ifeka). However, it bears mentioning that none of the anthologists explicitly present themselves as 'moral anthropologists' or 'anthropologists of ethics', which I take as implicating critique from outside toward those perpetrating the said 'turn' rather than self-criticism per se.

There seems to be something endemically symptomatic to the emergence of moral anthropology. This is also noted by Kapferer and Gold, who in their introduction suggest that moral anthropology could be seen as a 'reaction (perhaps unconscious) to structural changes in the discipline' that would have 'dissipated or fractured a sense of a coherent and relatively distinct project' (p. 10). Such changes, the editors further propose, are the effect not only of the great expansion in the number of practicing anthropologists in recent decades but of the growth of subdisciplinary areas within anthropology. Framed in this manner, there are also reactionary or even conservative dimensions in the moral turn, which is perhaps also related to how this type of anthropology has been presented simultaneously as both something novel to the discipline and as something that anthropologists have *always* done anyway. While the latter is certainly true, in retrospectively reframing and reclaiming earlier research, such as E. E. Evans-Pritchard's work among the Azande, as exemplary works of moral anthropology—as Kirsten Bell (p. 50–51) criticizes James Laidlaw for doing—one risks imposing 'the moral' onto phenomena and potentially distorting them. This is also a problem only exacerbated by the normative quality of the term *moral* itself (and its associated metapragmatics, see Lindfors 2017: 11–12). Not only does ethnocentric universalization corrupt one's analysis, it also amounts to a restriction of the ethnographic imagination.

Indeed, a central critique shared by these thirteen texts relates to the problem of external imposition and to how moral anthropology has been unable to clearly account for such moves and, more generally, for its own motivating values. Moral anthropology is criticized as 'formalist, universalizing, and atavistically based on eighteenth century philosophy' (p. 142), and its model of personhood as one that presupposes a self-sufficient male 'made moral through virtuous capital accumulation' (p. 144). In short, moral anthropology itself is claimed as inherently 'moralist' from the start.

A related target shared by the critics concerns the way the focus on moralities has been (sometimes explicitly) framed as legitimately complimenting if not displacing political and socioeconomic frameworks that peddle 'structure, power, and interest' (Lambek 2010: 1). In this line of reasoning, one of the most severe renunciations of moral anthropology comes from Don Kalb, for whom '[e]thical anthropology sometimes appears as a place offered to the well-meaning but troubled Western middle classes for hiding safely in all their solemn beauty' (p. 73). In this regard, *Moral Anthropology: A Critique* manages an illuminating 'scaling up' (see Carr and Lempert 2016) of perspective that unveils the political and economic forces (read: neoliberalism) of which the turn to moral anthropology itself is argued as being an expression. This is not the first time in the history of anthropology that the discipline has been seen to share ideological complicity with the broader world orders it serves, as Rohan Bastin (p. 180) points out, but this time we should know better.

In one of the best pieces in the anthology, Jonathan Friedman situates the moral turn as part of a much longer succession of various turns within anthropology, and illuminates the logic behind precisely *this* succession as corresponding with an intensified focus on individual subjectivity at the cost of other explaining factors. Then again, in her overly judgmental critique, Caroline Ifeka (p. 134) invokes straw men by interrogating moral anthropologists on how they would explain the ritualized sacrificial killings of subaltern animist communities in London: 'Will you stick to your Euro-centric guns and say, 'Yes, it is immoral, murder'?' In other words, Ifeka comes dangerously close to generalizing the work of a diverse bunch of moral anthropologists, whose methodologies and investments differ considerably amongst themselves.

While often unabashedly, negatively critical, *Moral Anthropology: A Critique* also suggests ways forward. In particular, Martin Holbraad lays out steps for how anthropology in general (and moral anthropology in particular) could, and oftentimes should, reverse its traditional methodological trajectory for overcoming the risks of external imposition:

> The whole point of anthropological analysis would in this way be turned around: rather than settling on a framework for the analysis of morality and ethics in order then to go on to shed light on diverse ethnographic materials, the idea would be to use the diversity of these materials to *unsettle* the analytical framework in question (p. 44).

The novel analytical frameworks produced in this manner would then be conceived as outcomes of, rather than premises for, further analysis.

Moral Anthropology: A Critique is a timely meditation on the sociopolitical as well as disciplinary implications related to yet another 'turn', the emergence of which Kristin Bell notes might also simply originate from the fact that

funding agencies, governments, and institutions have been recently seen to place a lot more weight on the social, political, and pragmatic relevance of academic research. Perhaps more than ever, moral matters draw our attention to them across media, and it is worth asking for whose team do we implicitly play in speaking in these terms—for instance, one might consider the implications of talking about the 'refugee crisis' in terms of ethics rather than politics. As Friedman (p. 192) bluntly puts it, 'It seems difficult to face the realities involved, which are political more than moral.'

The thirteen texts cobbled together in this light book (physically, not intellectually) are fairly short but no less penetrating in their analytical insight for that. They hit hard at the discomforts and inner tensions of contemporary anthropological theory and practice, making *Moral Anthropology: A Critique* mandatory reading for anyone puzzled by the buzzing if problematic area of inquiry that is the anthropology of moralities.

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ANTTI LINDFORS
UNIVERSITY OF TURKU
anmili@utu.fi