



Anthropology Book Forum

Open Access Book Reviews

Year in Review

2020 has been a turbulent year – to put it mildly. And as the world has seemed at times to come to a standstill, academic publishing has continued, and in some corners increased. While the pandemic has in many ways enhanced and amplified various forms of connectivity, it has also engendered and exacerbated exclusions and disconnections in multiple ways. Hence, the last year has provided many a challenge, but also opportunities to be inventive, to think about why we do things in certain ways and to look forward. In this year’s letter from the editors we will begin by addressing some of the issues motivating our continuous transformation of the Forum and how we have been addressing the concerns we noted in 2019. Thereafter, we will introduce even more possibilities for interactive reviews and scholarly conversation for the year to come, as well as an exciting new development for the Anthropology Book Forum.

Looking Back: 2020 Year in Review

As an [open access journal](#), committed to a set of principles that aims to reduce barriers to accessibility, the Forum publishes reviews weekly, every Monday. While we believe open access is a significant avenue towards increasingly accessibility, we also acknowledge the multiple experiences and modes of exclusion which we believe editors and academic publishers could play a greater role in addressing. To this end, we have been exploring and experimenting with new modes of engagement, new forms of written, audio and visual review formats, a broadened focus on more diverse titles relevant to anthropology while also developing new partnerships and relationships with academic publishers.

In our previous [Year in Review](#) we noted that despite the four-field approach to anthropology in the United States, we saw less overall engagement from archaeologists. Last year, we focused on addressing the gap between the number of reviews we receive and publish of archaeology titles and those of socio-cultural titles. This year, we have carried on our concern with a more representative publishing schedule with an aim to publish more equitably from the four fields. During 2020 we published a significant number of reviews of archaeology titles, and we also noticed an increasing interest in medical and biological anthropology titles. In the year to come, we hope to continue to cultivate more engagement from scholars and students working in these fields.

During the past year, we began experimenting with audio reviews to complement the written form, and we also expanded review options to include joint reviews and review articles. This year we have also looked to include those titles that are of central interest to anthropologists, but which are often listed under fields such as ‘gender studies,’ ‘urban studies,’ or ‘African

studies,' and thus overlooked by publishers uploading titles to our site. We have also focused on a more inclusive approach to those publishers with whom we work. While we continue to work closely with large academic publishers, we have also sought out small-scale publishers (including those especially run by women and minorities) in order to expand the titles available for review and our engagement with potentially marginalized conversations and scholarly contributions. Currently, we work with approximately 100 publishers and are actively expanding our list of partners. In addition, we are encouraging reviewers to review non-English titles to expand the range of work featured by the *Forum*. Similarly, by allowing reviewers to also request titles not already listed on our site, we also hope that the variety of titles and subjects reviewed has and will be further diversified.

Looking Forward: 2021

As delineated above, we believe book reviews are not just summaries of academic texts; they are engagements with scholarship, ideas and authors. As such, in the coming year we aim to experiment with new methods for engagement with scholarship relevant to anthropology, broadly defined. Given the ongoing home-based nature of current research and academic engagement, we foresee spaces such as the Anthropology Book Forum playing a crucial role in continuing a vibrant exchange of knowledge. While we will continue to publish weekly reviews in writing as well as in audio format, we also want to make the Forum a more interactive, living space. We are therefore introducing *Author Book Talks*, *Author Interviews*, and *Video Reviews*. Let's go over these different formats a little bit more in detail:

Author Book Talks: Here we will offer the author a platform to tell the story behind their book/video. The idea is *not* to provide their own summary of the book, but rather to contextualize their research, point the audience towards the larger contribution of their work, for both academia and a more general public. These talks will be published alongside a written review (not authored by the book author).

Author Interviews: This will be a space similar to the *Author Talks* but now directed by an interviewer. We will work to facilitate connections between those interested in producing an interview as a form of review with the book author as well as providing a copy of the book under discussion. We hope that this mode of review will also provide an opportunity to bring researchers, faculty, and students together for a conversation that might otherwise not be possible.

Video Reviews: These reviews will function much as a regular written/audio review, only with the reviewer present 'physically' reading the review. We find that during these times of social distancing, in addition to more enduring forms of separation, it is important to offer spaces where not only written letters or recorded words can be offered at the Forum, but that authors and reviewers alike can be 'present,' albeit virtually.

Finally, we are excited to announce that the Forum will be expanding and moving to a site of its own in the spring of 2021! The new site will facilitate the expansion of review formats,

cross-disciplinary conversations as well as provide a space for ongoing experimentation and dialogue.

Summing up

We hope that by continuing to keep reviews coming regularly, and by offering these more interactive formats and expanded opportunities for engagement, the Anthropology Book Forum can play a part in vivid and intellectually stimulating conversations. Last, but not least, we want to thank our readers and the increasing number of publishers offering us their titles for review. We are confident that the Forum will continue to grow during 2021 and that we will, with your help, continue to offer a useful and dynamic resource for knowledge exchange.

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