

A history of anthropology, 2nd edition

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Preface to the second edition

It would be preposterous to claim that anthropology has changed dramatically in the twelve years that have passed since the publication of the first edition of this book. However, there are several reasons why we felt that a thorough revision and update was in order by now.

First, the non-metropolitan anthropologies – from Brazil to Russia, from Japan to India – were treated cursorily and somewhat superficially in the first edition. This has now, at least to the best of our abilities, been rectified. Recent scholarship on ‘other people’s anthropologies’ has been of great help here.

Second, there were a number of small errors, inaccuracies and ambiguities scattered around in the first edition. We cannot guarantee that they are all gone, but again, we have done our best.

Third, there have in fact been some slight changes or adjustments in the course that anthropology has been taking in the last few years. For example, the field of globalisation studies, an incipient and slightly naughty trend in the 1990s – naughty because it eschewed an assumed orthodoxy seeing anthropology as the study of small, fairly isolated societies – has grown into maturity. Few anthropologists today see problems in studying the relationship between the global and the local, and most do, in one way or another.

Fourth, as a matter of fact, the early chapters have been revised and modified just as much as the latter ones. Indeed it may be said that the remote past has changed just as rapidly as the recent past. Partly we see the past in a different light because of recent changes; partly new research and a deepened understanding reveals new details and formerly ignored patterns.

It is not true, in other words, that the past is safe and immune to change since what has happened has happened. As anthropologists interested in history

have shown time and again, the past is something malleable and dynamic. Each generation has its own past. This is our anthropological past.

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