

## **Rebuilding the ship at sea: An anthropologist's attempt to make sense of contemporary world history**

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### *Abstract*

Few anthropologists dare to engage in world history – indeed, many argue that since anthropology takes local life as its main point of departure and central source of empirical material, anthropological world history is a contradiction in terms. Yet, the local contexts studied by anthropologists are produced in an increasingly interconnected world, and ignorance of large-scale processes may easily result in wrong or absent contextualisations.

In one of the few genuinely anthropological contributions to world history, *Europe and the People Without History*, Eric Wolf showed why history is too important to be left to the historians. His perspective was that of the colonised and conquered peoples during colonialism, wrapped in a convincing account of the rise of Europe as the centre of the early modern world.

Contemporary anthropology has produced important work, both quantitatively and qualitatively, on the transformations characterising the world today – accelerated communication, the global spread of capitalism, reflexive politics of identity, migration etc. – but have not offered a global history of the world in the 21st century. In order to counteract, simultaneously, our famous professional myopia and the often Eurocentric accounts available from historians, a work of comparable scope to Wolf's magnificent book, but concentrating on the contemporary world, is needed. The lecture suggests what an anthropological history of the early 21st century might look like.