

IMPROVING THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE TO THE WEST AFRICAN EBOLA EPIDEMIC

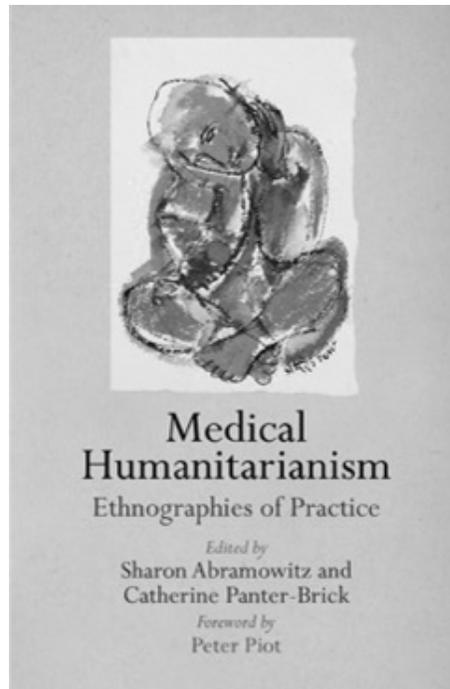
SHARON ABRAMOWITZ

Since establishing the Emergency Ebola Anthropology Initiative in 2014-2015, which brought together international social science experts to inform the Ebola response, Professor Abramowitz has played an important role in bringing together UN, humanitarian, and academic partners to establish a permanent social science platform for humanitarian response. This project is well underway, and she anticipates that the platform will launch in late 2016. For her work advocating for the use of anthropology in the global Ebola response, Abramowitz was awarded the American Anthropological Association Executive Director's Award in 2015.

To directly inform lessons learned from the West African Ebola epidemic, Abramowitz has served in a variety of consulting roles during 2014-2015 with the World Health Organization, Save the Children, and UNICEF. In these activities, Abramowitz has played a leading role advocating for the use of community-based epidemic prevention and response strategies, assessing the contributions of Community Care Center (CCC) models, and for advocating for the prioritization of mental health and psychosocial needs in post-epidemic recovery interventions.

She has also published, or is in the process of publishing, a series of interdisciplinary qualitatively-based Ebola-related research publications in journals like *The Lancet*, *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*, *Global Public Health*, *Critical African Studies*, and *Health Communications*. She is also currently leading a collaborative effort to systematically review community-based responses to epidemic and pandemic events.

Abramowitz is the principal investigator of a new University of Florida-based initiative called *The Ebola 100 Project* (www.ebola100project.net). This project, which has partnered with academic, research, and NGO institutions like the American Anthropological Association, the Institute Pasteur, Dalhousie University, the



US Marine Corps, Liberia's Platform for Peace and Dialogue, and the NGO Restless Development aims to collect and publish interviews with humanitarian actors across the Ebola response in order to ascertain humanitarian experiences working in emergency epidemic events in West Africa. Abramowitz took a lead role mentoring 75 undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Florida by providing them with direct research opportunities through the Center for African Studies' Health in African Working Group conducting primary research on both the *The Ebola 100 Project* and the systematic review process.

Abramowitz, with co-editor Catherine Panter Brick at Yale University, also welcomed the publication of her edited volume entitled *Medical Humanitarianism, Ethnographies of Practice* with University of Pennsylvania Press in 2015. This book, along with recent related publications on medical humanitarianism in the journals of *Social Science and Medicine* and *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, seeks to establish a

specific field for medical anthropological and science and technology studies (STS) inquiry into medical humanitarian practice.

Continuing her pre-Ebola research agenda focused on humanitarianism and gender-based violence, Abramowitz is submitting an NSF proposal to comparatively analyze the histories and presents of gender-based violence in Rwanda and Liberia with Jennie Burnet at Georgia State University. The goal of this research is to develop a comparative framework for empirically examining and theorizing how patterns of gender violence and gendered protections are shaped by historical and contemporary conditions in diverse contexts.

Sharon Abramowitz is assistant professor of anthropology & African studies.