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Beyond Political Anthropology

Special Section

Sous la direction de Riccardo Ciavolella, Sabrina Melenotte, Gianfranco Rebucini et Éric Wittersheim

À la Une

RUBRIQUE SPÉCIALE – PENSER LES CATÉGORIES

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  Au-delà de l'anthropologie politique

  Más allá de la antropología política

  Al di là dell'antropologia politica

  Além da antropologia política

  Riccardo Ciavolella, Sabrina Melenotte, Gianfranco Rebucini et Éric Wittersheim
  Au-delà de l'anthropologie politique. Introduction

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Penser les catégories, réfléchir les pratiques théoriques

Sous la direction de Riccardo Ciavolella, Sabrina Melenotte, Gianfranco Rebucini et Éric Wittersheim

Veena Das
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Au-delà de l'anthropologie politique. Introduction

Étudier et questionner le pouvoir au XXIᵉ siècle

Riccardo Ciavolella, **Sabrina Melenotte**, **Gianfranco Rebucini** et **Éric Wittersheim**

Traduction(s) :
Beyond Political Anthropology. Introduction

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TEXTE

1 Il est des moments dans une vie, une génération ou l'histoire d'une civilisation, où l'on a besoin de mots différents pour décrire le monde en mutation, et où les anciens termes ont besoin de nouvelles significations.

2 La traduction de mots et de mondes : non seulement d'une langue vers une autre, mais aussi d'un monde ancien qui se meurt vers un nouveau monde en devenir. C'est ainsi que Gramsci a défini à merveille ce qu'étaient une « traduction » et une « crise ». Et cela semble décrire parfaitement nos mondes contemporains : la nécessité de traverser ce passage intermédiaire et de se diriger vers un nouvel horizon, d'aller au-delà de la crise économique, au-delà des institutions représentatives traditionnelles et de la gouvernementalité globale actuelle, au-delà de l'effondrement écologique, et certainement au-delà de la pandémie de Covid-19 qui – comme d'autres crises sanitaires ayant touché (différemment) des régions plus ou moins « chanceuses » – œuvre comme un détecteur de symptômes : elle révèle et approfondit toutes les autres crises, mais n'explique pas toujours leurs racines et leurs causes. À cet endroit précis résident peut-être les objectifs des sciences humaines et sociales, y compris des recherches débattant avec les sciences « naturelles », la littérature et les arts : offrir une pensée « radicale », dans son sens étymologique, c'est-à-dire qui permette de retourner à la racine des causes ; et offrir des inspirations, ainsi que des outils pratiques, pour imaginer et construire cet « au-delà ». Mais comment cela est-il possible si les sciences humaines et sociales sont elles-mêmes considérées comme étant en crise ?

3 Telle est aussi, plus modestement, la situation de l'anthropologie politique. Les deux mots qui la constituent – « anthropologie » et « politique » – renvoient à des réalités que nous devons de toute urgence reconsidérer : la place de l'humain dans le monde et sa relation à tout le vivant ; la politique comme moyen de construire ce monde commun et de négocier collectivement cette relation, par le consensus ou le dissensus. Lorsque des personnes s'engagent dans quelque projet relatif à l'anthropologie politique (chercheur.e.s, journalistes, mais surtout étudiant.e.s et nouveaux adeptes), elles la considèrent comme un outil extraordinaire pour saisir et interpréter, d'un point de vue situé ou théorique, les différentes crises emboîtées que nous traversons. Pourtant, dans le même temps, nous avons de plus en plus de mal à admettre l'idée d'une anthropologie politique formant une branche disciplinaire distincte, avec toutes les conséquences qu'entraîne une telle conception : une connaissance spécialisée et étroite, à l'opposé d'une approche plus large de la condition humaine et de ses possibilités ; une connaissance dont les racines sont européo-centrées, depuis longtemps dominée par des anthropologues occidentaux et masculins, etc. Nous avons le sentiment d'être depuis longtemps déjà dans l'ère du « post » (postcolonial – ou décolonial – par exemple), et que notre discipline l'est davantage encore quand on pense à certaines traditions anthropologiques non occidentales. Pourtant, l'usage même du préfixe « post » confesse notre difficulté persistante à formuler de

nouveaux paradigmes et de nouvelles pensées qui permettent de dépasser l'« ancien monde » et de faire un saut vers le nouveau. Nous avons encore besoin de trouver, d'élaborer et de développer de nouvelles significations pour notre travail au-delà de ses limites, barrières et frontières, qu'elles soient nationales, culturelles, ethniques, linguistiques, sociales, raciales, « naturelles », ou autres, avec tout ce que cela implique sur le plan méthodologique et épistémologique.

C'est pourquoi nous avons souhaité, pour commencer, demander simplement « qu'entendez-vous par *anthropologie politique* ? » à certain.e.s des chercheur.e.s et intellectuel.le.s les plus influent.e.s dans ce domaine : Veena Das, John Gledhill, Margaret Jolly et Silvia Posocco. Nous avons pris le risque de leur poser des questions à première vue élémentaires, et même de les provoquer un peu en tenant naïvement pour acquis que ce que l'on appelle « anthropologie politique » existe réellement. Il et elles ont tous réagi en refusant l'idée qu'une tribu d'expert.e.s appartenant à une branche disciplinaire du xxᵉ siècle puisse demeurer inchangée, ou même avoir un sens aujourd'hui ; et ce n'était que le point de départ de réponses incroyablement riches, pleines d'intuitions émergeant de l'anthropologie politique et allant au-delà de celle-ci, la définissant à la fois comme expérience individuelle et comme bagage commun (et global) pour l'avenir. Nous avons été frappé.e.s par le fait que, malgré les différences de trajectoires personnelles ou de contextes théoriques et culturels, les quatre anthropologues interrogé.e.s aient tant de convictions communes sur « l'anthropologie politique » : la nécessité de décloisonner définitivement les disciplines, en développant un concept de politique qui aille bien au-delà de toute idée européo-centrée, philosophique ou juridique, d'institution ou d'autorité ; la nécessité d'intégrer absolument tous les tournants critiques des dernières décennies, et même de revenir aux textes et aux concepts fondateurs de la discipline pour les discuter sérieusement ; la nécessité de contourner les frontières entre les « aires culturelles » classiques tout en privilégiant une perspective ancrée, située et inductive de la pensée anthropologique ; celle, enfin, de penser « la science » comme inévitablement incarnée dans la trajectoire personnelle de l'anthropologue et dans les contextes sociaux, culturels et politiques des personnes rencontrées sur le terrain, de relier inextricablement la connaissance à l'expérience de l'altérité et à un engagement existentiel dans le monde (militant, intellectuel, artistique, émotionnel, etc.) qui est, en définitive, une manière *politique* de faire de l'anthropologie.

5

L'anthropologue indienne Veena Das (Johns Hopkins University) ouvre cette série de quatre entretiens par une mise en garde contre les écueils menaçant la production d'un savoir qui évacue les questions politiques (et coloniales) contemporaines. Elle s'étonne de la résurgence, notamment dans les études économiques et sécuritaires, de la division canonique entre sociétés sans État (ou segmentaires) et sociétés dont l'autorité est centralisée, qui ne tient pas compte des nombreuses critiques adressées à ceux que l'on a longtemps considérés comme les « pères fondateurs » de l'anthropologie politique. Veena Das met en évidence l'utilisation problématique de ces vieilles catégories à travers une étude de cas spécifique, qu'elle réfute en montrant les conséquences épistémologiques et politiques majeures de telles interprétations : pour expliquer les conflits contemporains en Afrique, ces analyses soutiennent en effet que les groupes ethniques reposent sur une parenté plus forte, et que les sociétés fondées sur une structure lignagère segmentaire seraient plus sujettes aux conflits que celles qui en sont dépourvues, évacuant totalement le rôle de l'État (colonial) dans ces violences. Ainsi, Das nous invite à la fois à porter un regard critique salutaire sur les fondements de la discipline et à « descendre dans l'ordinaire » afin de préférer l'observation empirique à l'utilisation d'hypothèses erronées.

John Gledhill (University of Manchester) est sans doute l'une des figures les plus marquantes de l'anthropologie politique, tant en raison de ses recherches ethnographiques sur les différentes formes de résistance et les mouvements sociaux en Amérique latine (notamment au Brésil et au Mexique), que de sa contribution à une théorie critique du politique dans un monde globalisé. Professeur émérite à l'Université de Manchester, l'un des centres qui ont vu naître et se développer l'anthropologie politique, il a joué un rôle considérable dans le renouvellement de la discipline et la réflexion critique sur sa trajectoire et ses évolutions, notamment en faisant paraître certains des ouvrages les plus importants pour les étudiants comme pour les chercheurs. Sa contribution à ce dossier retrace les transformations de l'anthropologie politique au cours des dernières décennies à travers son itinéraire personnel, en mettant en évidence les nouvelles orientations qui permettent de dépasser les héritages coloniaux et d'intégrer des perspectives critiques et un engagement intellectuel auprès des mouvements sociaux.

Figure de proue du monde universitaire australien et spécialiste mondialement reconnue de l'Océanie, Margaret Jolly (Australian National University) a vu, au cours d'un demi-siècle de carrière, sa discipline évoluer d'un simple intérêt pour l'« anthropologie des femmes » vers un champ intellectuel où les études de genre et les approches postcoloniales ont remodelé la signification même de l'« anthropologie politique », voire de l'anthropologie dans son ensemble. Une évolution que Margaret Jolly a fait plus qu'accompagner, à la fois par ses écrits et par son investissement pédagogique à la Research School of Pacific Studies puis au Gender Institute qu'elle a longtemps dirigé à Canberra. Son témoignage, mêlant éclairages historiques et anecdotes personnelles, apparaît comme un voyage à travers le monde contemporain, celui d'une femme qui a toujours été une chercheuse et une citoyenne engagée dans les combats de son temps.

8 Silvia Posocco (Birkbeck, University of London) appartient déjà à cette génération d'anthropologues pour qui la critique des biais et des centrismes est intégrée de longue date. Son expérience de chercheuse sur des terrains particulièrement éprouvants et/ou engageants lui permet d'envisager un retour sans concession sur les fondements mêmes de ce que signifie faire de l'anthropologie politique politisée et de la politique de l'anthropologie. Celle-ci est certainement une aventure collective plutôt que personnelle. Ainsi, Posocco nous livre un compte rendu fascinant des collaborations intellectuelles et humaines qui ont façonné sa riche production anthropologique, sur des thèmes en apparence aussi divers que la violence politique, le génocide, le travail reproductif et la parenté *queer*, le racisme bio- et nécro-politique et la décolonisation des sexualités, mais qui ont tous en commun son attention pour les « passions contre-, trans- et dés-identificatoires du travail de recherche *défiant le terrain* ».

9 À en juger par les réponses de nos invité.e.s, nous pourrions soutenir que, si notre interrogation centrale – « qu'entendez-vous par *anthropologie politique* ? » – était naïve, faire preuve de naïveté est parfois louable. Afin de permettre au lecteur d'apprécier le débat que nous voulions susciter, nous transcrivons ci-dessous l'ensemble des questions que nous leur avons posées. Néanmoins, nous avons laissé aux quatre contributeur.e.s une grande marge de manœuvre dans la construction de leurs réflexions, et il et elles ont pris (et revendiqué) encore plus de liberté. Nous leur sommes immensément reconnaissant.e.s de cette « indiscipline ».

10

I. Définition

11 *Qu'est-ce que l'anthropologie politique pour vous ? Comment comprenez-vous à la fois l'anthropologie et la (ou le) politique : qu'est-ce que la (ou le) politique et que signifie l'anthropologie pour vous ?*

12

II. Héritages

13 *Vos recherches en anthropologie politique se rattachent-elles volontairement, ou au contraire, rompent-elles avec une ou plusieurs traditions disciplinaires (en tant que lieux d'enseignement, de travail et de réalisation du travail de terrain) ?*

14

III. Contextes et terrains

15 *Comment le contexte spécifique (politique et disciplinaire) de votre travail de terrain façonne-t-il votre propre approche de l'anthropologie politique que vous menez ?*

16

IV. Rôle

17 *Quel est, selon vous, le rôle de l'anthropologue politique tant dans le débat public qu'intellectuel ?*

18 *Quelles sont les « sollicitations du présent » (régimes autoritaires, répressions, révoltes ou révolutions, émeutes, mobilisations sociales et protestations, etc.) qui rendent l'anthropologie politique importante pour nos sociétés contemporaines ? Comment le présent affecte-t-il ou perturbe-t-il la recherche, les méthodologies, les engagements, les interprétations et les théories ?*

19 *Comment vous positionnez-vous par rapport à l'engagement et aux transformations politiques ? Trouvez-vous nécessaire ou inévitable un dialogue avec les mouvements sociaux ? Si oui, pourquoi et dans quel but ?*

CITER CET ARTICLE

AUTEURS

Riccardo Ciavolella

Riccardo Ciavolella est chercheur CNRS, membre de l'Institut interdisciplinaire d'anthropologie du contemporain, UMR 8177 du CNRS et de l'EHESS, où il enseigne l'anthropologie du politique. Son travail interroge l'émergence du politique et l'imagination de possibles dans les marges et les fins des mondes, en Afrique comme en Europe. Auteur d'ouvrages et articles ethnographiques et théoriques, il a publié entre autres des monographies sur le politique aux marges en Afrique de l'Ouest (Karthala, 2010), le manuel *Introduction à l'anthropologie du politique* (De Boeck, 2016, avec Éric Wittersheim) et l'essai *L'ethnologue et le peuple* (Mimésis, 2020) sur les liens entre anthropologie et Résistance à partir de l'expérience d'Ernesto de Martino. En parallèle de son écriture théorique, il expérimente d'autres langages, surtout littéraires, influencés par l'imagination anthropologique.

Riccardo Ciavolella is a CNRS researcher and member of the Institut interdisciplinaire d'anthropologie du contemporain at the EHESS in Paris, where he teaches political anthropology. His work focuses on the emergence of politics and the imagination of other possibilities in the margins and the ends of worlds, especially in Africa and

Europe. He is the author of ethnographic and theoretical books and articles such as, among others, monographs on politics at the margins in West Africa (Karthala, 2010), an *Introduction to the Anthropology of Politics* (De Boeck, 2016, with Éric Wittersheim) and the essay *L'ethnologue et le peuple* (Mimésis, 2020) on the links between anthropology and the Resistance based on the experience of Ernesto de Martino. In parallel to his theoretical writing, he experiments other languages, especially literary ones, influenced by the anthropological imagination.

Articles du même auteur

Les espaces pluriels d'une revue d'anthropologie du politique

Paru dans *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques*, 5 | 2023

David Graeber (1961-2020)

Paru dans *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques*, 1 | 2020

Les deux Gramsci de l'anthropologie politique

Paru dans *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques*, 1 | 2020

Sabrina Melenotte

Sabrina Melenotte est chargée de recherche à l'Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD), affiliée à l'Unité de recherche Migrations et Sociétés (URMIS), co-rédactrice en chef de la revue *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques. Revue internationale d'anthropologie du politique* et membre du comité de rédaction de la revue *Violence. An International Journal*. Après une recherche doctorale sur le conflit armé au Chiapas (Mexique), elle mène ses recherches actuelles sur les personnes disparues et le gouvernement des morts au Mexique comme autant d'expressions politiques, sociales et culturelles mises en œuvre pour faire face à la violence extrême et massive en cours. Elle a récemment publié : « Des morts qui dérangent. Espaces clandestins de la disparition et nécropouvoir au Mexique », *Cultures & Conflits*, vol. 1, n° 121, 2021, p. 51-72 ; « Sur les traces des disparus au Mexique », *Ethnologie française*, vol. 50, n° 2, 2020, p. 345-360 ; et elle dirige actuellement le Mook *Le Mexique. Une terre de disparu.e.s*.

Sabrina Melenotte is a research fellow at the Research Institute for Development (IRD), member of the Migrations and Societies Research Unit (URMIS), Co-Editor in Chief of the review *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques. Revue internationale d'anthropologie du politique* and member of the Editorial Board of the review *Violence. An International Journal*. After a doctoral research on the armed conflict in Chiapas (Mexico), she conducts her current research on the disappeared and the government of the dead in Mexico as political, social, and cultural expressions that are implemented to cope with the ongoing, extreme and massive violence. She has recently published: "Des morts qui dérangent. Espaces clandestins de la disparition et nécropouvoir au Mexique", *Cultures & Conflits*, vol. 1, no. 121, 2021, p. 51-72; "Sur les traces des disparus au Mexique", *Ethnologie française*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2020, p. 345-360; and she currently directs the Mook *Mexico. A Land of the Missing*.

Articles du même auteur

Paysages politiques de la disparition. Introduction

Paru dans *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques*, 3 | 2022

Gianfranco Rebucini

Gianfranco Rebucini, anthropologue, est chargé de recherche au CNRS et co-directeur de l'IIAC (CNRS/EHESS). Il s'intéresse tout particulièrement aux enjeux politiques des masculinités au Maghreb et en Europe. Ses recherches actuelles portent sur les nouvelles formes de mobilisations politiques autonomes queer en France et en Italie. Il se consacre également à une réflexion autour des perspectives critiques du marxisme contemporain et de ses connexions avec les théories queer. Il a notamment participé à l'élaboration scientifique et à l'édition de l'*Encyclopédie critique du genre* ([2016] 2021) et à la publication du numéro spécial de la revue *Genre, sexualité et société* intitulé « Hégémonie » (2015).

Gianfranco Rebucini is an anthropologist at the CNRS and co-director of the IIAC (CNRS/EHESS). He is particularly interested in the political issues of masculinities in the Maghreb and in Europe. His current research focuses on new forms of queer autonomous political mobilizations in France and Italy. He is also engaged in a reflection on the critical perspectives of contemporary Marxism and its connections with Queer Theories. He participated among others things in the scientific elaboration and edition of the *Encyclopédie critique du genre* ([2016] 2021) and in the publication of the special issue of the journal *Genre, sexualité et société* « Hégémonie » (2015).

Articles du même auteur

Les espaces pluriels d'une revue d'anthropologie du politique

Paru dans *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques*, 5 | 2023

Éric Wittersheim

Éric Wittersheim, né en 1971, est anthropologue, cinéaste et traducteur. Spécialiste de l'État dans le Pacifique Sud, il étudie l'évolution des utopies politiques sur la longue durée. Maître de conférences à l'EHESS depuis 2011, ancien directeur de l'IRIS (Institut de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux sociaux), il a également enseigné à l'INALCO et été Research Fellow au East-West Center (Université de Hawai'i, USA).

Éric Wittersheim, born in 1971 is anthropologist, filmmaker and translator. His research focus on the state in the South Pacific, as well as the evolution of political utopia on the long run. Associate professor at EHESS, where he was director of IRIS (Institut de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux sociaux), he has also taught at INALCO and been a Research Fellow at the East-West Center (Université of Hawai'i, USA).

Articles du même auteur

Les espaces pluriels d'une revue d'anthropologie du politique

Paru dans *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques*, 5 | 2023

Beyond Political Anthropology. Introduction

Studying and Challenging Power in the 21st Century

Riccardo Ciavolella, **Sabrina Melenotte**, **Gianfranco Rebucini** et **Éric Wittersheim**

Traduit de :
Au-delà de l'anthropologie politique. Introduction

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TEXTE

There are moments, in any individual lifetime, generation, or history of a civilisation, when it feels like we need different words to describe the changing world, and when old terms need new meanings.

A translation of wor(l)ds: not only from one language to another, but also from the old world that is dying to the new one that has yet to come. This is how Gramsci famously defined both a "translation" and a "crisis". And it fits perfectly to describe our worlds today: the need to cross this middle passage to a new shore, to go beyond the economic crisis, beyond traditional representative institutions and current global governmentality, beyond the ecological collapse, and surely, beyond the Covid-19 pandemic which – like other health crises which have affected (differently) more or less "lucky" regions of the world –, works like a detector of symptoms: it reveals and deepens all the other crises, but not always explains their roots and causes. This is where lie the very aims of the social sciences and the humanities (including researches debating with "natural" science, literature and arts): to offer a "radical" thinking, in its etymological meaning of going back to the root-causes; and to offer inspirations, but also practical tools, to imagine and build "that" beyond. But how is this possible, when these social sciences and humanities are themselves considered to be in crisis?

This is also, more modestly, the situation of "political anthropology". The two words that constitute it – "anthropology" and "political" – refer to realities that urgently need our reconsideration: the place of the human in the world and in relation to all its creatures; and politics as a way to build that commune place and negotiate collectively that relation, through consensus or dissensus. When people (researchers, journalists, but especially students and new adepts) engage in some project related to political anthropology, they consider it as an extraordinary tool to grasp and interpret, from a situated or theoretical point of view, the different and nested crises we are living. But at the same time, we feel increasingly uncomfortable with the idea of political anthropology as a disciplinary branch – with all the consequences of this conception that go "against" our ways to conceive the practice of political anthropology: a narrowing specialized knowledge, against the need for a wider approach to the human condition and its possibilities; a knowledge with Eurocentric roots, and for long dominated by Western, male anthropologists, etc. We have the feeling that we have long been in the "post-" era (post-colonial or de-colonial, for example), even more if we think at some non-Western anthropological traditions. But the very term "post" still confesses our difficulty to formulate new paradigms and thoughts that go beyond the "old world" and make the leap towards the new one. We still need to find, elaborate and expand on new meanings of our work beyond its limits, barriers, and frontiers, whether national, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, social, racial, "natural", etc., with all the methodological, but also epistemological implications of that.

For that reason, we suggested to start from the beginning, and to ask simply "what do you mean by *political anthropology?*" (see below) to some of the most influential and innovative scholars and intellectuals in the field (from our point of view): Veena Das, John Gledhill, Margaret Jolly and Silvia Posocco. We took the risk to ask them simple, basic questions, and even to be provocative with the *naiveté* of taking for granted that something called "political anthropology" could really exist. They all reacted refusing the idea that a tribe of experts of a 20th century disciplinary branch could survive unchanged or even be meaningful in our century; and this was only the starting point for eliciting incredibly rich replies, full of insights arising from political anthropology and going beyond it, defining it both as an individual experience and its future as a whole. We have been struck by the fact that, despite the differences in personal trajectories or theoretical and cultural backgrounds, all the four interviewed anthropologists share some common points about "political anthropology": the need to definitively overcome disciplinary separations, developing a concept of politics that goes well beyond any Eurocentric, philosophical or juridical idea of institution or authority; the need to completely integrate all the critical turns of the last decades, and even to return to the founding texts and concepts of the discipline to seriously discuss them; the need to overcome any boundary between traditional "area studies" while reinforcing and opting for a rooted, situated and inductive perspective of anthropological thinking; and the necessity to think to "science" as inevitably embodied in the personal trajectory of the anthropologist and in the social, cultural and political contexts of people met on the field; inextricably relate knowledge to the experience of alterity and to an existential commitment with the world (militant, intellectual, artistic, emotional, etc.) which is, ultimately, a *political* way of doing anthropology.

5

The Indian anthropologist Veena Das (Johns Hopkins University) opens this series of four interviews with a warning about the pitfalls of producing knowledge that evacuates contemporary political (and colonial) issues. She is surprised by the resurgence, particularly in economics and security studies, of the now canonical division between stateless (or segmentary) societies and societies with centralized authorities, without taking into account the numerous criticisms addressed to whom have been considered a long time as the "founding fathers" of political anthropology. Das highlights the problematic use of these old categories, through a specific case study she refutes by showing the major epistemological and political consequences of such reinterpretations: in order to explain contemporary conflicts in Africa, these analyses argue that ethnic groups are based on stronger kinship and that segmentary lineage societies would be more prone to conflict than those without segmentary lineage structures, totally evacuating the role of the (colonial) state in this violence. Thus, Das invites us both to take a salutary critical look at the foundations of the discipline and to "descend into the ordinary" in order to privilege empirical observation over the use of erroneous hypotheses.

John Gledhill (University of Manchester) is undoubtedly one of the most influential figures in political anthropology, both for its ethnographic researches on resistance and social movements in Latin America (especially Brazil and Mexico) and for his contribution to a critical theory of politics in a globalized world. Emeritus Professor at the University of Manchester, one of the centers of birth and development of political anthropology, he has immensely contributed to the renewal of the discipline and the critical reflection on its trajectory and evolutions, notably with some of the most important books for students and scholars. His contribution in this issue traces back the transformations of political anthropology in the last decades through its personal itinerary, by highlighting the new directions overcoming colonial legacies, and integrating critical perspectives and intellectual commitment with social movements.

A leading figure of Australian academia, and a world expert on Oceania, Margaret Jolly (Australian National University) has, along her 50-year long career, seen her discipline evolve from a mere interest for the "anthropology of women" to an intellectual field where gender studies and postcolonial approaches have reshaped the very meaning of "political anthropology", and even anthropology itself. Margaret Jolly has done much more than just witnessing this evolution, both through her writings and through her strong investment in teaching at the Research School of Pacific Studies and the Gender Institute, which she convened for many years in Canberra. Her testimony, mixing historical insights and personal anecdotes, appears like a journey through the contemporary world, that of a woman that has always been an engaged researcher and citizen.

For her own part, Silvia Posocco (Birkbeck, University of London) already belongs to that generation of anthropologists for whom the critique of biases of -centrisms has been integrated for a long time. Her experience as a researcher in particularly difficult and/or engaging fieldwork allows her to consider a return without concessions to the very foundations of what it means to do politicised political anthropology and to the politics of anthropology. This is certainly a collective adventure before a personal one. Posocco gives us a fascinating account of the intellectual and human collaborations that have shaped her rich anthropological production on seemingly different themes such as political violence, genocide, reproductive work and queer kinship, bio- and necropolitical racism and the decolonisation of sexualities, but all of which have in common her attention for the "counter- , cross- and dis-identificatory passions of field-*defying* scholarly work".

9

After reading the responses of our guests, we could say that, if our core question "what do you mean by *political anthropology*?" was a *naive* one, it is now clear that it can sometimes worthy to be naive. To conclude, in order to give readers the opportunity to appreciate the debate we wanted to foster, we transcribe below the questions we asked to these four anthropologists. Nevertheless, we gave contributors a large *marge de manœuvre* in building up their replies; and they even take (and claim) much more freedom. We are immensely grateful to them for this "indiscipline".

10

I. Definition

11 *What is political anthropology for you? How do you understand both anthropology and politics (or the political): what is politics (or the political) and what does anthropology mean to you?*

12

II. Legacies

13 *Does your research in political anthropology voluntarily relate to, or at the contrary, break with one or (m)any disciplinary traditions (as places for teaching, working and carrying out fieldwork)?*

14

III. Contexts and fields

15 *How does the specific (political and disciplinary) context of your fieldwork shape your own approach of the political anthropology you are conducting?*

16

IV. Role

17 *What do you think is the role of the political anthropologist both in the public and intellectual debate? Which are the "solicitations of the present" (authoritarian regimes, repressions, revolts or revolutions, riots, social mobilizations and protests, etc.) that make political anthropology important for our contemporary societies? How does the present affect or disrupt research, methodologies, engagements, interpretations and theories? How do you position yourself in relation to commitment and political transformations? Do you find it necessary or inevitable a dialogue with social movements? If so, why and what for?*

CITER CET ARTICLE ↑

Référence électronique

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AUTEURS ↑

Riccardo Ciavolella

Riccardo Ciavolella is a CNRS researcher and member of the Institut interdisciplinaire d'anthropologie du contemporain at the EHESS in Paris, where he teaches political anthropology. His work focuses on the emergence of politics and the imagination of other possibilities in the margins and the ends of worlds, especially in Africa and Europe. He is the author of ethnographic and theoretical books and articles such as, among others, monographs on politics at the margins in West Africa (Karthala, 2010), an *Introduction to the Anthropology of Politics* (De Boeck, 2016, with Éric Wittersheim) and the essay *L'ethnologue et le peuple* (Mimésis, 2020) on the links between anthropology and the Resistance based on the experience of Ernesto de Martino. In parallel to his theoretical writing, he experiments other languages, especially literary ones, influenced by the anthropological imagination.

Riccardo Ciavolella est chercheur CNRS, membre de l'Institut interdisciplinaire d'anthropologie du contemporain, UMR 8177 du CNRS et de l'EHESS, où il enseigne l'anthropologie du politique. Son travail interroge l'émergence du politique et l'imagination de possibles dans les marges et les fins des mondes, en Afrique comme en Europe. Auteur d'ouvrages et articles ethnographiques et théoriques, il a publié entre autres des monographies sur le politique aux marges en Afrique de l'Ouest (Karthala, 2010), le manuel *Introduction à l'anthropologie du politique* (De Boeck, 2016, avec Éric Wittersheim) et l'essai *L'ethnologue et le peuple* (Mimésis, 2020) sur les liens entre anthropologie et Résistance à partir de l'expérience d'Ernesto de Martino. En parallèle de son écriture théorique, il expérimente d'autres langages, surtout littéraires, influencés par l'imagination anthropologique.

Articles du même auteur

Les espaces pluriels d'une revue d'anthropologie du politique
Paru dans *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques*, 5 | 2023

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Paru dans *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques*, 2 | 2021

David Graeber (1961-2020)
Paru dans *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques*, 1 | 2020

- Tous les textes...

Sabrina Melenotte

Sabrina Melenotte is a research fellow at the Research Institute for Development (IRD), member of the Migrations and Societies Research Unit (URMIS), Co-Editor in Chief of the review *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques. Revue internationale d'anthropologie du politique* and member of the Editorial Board of the review *Violence. An International Journal*. After a doctoral research on the armed conflict in Chiapas (Mexico), she conducts her current research on the disappeared and the government of the dead in Mexico as political, social, and cultural expressions that are implemented to cope with the ongoing, extreme and massive violence. She has recently published: "Des morts qui dérangent. Espaces clandestins de la disparition et nécropouvoir au Mexique", *Cultures & Conflits*, vol. 1, no. 121, 2021, p. 51-72; "Sur les traces des disparus au Mexique", *Ethnologie française*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2020, p. 345-360; and she currently directs the Mook *Mexico. A Land of the Missing*.

Sabrina Melenotte est chargée de recherche à l'Institut de recherche pour le développement (IRD), affiliée à l'Unité de recherche Migrations et Sociétés (URMIS), co-rédactrice en chef de la revue *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques. Revue internationale d'anthropologie du politique* et membre du comité de rédaction de la revue *Violence. An International Journal*. Après une recherche doctorale sur le conflit armé au Chiapas (Mexique), elle mène ses recherches actuelles sur les personnes disparues et le gouvernement des morts au Mexique comme autant d'expressions politiques, sociales et culturelles mises en œuvre pour faire face à la violence extrême et massive en cours. Elle a récemment publié : « Des morts qui dérangent. Espaces clandestins de la disparition et nécropouvoir au Mexique », *Cultures & Conflits*, vol. 1, n° 121, 2021, p. 51-72 ; « Sur les traces des disparus au Mexique », *Ethnologie française*, vol. 50, n° 2, 2020, p. 345-360 ; et elle dirige actuellement le Mook *Le Mexique. Une terre de disparu.e.s.*

Articles du même auteur

Paysages politiques de la disparition. Introduction
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Paru dans *Condition humaine / Conditions politiques*, 2 | 2021

Gianfranco Rebucini

Gianfranco Rebucini is an anthropologist at the CNRS and co-director of the IIAC (CNRS/EHESS). He is particularly interested in the political issues of masculinities in the Maghreb and in Europe. His current research focuses on new forms of queer autonomous political mobilizations in France and Italy. He is also engaged in a reflection on the critical perspectives of contemporary Marxism and its connections with Queer Theories. He participated among others things in the scientific elaboration and edition of the *Encyclopédie critique du genre* ([2016] 2021) and in the publication of the special issue of the journal *Genre, sexualité et société* « Hégémonie » (2015).

Gianfranco Rebucini, anthropologue, est chargé de recherche au CNRS et co-directeur de l'IIAC (CNRS/EHESS). Il s'intéresse tout particulièrement aux enjeux politiques des masculinités au Maghreb et en Europe. Ses recherches actuelles portent sur les nouvelles formes de mobilisations politiques autonomes queer en France et en Italie. Il se consacre également à une réflexion autour des perspectives critiques du marxisme contemporain et de ses connexions avec les théories queer. Il a notamment participé à l'élaboration scientifique et à l'édition de l'*Encyclopédie critique du genre* ([2016] 2021) et à la publication du numéro spécial de la revue *Genre, sexualité et société* intitulé « Hégémonie »

Articles du même auteur

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Éric Wittersheim

Éric Wittersheim, born in 1971 is anthropologist, filmmaker and translator. His research focus on the state in the South Pacific, as well as the evolution of political utopia on the long run. Associate professor at EHESS, where he was director of IRIS (Institut de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux sociaux), he has also taught at INALCO and been a Research Fellow at the East-West Center (Université of Hawai'i, USA).

Éric Wittersheim, né en 1971, est anthropologue, cinéaste et traducteur. Spécialiste de l'État dans le Pacifique Sud, il étudie l'évolution des utopies politiques sur la longue durée. Maître de conférences à l'EHESS depuis 2011, ancien directeur de l'IRIS (Institut de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les enjeux sociaux), il a également enseigné à l'INALCO et été Research Fellow au East-West Center (Université de Hawai'i, USA).

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Concepts of the Political

Veena Das

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Mots-clés

guerres civiles, Afrique, segmentation lignagère, acteurs non étatiques, anthropologie politique, pauvres

Keywords

civil wars, Africa, lineage segmentation, non-state actors, poor, political anthropology

PLAN

- I. Definition
- II. Heritage
- III. Contexts and fields
- IV. Role

TEXTE

I. Definition

What is political anthropology for you? How do you understand both anthropology and politics (or the political): what is politics (or the political) and what does anthropology mean to you?

What if we started somewhere else than with the idea that political anthropology is a *given* domain of social life*?* Text books on political anthropology assume that each specific domain that we cut society into has a specific conceptual vocabulary that identifies universal categories. Thus, state, sovereignty, democracy, authoritarianism, power, law, governance are assumed to constitute the conceptual furniture through which politics as a domain of social life is carved out. The corresponding vocabulary for religion might be god, spirits, piety, prayer, ritual, and so on. The task of the anthropologist is then seen as that of finding good examples or instantiations that will illuminate local variations, empirical actualizations, and thus allow comparative formulations. It is then assumed that with each new empirical work, we will ultimately achieve better and better understandings of these concepts. What if our picture of thinking was different, not necessarily more right but, different?

Rather than speak in general terms, I would like to start with a concrete example of the vicissitudes of anthropological concepts to show how the domain of the political comes to be articulated – what it brings forth and what is eclipsed from view. Consider the classical text that many view to have inaugurated the field of political anthropology, *African Political Systems,* edited by Meyer Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) in which they stated forcefully that "We have not found that the theories of political philosophers have helped us to understand the societies we have studied and we consider them of little scientific value." Yet the conceptual heart of the book lay in the

distinction they proposed between political systems in which order was maintained through a balance of power in segmentary systems of intersecting lineage and territorial units ("anarchic order", as it was termed) and one in which control was exercised through centralizing political institutions such as a ruling chief and territorial organization of the political community. In the former case, they argued that "there is no individual or group in which sovereignty can be said to rest" (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p. 14), while in the latter case they identified such figures of sovereignty as the chief, or the king. This division into stateless societies and ones with state, not only allowed them to introduce a teleology in which societies moved in the direction of the former to the latter, but also managed to smuggle into the analytic, a particular concern of political philosophy arising from the original myth of sovereignty that Hobbes tells us – viz., that prior to the institution of the state, men existed within a state of nature in which the only rule was that of mutual violence men enacted on each other (see Das *et al.*, 2014)[1]. I have critiqued elsewhere the picture of the masculine state upon which this formulation rested and the fraught relation between the social contract and the sexual contract. I have also shown that in Hobbes' formulations men were seen as completely autonomous beings springing from the earth, as it were, like mushrooms from the earth, which led to the expulsion of women from the political domain altogether (Das, 2006, 2007, 2008a)[2].

Most anthropologists writing on this subject would readily concede that centering the Nuer political system (and others with lineage segmentary models) around the question of how order was maintained in stateless societies as a response to the Hobbesian problem of order, obliterated from view the actual disorders that Nuer society was facing in view of British colonial wars, and the implicit assumptions of rights to territory through rights of conquest. Characterizing the Nuer as a political system marked by an anarchic order,[3] shifted attention to the *absence* of the state among the Nuer rather than the *presence* of the colonial state. I had thought that Talal Asad's (1973) decisive intervention in 1973 showing how colonialism produced the conditions of possibility for British anthropology to be consolidated as a discipline had led anthropologists to be cautious about the ways in which they read and interpret the character of the political in texts written within the political milieu of colonialism and indeed in the postcolonial contexts too.[4] Indeed, a rich literature grew around the Nuer and the Dinka, shifting the problem of governance from solving the puzzle of finding mechanisms of order in stateless societies to such issues as the rhythms of violence and pacification in the region and the various measures taken by the British to institute their own modes of governance.

Imagine my surprise, then, to discover how the distinction between stateless societies and societies with centralized authorities has resurfaced in economics (see Moscona, Hunn and Robinson, 2020) in the form of the distinction between lineage societies with segmentary processes, and societies with the centrality of the village in which authority rests with the chiefs as a mode of organization to explain variations in the intensity and duration of "civil conflicts" [the reason for putting this expression within distancing quotes will become evident soon] in Africa. A detailed critique of this paper follows but, here, I simply note that the way anthropological literature has come to be read in some parts of economics and in comparative politics has an uncanny resonance with the work done by members of the security apparatus in some powerful countries in the West that have the global reach to influence the direction of research on political conflict, which deserves close attention. I don't mean to claim any kind of innocence on behalf of anthropology either. After all, many anthropologists, directly or indirectly, contributed to the colonial project and recent writings have again raised important questions about the use of anthropological knowledge by security apparatus in both authoritarian and democratic politics (Verdery, 2018; Price, 2016). Instead of a confessional *mea culpa* kind of stance, I want to think of the epistemological and political challenges we face as we come to terms with the fact that there is no escaping the political conditions within which knowledge is produced. What shape should our criticisms then take?

As an example of the kinds of concerns that I am trying to put forward here, let me turn to the paper recently published in *Econometrica*, the flagship journal of Economics, on segmentary lineage organization and conflict in Sub-Saharan Africa (Moscona, Hunn and Robinson, 2020). The reason I take up this paper is precisely because of the disciplinary recognition accorded to any paper published in this journal, but also because the authors have tried to take the anthropological literature seriously, and their results (within the confines of their method), they claim, show strong effects of segmentary lineage organization on contemporary conflicts in Africa. That they disregard the subsequent literature demonstrating the distortions in the very texts they take to be canonical for understanding the relation between kinship and politics is puzzling. I can imagine that their response may well be that they only wanted to extract from these texts what was relevant to their argument. But at the very least two totally different methods of reading the same texts then arise and could raise important epistemological issues that are in themselves fascinating. When these differences begin to have real consequences in the world on how structures of domination are reproduced, through the stories scholars in elite universities continue to tell about non-Western societies, then the critique with which we might provide each other takes on an added urgency.

In their paper, "Segmentary Lineage Organization and Conflict in Sub-Sharan Africa", Moscona, Nunn, and Robinson (2020) set out to test the hypothesis (a "longstanding" one, according to them) that ethnic groups organized around "segmentary lineages" are more prone to conflict than those without segmentary lineage structure.[5] The justification they offer for considering this hypothesis to be robust is that "Ethnographic accounts suggest that in such societies which are characterized by strong allegiances to distant relatives, individuals are obligated to come to the aid of fellow lineage members when they become involved in conflicts". The conclusion towards

which they veer then is that small disagreements in societies of the segmentary type often escalate into large-scale conflicts involving many individuals, and thus have lethal consequences. Due to the ease of mobilizing distant kin, these authors argue, conflicts become larger in scale and are protracted for longer periods of time, as compared to societies organized around other principles. They also, in passing, mention that kinship ties are stronger in societies of the segmentary lineage type.[6] The second arm of their analysis is the characteristics of specific conflicts they cull from the database from *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project*. For the moment I will refrain from offering my critique of this kind of dataset and apparent ease with which the conflicts are coded as "riot", "protest", etc., and particularly the apparent ability to separate the actors (government forces, rebel militia, terrorists, etc.), only to note that much of my own research – along with many civil rights advocates, lawyers and other academics in India and elsewhere – has been precisely to show how government agencies manage to use these classifications to obscure the role of the state in what are rendered as non-state actors (see Das, 2004, 2008b).

How do Moscona *et al.* arrive at their understanding of how the anthropological literature is to be read? I have chosen to concentrate on *The Nuer* since this is the classic text which provides the most sustained discussion of this model of lineage organization. For convenience of reading, I will juxtapose the claims on the distinctive features of lineage segmentation that Moscona *et al.* extract from the Nuer, and then track what happens if one follows that abstract model through to other parts of the text in which Evans Pritchard speaks of actual lineage segments and their composition. Moscona *et al.* start their own discussion with a model drawn from Evans-Pritchard: "Each segment is itself segmented and there is opposition between its parts. The members of any segment unite for war against adjacent segments of the same order and unite with these adjacent segments against larger sections." (Evans Pritchard, 1940, p. 142.) Moscona *et al.* supplement this observation from Evans-Pritchard with similar statements from Smith (1956), Lewis (1961, 1994), Sahlins (1961), as well as with proverbs found commonly in many societies that give hypothetical accounts of proximity and distance in kinship relations. "I against my brothers; my brothers and I against my cousins; my cousins, my brothers and I against the world." I note here that the discussion is based entirely on hypothetical questions posed to informants – it is not based on any observed case of feud in which higher order segments have united against similar units, nor is it based on a reconstruction of an actual historical feud, unlike later studies such as those of Rosaldo (1980) on headhunting expeditions among the Ilongot in the Philippines, confined to a defined historical period.

As opposed to the schematic model of lineage segmentation, with its neatly balanced lineage segments, when it comes to the actual lineage segments to which references are found in *The Nuer*, one finds that there are considerable uncertainties in the listing of segments in Evans-Pritchard's account, as well as ambiguities in naming the territories in which members of a single lineage segment are to be found. For instance, while Evans-Pritchard gives us the names of primary and secondary sections of the Lou tribe,[7] and the Eastern Jikany tribes, and tries to fit these into his abstract model, it is clear that he had never witnessed an actual feud or the involvement of the primary and secondary sections in the actual unfolding of any feud which might have shown how individuals from territories actually participated in the feud. Disputes that occurred during Evans-Pritchard's fieldwork erupted among *minor sections*, which involved adjacent villages and not agnates dispersed over different Nuer or Dinka territories. The type of weapons used in these conflicts were restricted, and if accidentally blood was spilled, the offender tried to take shelter with the leopard skin chief trying to avoid exposure to those on whom the duty of vengeance would fall. The kind of disputes that could escalate into a war involving the maximal lineages had not happened among the Nuer for at least fifty years. The account of divisions among Gawaar, Lak, and Thiang tribes were not a result of direct observation, but were retrieved from discussions Evans-Pritchard had had with Mr. B.A. Lewis, the one-time Commissioner for Zeraf River District. In fact, after giving us the model of lineage segmentation and the reconstructions of segment names, Evans-Pritchard himself notes that: "These fights between tribal sections and the feuds that result from them, though based on a territorial principle, are often represented in terms of lineages, since there is a close relation between territorial segments and lineage segments, and Nuer habitually address social obligations in a kinship idiom. Thus, in telling me that Wangkac and Yol would unite for war against any other section Nuer stated the proposition by saying that the Wangkac and Yol lineages, which are the dominant lineages in these sections, would unite because their *ancestors were the sons of the same mother*" (p. 143, emphasis added). The loyalty then arises even at the level of a hypothetical possibility because of *filiation* (to use Fortes's [1972] term) and not because of agnatic *descent*.

I could give many more examples of the entangled nature of kinship ties in Evans-Pritchard's account when he looks at the concrete lineages and not the abstract model, but the main point I am making is this: the construction of the lineage segmentary model was not based on what was happening when Evans-Pritchard was engaged in fieldwork. The answers Evans-Pritchard elicited were offered in response to *hypothetical* questions. The answers were not even reconstructions of the history of any actual feud the respondents might have participated in. This is why there is such a preponderance of such expressions in *The Nuer* as "would unite" (p. 143); "at one time it must have been common" (p. 152); "I have never observed such a procedure"; "according to verbal information for I have never observed such a procedure" (p. 163), etc.

It is a pity that the critical literature on kinship in the late seventies and eighties onwards, which challenged such categories as "unilineal descent groups" and a mechanical model of "lineage segmentation", was either not studied or was simply omitted in their discussion by Moscona and his colleagues. It is also the case that these authors take what could be elicited from informants in response to hypothetical questions as if these were descriptions of actual behaviour. Both these two factors lead them to a very outdated conception of such terms as unilineal descent, kinship obligation, and helps them to completely erase the colonial violence from their account which is right in front of one's eyes if one cares to look into the text on the Nuer slightly more closely and not with an eye to simply extract statements that would support an explanatory frame for contemporary conflicts in these regions.

There are several places in *The Nuer* where Evans-Pritchard speaks of the articulation of the lineage system with the territorial system. For example: "In our view the territorial system of the Nuer is always the dominant variable in relation to the social systems" (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p. 265). Among many other anthropologists who wrote on this theme, Susan McKinnon (2000) summarizes a clear consensus among the critics of Evans-Pritchard that there are stark discrepancies between the abstract model of lineage segmentation and the empirical facts noted in the different texts by Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer. In McKinon's words (2000, p. 36): "Although few critics have been willing to offer an alternative characterization, most are quite clear that the attribution of patrilineality is difficult to sustain in face of the complexities of the Nuer system... At every point, the patrilineal/patrilocal model is contradicted and complicated by modes of affiliation and attachment that is anything but patrilineal and by modes of residence that are hardly patrilocal".**[8]** Indeed, recruitment to territorial groups as in the villages and the camps to which the Nuer moved during the dry season was made on the basis of a number of principles that included agnatic, cognatic, affinal and adoptive relations. Similarly, when it comes to lineage composition of actual tribal groups, these included not only members of the dominant lineage but also "large stranger lineages", "small lineages of Nuer strangers", and of "Dinka clusters" (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p. 206). Evans-Pritchard also reported that sometime groups fleeing British oppression were given shelter in another village because of ties through the mother; in other cases, segments might have moved because of ecological conditions. Frustrated by the obsession with classifying societies as being either marked by unilineal descent or cognatic descent, Edmund Leach (1961) characterized the entire enterprise of dividing societies according to one or the other principle of descent as "butterfly collecting" that completely obscures the complexity of multi-layered relationships. But it is McKinnon (2000) who gives the clinching argument by showing that at the heart of the conceptual problem underlying the whole notion of unilineal descent was the sharp division between the domestic domain and the politico-jural domain in British anthropology of the fifties and the sixties, which resulted in the differentiation of unilineal descent as belonging to the politico-jural level and cognatic relations as belonging to the domestic domain through filiation rather than descent. It was not that relations through ties of unilineal descent were *stronger* than, say, those among cognatic kin or affines, but rather that the image of a closed unilineal descent group fitted better the notion of jural corporation and the colonial notions of jural rules, which would be enforceable by British officials. I should stop this line of argument here for it might seem like flogging a horse that was not even alive in the first place, except that the resurfacing of these concepts to explain complex trans-regional conflicts in Africa authorizes a new politics of knowledge that dresses colonial projects in new clothes.

Let us take just three other points. First, there is simply no evidence that could support the claim on which Moscona *et al.* (2020) rest their case, i.e. the fact that because people owe kinship obligations to distant kin, conflicts become more prolonged in segmentary lineage systems. Most of the conflicts that Evans-Pritchard describes in detail in the texts are among proximate villages or within a village, and it is because territorial units have mixed lineages that cross-cutting ties of cognatic kinship and affinity can become resources – along with ritual mediation by the leopard skin chiefs – that blood feuds ended or at least vengeance could be deferred (on this point, see also Caton, 1987). Second, if we look at the actual violence that was going on as result of colonial occupation, we see traces of it in Evans-Pritchard's different texts on the Nuer, but these are traces, for they never receive full-fledged elaboration. Thus, for example, though Evans-Pritchard claims that the influence of the prophets in political life was exaggerated, his actual empirical materials show that the British treated the prophets as potential rebels attracting a large number of followers who could be incited to rebel. Evans-Pritchard states that: "Owing to the facts that Nuer prophets had been the focus of opposition to the Government, they were in disgrace and the more influential of them under restraint or in hiding during my visits to Nuerland" (1940, p. 185). It is startling to see that the prophet Ngundeng is declared by Evans-Pritchard to have been a psychotic presumably on the basis of government reports even though he had died in 1906 and, as a result, Evans-Pritchard could not have any direct experience of his apparently "psychotic" behaviour. This kind of remark probably reflected judgements of British officials rather than the viewpoints of the followers of the prophets. The prophet Gek was killed by Government forces in 1928; Dwal was made a political prisoner. Evans-Pritchard sees none of these events as "political", nor does he speak about the disorders that the colonial rule itself was perpetrating through large scale interventions of this kind. It is hard to resist the idea that the entire portrait of the Nuer in terms of lack – they did not have a state, they did not have law, they had no jural authority among them they could appeal to, evacuated the real politics of colonial rule and substituted the model of "ordered anarchy" through the abstractions entailed in the mechanical model of lineage segmentation that came to dominate the discussion on political systems for three decades.

Second, it is not that the picture Evans-Pritchard constructed of lineage model was conjured up out of thin air. At this point of my thinking, I am able to offer a couple of observations that would need further refining. First, we would need to revisit the whole question of what it means for Evans-Pritchard to have spoken of kinship as an idiom, and that the Nuer habitually express all other relations and conflicts in the *idiom* of kinship? In the late sixties this question was subsumed within the debates on substantivist versus nominalist views of kinship.

Finally, it is not that anthropologists have not engaged in understanding the prolonged civil-war in Sudan, but they have simply not found it useful to evoke the model of lineage segmentation to explain the shifts in loyalties or the prolonged conflicts and wars between Northern and Southern Sudan. Instead, they speak of kleptocracy, movement of weapons, rent seeking of loyalties, foreign missionaries, shutting of oil refineries, the political market place and the role of transnational militias, as well as international humanitarian organizations with good intentions and bad outcomes (see Alex de Waal, 2014, 2015; Hutchinson, 1996). The very notion of non-state actors, which theorists of new wars popularized (see Schuurrman, 2010; Wolfendale, 2011) and which is seamlessly incorporated in Moscona *et al.*, overlooks the simple fact that in all terrorist organizations and operations, and in so-called civil conflicts, there are multiple states involved, which fund these operations, provide weapons, military support overtly or covertly, and intimidate civilians with air raids in areas defined as enemy areas, and that powerful states like the USA and Russia are engaged in proxy wars with stakes in prolonged conflicts. [9]

It gives me no joy that the ideas honed within political anthropology that implicitly or explicitly provided support to the ends of colonial Empires are now retooled to provide support to scholarly explanations that once again obliterate the role of geopolitical interests, transnational movement of drugs, oil, and weapons, as the burden of explanations for the disorders of wars is shifted to these societies' internal features. Not surprisingly, Moscona *et al.* (2020) find themselves in agreement with experts in security studies. They state: "Such arguments are not confined to the writing of academics. Zeman (2009), a strategist with the U.S Marine Corps, has argued that there is a strong relationship between segmentary organization and 'terror'. Members of Islamist extremist groups commonly come with societies with segmentary traditions and there are explicit links between tribal organization and 'terror'" (p. 2032).

I can imagine that in a face-to-face discussion Moscona and his co-authors might ask why they are finding these strong effects of lineage organization if such segmentary forms are simply abstractions offered in response to hypothetical questions. My answer could go in two directions. First, if the scaffolding on which the explanatory framework was built – viz. that due to the model of segmentary lineages, members dispersed over large territories automatically assemble to fight for their agnatic kin – simply crumbles, then it is for economists to tell us why they are finding these large effects. There are many examples in the history of science that show that, caught in the grip of theoretical models, researchers were able to "see" empirical correspondences to their models shown later, in the wake of paradigmatic shifts in the models, to have been false, as well as debates around the resonances of models with fictions (Contessa, 2010; Hacking, 1998; Friend, 2019). Second, it is perfectly possible that the aggregate Moscona *et al.* have constructed is a false aggregate and that we will do better by looking beyond a single causative factor and going into the particularities of the cases of ongoing conflicts, wars, and genocides with a mind to look at the whole assemblage of these formations provided we remain mindful that those powerful actors, whom Moscona *et al.* cite and are producing the paradigms of security today, are themselves complicit in sustaining many of these conflicts. Meanwhile, as widely reported in the media, the USA demanded and extracted some amount in the region of 335 million dollars from Sudan, a country impoverished by an authoritarian and corrupt rule that was supported by powerful external forces, in order to take it off from the list of terrorist states. It boggles the imagination that these kinds of brute extractions are not seen as constitutive of the violence and disorder of the conflicts in Africa, as the alliance between the new cultural economics (or institutional economics) and intelligence agencies is consolidating.

Although I have occasionally slipped into an accusatory tone, my intention here is not to elevate one discipline over another but to pause and ask what deeper questions about knowledge arise as we think of concepts and their shadows. My concluding thoughts, therefore, are more in the nature of three questions.

First, if thinking cannot be completely divorced from the political milieu in which it occurs and our ideas have wider social effects, how might we begin to think co-operatively across disciplines on these matters? As Asad had reminded anthropologists back in 1973, "[…] anthropology does not only apprehend the world in which it is located but… the world also determines how it will apprehend it." (Asad, 1973, p. 12.) But what does this stance of asking how our knowledge is shaped by institutions and in what way tokens of power get misapprehended as tokens of expertise entail? Going beyond the analysis of rhetorical performances of indignation, what impact do institutional structures and material conditions of knowledge production have on the way we think of the dark sides of knowledge?

Second, does anthropology need to reconsider its whole notion of culture which allows societies to be abstracted in terms of a set of items of cultural characteristics, isolated from the hurly-burly of life? Could Moscona *et al.* (2020), for instance, have been misled into thinking that features such as unilineal descent, or the proposition that unilineal descent groups are "closed" whereas cognatic groups

are "open", by anthropology's own assumptions about culture, and if so, how? Instead of a search for cultural characteristics, would another concept such as "life forms" have allowed the enfolding of various institutions – including those across different scales – into each other, to which much anthropological literature testifies, but which tends to be ignored by economists and political scientists because it does not lend itself to neat models (Floyd, 2018).

Third, how are false aggregates produced and what are epistemological implications of the neat correlations and causal effects that some social scientists find when the institutions in question have no real empirical counterpart, as I have shown with regard to models of lineage segmentation in which abstractions held and offered in relation to hypothetical models are reified and confused with actual behaviour of people on the ground? I am not arguing that mentalities or mental models people hold are not an important part of the social, rather I am asking what questions we might legitimately ask of these modalities? For instance, the idea that lineage organization was central to Somali life, seeped into political imaginaries of scientific socialism and the vehement attacks on "tribalism" as part of the political experiment to introduce new forms of governance in Somalia, created their own political pathologies, as amply demonstrated by Lewis (2002). The point is that the programmes to build Somali nationalism did not happen in a vacuum and to assume that the geopolitical context of the cold war can be simply bracketed distorts the analysis. The impact of new laws to stamp out so-called "tribalism" need to be seen as part of the historical developments in which the history of colonialism, the stakes of new transnational flows of arms, political ideologies, as well as the very ideology of social sciences that propagated the idea of modernity as a triumph against traditionalism played a vital role in the way the imaginary of lineage forms was enfolded into the imaginary of building a thoroughly new kind of nation. One might think of the parallel with caste in India, in which the very existence of such terms as "scheduled castes", "other backward castes" attests to dynamic political processes rather than a straightforward continuity of traditional institutions. If societies are to be seen as existing *in time* rather than static entities *to which* time happens, then one needs to problematize the question of complex multiple forms that intervene in making the ontologies of social entities such as lineages, castes, nations, state, than taking their meanings for granted.

Does this whole set of issues require a rethinking of reality itself as not "frontal" and "out there", which we can confront from the outside, but as something we, as those who seek to represent it through our descriptions and our models, are a part of: "we are *in* this reality" (Benoist, 2021)?

Finally, let me reiterate that my criticisms should not be misconstrued as objections to the use of models or mathematical reasoning in economics. Indeed, I am perfectly aware that we often theorize quite effectively with inexistent objects. If the paper by Moscona and his colleagues was in the nature of a thought experiment, or if they were making a model in which they were trying to work out the logical consequences of a set of assumptions about lineage segmentation and the varying intensities of conflict by simulations, or within a logical structure of conditional truths (if... then), I would have little to object to, for that might contribute to clarifications of logical connections, or go towards showing certain impossibility conditions – a type of exercises from which I have learnt much. It is also not my point that the powers of the colonial imagination within which non-Western societies were conceptualized in terms of a lack does not have real consequences. My point is that there is enough evidence in the texts that Moscona *et al.* use, i.e. that, when it comes to action, answers offered to hypothetical questions are no substitute for actual observation, which of course was not possible because of the government actions banning feuds. Even a reconstruction of an actual feud in which some had participated would have given a better idea of the enfolding of different institutions to produce much more complexity than the mechanical model implied as Lewis, for instance, discovered in the case of Somali and to which he testified (Lewis, 1994, see also footnote 8). The problem for me is not that Moscona *et al.* give the wrong answers, but that they ask the wrong questions.

I hope a new set of conversations among and within disciplines might be made more robust through mutual commentaries, and, most of all, I hope these contribute to addressing what really matters (Laugier, 2015) for our informants, respondents, co-inhabitants, or whichever name we want to use for the flux of social and political milieus of which we are a part.

II. Heritage

Does your research in political anthropology voluntarily relate to, or at the contrary, break with one or (m)any disciplinary traditions (as places for teaching, working and carrying out fieldwork)?

I have taken the case study above to be able to argue that I have no allegiance or aversion to any tradition. Instead, I like to take a problem and ask what might be the best way to tackle that problem. Are we asking the right questions? What is the kind of vigilance we must exercise on ourselves to see that our theories and models do not become harmful, as I think the case of the movement of the model of segmentary lineage into economics and security studies is likely to become. Philosopher Stanley Cavell repeatedly expressed

the disquiet that philosophy harbours in itself the potential for violence against the everyday. The only therapy I can offer is what I have called a descent into the ordinary, which entails an attention to the concrete, an ordinary realism that eschews the desire for perfect solutions and a commitment to discover what it means to care for the world that we inhabit with others, humans and non-humans alike.

I read the literature in anthropology, philosophy, literary criticism, and political theory and have a limited understanding of the literature in economics that proves helpful (or sometimes harmful, depending on different conditions) in pursuit of the specificity of the issues that get thrown at us from our respective political milieus and our knowledge locations. But I don't start a priori with what I feel attuned to or what I feel aversion to. I discover that in the course of getting to get a grip on problems that I come across through fieldwork or through reading of particular texts. I do regret that I have not been able to bring into the conversation more of the philosophical literature from Sanskrit on very profound issues such as the nature of negation, or what is an understanding of concepts, how is the real constituted. I hope I still have time left to gather enough confidence to give one final push to make some of this happen and show how much we lose by assuming that, as far as thought is concerned, everything that is valuable is to be found in Europe, as philosophers revered for their commitment to the recognition of the other, such as Emmanuel Levinas, have no hesitation in proclaiming.

III. Contexts and fields

How does the specific (political and disciplinary) context of your fieldwork shape your own approach of the political anthropology you are conducting?

I have been working in urban slums and low-income localities in Delhi for the last twenty years and, interspersed with that filed, I have worked on violence for a long time. My work has thus addressed issues of urban poverty and health as well as issues pertaining to everyday claim-making on the state, modes of power that are quotidian, and the manner in which catastrophic violence including that in sectarian riots, and terror related to so-called "legal violence" breaks not only individuals but also communities apart. I have also been collaborating on researching issues pertaining to diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis and the modalities for implementing a global intervention to reduce time between diagnosis and treatment adherence for under-resourced communities. Here are some of the points that emerge from this research.

First, the literature on the urban poor has been intimately connected with discussions and interventions in public policy that generated such internal divisions as those between the "deserving" and the "undeserving" poor, or between the proletariat seen as the engine of history and the rest (e.g., lumpenproletariat), who were regarded as unable to engage in politics at all (Rancière, 2004). Concepts such as social capital moved from academic theorizing to the policy world in the context of framing policies to help the poor move out of what was called the "poverty trap". One of the consequences of this way of seeing the poor is that while agency is granted to certain kinds of poor, others are seen in policy discourses as populations to be managed through both the state's policing and paternalistic interventions. In one influential tradition of conceptualizing the poor, the very emergence of the poor as a distinct social category of those who are neither fully included nor fully excluded from society is seen to be a product of the relief provided them by others, as in Simmel's (1965) work. This manner of having brought up the poor within social theorizing was set to denying them any agency in their own destinies, and yet much of the work on the poor shows that they manage incredibly complex economic and political lives. An attention to these issues prompts us to ask how we may think of domesticities, kinship, politics, and the way networks, material and affective, are mobilized to enable what one might call moral economies, or everyday ethics.

Theoretical interventions such as subaltern studies did much to reclaim collective agency on behalf of those defined as subordinate, but there was a concentration on the extraordinary, or on moments of rebellion. As far as everyday life was concerned, there seemed to be an implicit agreement in the literature with Hannah Arendt's (1965) position that the poor are not capable of politics: they are so entangled in ensuring basic survival that they cannot exercise the freedom that Arendt sees as a necessary condition for collective action or deliberation that (for her) defines the domain of politics. From this perspective, the problems relating to the poor are seen as confined to problems of administration. Even when at certain specific moments, such as elections, when it is apparent that the electoral participation of the poor exceeds that of the rich (as in India), the theorization emphasizes the projection of other sensibilities (e.g. that of the religious or the sacred) to the poor to explain their enthusiasm for, say, electoral politics. These positions assume that the poor do not have the conceptual means of understanding what a vote might mean for determining their political futures – for a strong refutation of this view see Das and Randeria 2015, among others. I have written on these themes, but also held focus group meetings, workshops, and discussions in the slums with people to make available, in Hindi, the nature of our findings for their comments, and for correcting ourselves on how we understand politics.

Without any wish to romanticize the poor, or to underestimate the ways in which poverty might corrode the capacity for collective or individual action, it does seems to me that an understanding of poverty must be considered in relation to other conditions of life such as the possibility of democratic participation, the erosion of infrastructure, the denial of citizenship as in the case of refugees, the impact of

race and policies of incarceration, or the way in which livelihoods might become embroiled in drug trade or addiction, or are willfully destroyed in the name of either development or the functioning of the free market. In each of these constellations, we can discern the different ways in which poverty is experienced and how far the potential for political action, seen as the effort to bring about a different kind of everyday, is realized.

There are other themes I am interested in, such as the politics of research on urban health, the implications of big data, the manner in which we could understand the way numbers or narratives are generated, or how to think of such issues as the ethics of care (Laugier, 2015), or local justice (Merry, 2009). I would readily agree that the world makes me restless but I will register some astonishment on how I keep returning to concepts, traditions, empirical contexts, theoretical issues around the everyday and their bearing on skepticism. The best way to put all this across is to say that I am learning to see what is before my eyes.

IV. Role

What do you think is the role of the political anthropologist both in the public and intellectual debate?

Which are the "solicitations of the present" (authoritarian regimes, repressions, revolts or revolutions, riots, social mobilizations and protests, etc.) that make political anthropology important for our contemporary societies? How does the present affect or disrupt research, methodologies, engagements, interpretations and theories?

How do you position yourself in relation to commitment and political transformations? Do you find it necessary or inevitable a dialogue with social movements? If so, why and what for?

I started with a detailed case study of the way anthropological concepts such as those of stateless societies and lineage segmentation have moved into other disciplines such as economics and political science in a manner that the technical apparatus of certain disciplines manages to evacuate the role of contemporary geopolitical forces in the creation of lethal conflicts in Africa and elsewhere. I can take that case study to define my own compulsions to see how conditions for creation of knowledge are inflected with new forms of politics including the politics of knowledge creation (see Das, 2021). I am generally more interested in detailed demonstration of claims and critical observations and, to that extent, find the move from, say, general theories of justice to theories of local justice more interesting. I have also been involved in many collaborative projects in which these issues are honed to specific conceptual and pragmatic challenges. This is why I am writing on so many kinds of topics from thinking about the normativity of concepts and the place we could make for generating knowledge through to engaging philosophical traditions of India, to trying to create empirical knowledge on health markets in India, and how time for diagnosis to tuberculosis could be reduced and, as in my most recent book *Textures of the Ordinary*, what it means to bring anthropology into conversation with philosophy. All of this is anchored to my interests in everyday life, ordinary ethics, ordinary language philosophy, and the cross-cutting of anthropology with philosophy and literature. I find I am always having to learn new ways of engaging with these issues and would ideally love to go back to being a graduate student.

Thank you for the opportunity to share these thoughts with you and the readers of this exciting new journal.

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NOTES

1 I note that the Hobbesian question of order resurfaces in international relations theory in which the absence of a centralized authority to regulate inter-state relations is cast in terms of the unintended order that is produced in conditions of perpetual anarchy (see, for instance Milner, 1991). The problem of stateless societies, it seems, has multiple avatars, in political theory.

2 I find it very interesting that running through various classifications of kinship terminology or through the discussion of evolution of kinship forms is an anxiety that a political order is better secured where the kinship institutions can determine who the father is with absolute certainty. The analogy between the questions as to whether a *father* has the right to kill his son and whether a *king* has the right to kill his subject is part of the story of sovereignty in European political theory as in Filmer (1991 [1588-1653]). It is the anxiety to secure the jural place of the father and ensure smooth transition through succession and inheritance that made unilineal descent seem much more orderly than cognatic descent, and also consigned relations with other kin such as the mother or the wife under patrilineal regime to the domain of the affective and the moral. It is the anxiety around property that enshrined unilineal descent at the prominent place they have occupied in kinship theory (see Das, 2006). Of course, there are the famous cases of matrilineal descent such as the Nayars of Kerala or the Trobriand islanders in which anxiety shifts to ruling out the possibility of a child through incestuous unions rather than determining who the father is for jural reasons, but none of these complexities make it into the straightforward correlation that economists, I will consider, generate on unilineal descent, lineage segmentation and increased intensity of violence.

3 As Evans-Pritchard wrote in no uncertain terms, "Indeed the Nuer have no government, and their state may be described as an ordered anarchy." (Evans-Pritchard, 1940, p. 6.)

4 Although this will be old news to anthropologists, economists and others using anthropology produced in the 1940s and 1950s perhaps need to hear Asad's words again. I cite him on this point in some detail for that reason. As Asad wrote, "We must begin with the fact that the basic reality which made prewar social anthropology a feasible and effective enterprise was the power relationship between dominating (European) and dominated (non-European) cultures. We then need to ask ourselves how this relationship has affected the practical preconditions of social anthropology; the uses to which its knowledge is put; the theoretical treatment of particular topics; the mode of perceiving and objectifying alien societies; and the anthropologist's claim to political neutrality". (Asad, 1973, p. 1; see also Guha, 1997; Stocking, 1991). The literature on these issues is so extensive that I refrain from saying more.

5 It should be noted that while the contrast that political anthropologists made was between stateless polities and those with centralized authority, Moscona *et al.* (2020) treat the African societies without segmentary lineages in their sample as centred around the village, which is led by a village chief. Given that the village is also an important unit mobilized in various kinds of social actions, including dispute settlement among societies such as the Nuer, one would have expected much more attention to the structure of villages and camps in both the control group and the presumed "experimental group" for the testing of their hypothesis. Thus, on one side, they fail to see how villages were integrated into the traditional kingdoms, and thus did maintain distant relations of all kinds, and on the other side the changes introduced by the colonial powers in disinvesting power from the traditional chiefs and creating new kinds of chiefs as their mediators get no mention. This strategy of rule was adopted not only in states where traditional chiefs could be recognized, but also in what the colonial state characterized as stateless societies. See my later comments on the British attacks on Nuer and Dinka prophets they identified with nodes of power (see also Das, 2020, p. 305).

6 One confusion in their paper surfaces when allegiance to agnates is seen to stand independently from allegiance to cognates or affines – all of these relations could be brought under "kinship ties". It is the essential division between domestic domain and politico-jural domain in British anthropology of that period (with some notable exceptions, e.g. Edmund Leach) that manages to suggest that lineage segmentation sets in motion a mechanical process of

solidarity and opposition among agnates belonging to the same section when it stands in opposition to another lineage segment, as if cognatic kin or affines do not mediate these relations. We will see how these so-called fundamental oppositions based on a theory of unilineal descent have been made obsolete by scholars of kinship, including new kinship, later on.

7   Johnson (1982), while drawing attention to the difficult conditions of fieldwork and Evans-Pritchard's disagreements with the way colonial policy was being implemented by the then Governor of Upper Nile Province, C.A. Willis, notes the punitive expeditions against the Prophets and the fact that some violent events initiated by the Government happened in the vicinity of Evans-Pritchard's field sites. Johnson writes: "The Lou had already made their resentment of Evans-Pritchard known because of his association with the Government which had bombed them, burnt their villages, seized their cattle, took prisoners, herded them in 'concentration areas', killed their prophet Guek and had blown up and desecrated the Mound of his father Ngun Deng, their greatest prophet." (Johnson, 1982, p. 236.) I have combed through the different texts by Evans-Pritchard on the Nuer, and while we get to know where the Lou were territorially located as well as information on sections and subsections, we never learn that their habitats had been burnt, looted nor that they were placed in concentration areas by the colonial state to better control them.

8   Although Mescona *et al.* (2020) include Barth (1973) in their references, they fail to note the earlier contribution of Barth (1954) in which, considering the relation between lineage organization and endogamy in Iraqi Kurdistan, he stated that: "However, though marriage patterns do not function to define the relations between lineages, this does not assume that marriage relations and maternal ties have indeed no relevance of a structural or specifically political nature" (p. 165). Indeed, Barthes noted that lineage organization had survived only among nomadic groups. Moscona *et al.* (2020) are surprisingly casual when they extend their theory of lineage segmentation and conflict from the Horn of Africa to the Middle East, showing little awareness of the different grounds on which a model of lineage segmentation came under strong attack from scholars of the Middle East (see Caton, 1987; Meeker, 1979, 2004). In fact, even in the case of Somali, I.M. Lewis wrote of the difficulties he encountered in applying the lineage segmentation model when he actually did fieldwork. "My biggest problem was not in fending off obtrusive administrative pressures, but rather in acknowledging the inadequacy of the model of Somali society I had built up in Oxford in imitation of Evans-Pritchard's brilliant analysis of the Nuer lineage system"(Lewis, 1994, p. 14).

9   These issues have come up repeatedly in anthropological debates. For instance, in 1998, Catherine Besteman provided a succinct description of the different ways I.M. Lewis and she understood the conflict in Somalia. As she wrote: "In our conflicting views of Somalia's violent collapse, we differ perhaps most distinctly in our understandings of the nature of 'tradition', the relevance of inequality in contemporary Somalia, and the degree of change experienced Somalis in the latter part of this century. Lewis emphasizes the unchanging character of centuries-old 'tradition' in keeping lineage loyalties potent and encouraging violent behaviour; I believe Somalia's recent violence and fragmentation better understood by probing how 20th-century transformations in social structure, politics, economics, and international relations have affected and altered Somali social organization. In my original article, I asked if it is possible to ignore the effects in Somalia of 20th-century events such as colonialism, state-building, Cold War geopolitics, international aid, and the expanding economy in our quest to understand the Somali state and its destruction. I answered this question negatively, arguing that while aspects of the traditional kinship system have persisted, others have been radically transformed by these events over the past several decades. In my thought while the rhetoric of kinship remains potent, the content has changed over past several decades. Lewis answers the same question affirmatively arguing that "in the battles of the 1990s, Somalis were indeed 'doing what always done-only with greater access to more lethal weapons'". See Besteman (1998), Lewis (1998), Kapteijns (2004).

CITER CET ARTICLE   ↑

Référence électronique

AUTEUR   ↑

Veena Das

Veena Das is the Krieger-Eisenhower Professor of Anthropology at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA. Her work lies at the intersection of medical anthropology, violence, and the state. She has taken a particular interest in the philosophical and literary heritage of India and local communities, in social suffering and the ordinariness of violence, and in how ethnography generates both practical and theoretical concepts and understandings of the world. She is the author of *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (2007); *Affliction: Health, Disease, Poverty* (2015); and, most recently, *Textures of the Ordinary: Anthropological Essays after Wittgenstein* (2020).

Veena Das est professeure d'anthropologie Krieger-Eisenhower à l'Université Johns Hopkins, à Baltimore (États-Unis). Ses travaux se situent au carrefour de l'anthropologie médicale, de la violence et de l'État. Elle a porté un intérêt particulier à l'héritage philosophique et littéraire de l'Inde et des communautés locales, à la souffrance sociale et au caractère ordinaire de la violence, ainsi qu'à la façon dont l'ethnographie génère des concepts et une compréhension à la fois pratique et théorique du monde. Elle est l'auteure de *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary* (2007) ; *Affliction: Health, Disease, Poverty* (2015) ; et, plus récemment, de *Textures of the Ordinary: Anthropological Essays after Wittgenstein* (2020).

Reflections on the Scope and Practice of Political Anthropology

John Gledhill

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Mots-clés

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Keywords

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PLAN

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TEXTE

I will frame my response to the questions asked with a brief autobiographical note, because it is important to reflect on where our own politics come from. I was an undergraduate student of Philosophy, Politics and Economics at Oxford at the end of the 1960s and engaged in left-wing social and anti-imperialist activism in those heady days, in ways that went beyond student street protests. Social anthropology, then only offered to postgraduates in Oxford, seemed to promise the non-Eurocentric way of looking for the world that I had already been looking for before I went to university.

I grew up in the town of Keighley in West Yorkshire, stigmatized nationally today as an especially depressing example of the "left behind" places in a deindustrialized North of England starved of jobs and investment in public services. Yet it was easy to find grinding poverty in Keighley and the urban periphery of the metropolitan city of Bradford even when I was young. The wool textile industry had experienced only a limited revival in the face of globalization, thanks to infusions of South Asian capital and immigrant workers, some of whose descendants still work in the sweatshops brought to general public attention when they became Covid-19 hotspots in 2020. The new immigrant workers were initially ghettoized and racism manifest in all social classes, although the binary character of British colour prejudices surprised better-off South Asians whose ancestors had been introduced into Britain's Caribbean and African colonies as "buffer classes" between white planter elites and black labourers. Although some things have changed over the years, those who see the Black Lives Matter movement as an inauthentic import from the United States should try living in an ethnically mixed working-class neighbourhood. A degree of "everyday cosmopolitanism" has developed since I was an adolescent, but institutional racism, especially in the police, remains profound. The first member of my family to go to university, I was fortunate to get an elite education. Studying Ancient History at school led me to the conclusion that the stories that my teachers offered about how "Western Modernity" was rooted

in the classical "civilizations" of the Graeco-Roman world were simply ideological, along with their insistence that Africans were "people who lived in mud huts" for whom colonialization had offered an opportunity to "evolve" being brought to a tragic end by their independence. Fortunately, libraries offered books telling different stories, and my exploration of ancient "world systems" led me to think about our regional experience of capitalist industrialization and deindustrialization in terms of the colonial past and globalizing present. Thus, I set about teaching myself about that as well. I was somewhat disappointed by Oxford social anthropology in the twilight of British structural-functionalism. French theoretical ambitions impressed, but it was the work of Eric Wolf and Sidney Mintz that most inspired me. My generation's perception that anthropology itself needed decolonizing did not fall on entirely deaf ears at Oxford, as demonstrated by the chapter that Wendy James contributed to Talal Asad's *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. It should, however, give us pause that the continuing need to decolonize anthropology featured prominently in the 2019 conference of the UK Association of Social Anthropologists, and that the Black Lives Matter Protests of 2020 renewed longstanding calls to decolonize the secondary school curriculum.

I. Definition

What is political anthropology for you? How do you understand both anthropology and politics (or the political): what is politics (or the political) and what does anthropology mean to you?

Etymology and Western European philosophical traditions might encourage us to follow Hannah Arendt in finding the origins of "politics" and "the political" in the Greek slave-based *polis* (conveniently bracketing out the role of Islamic civilization in the processes of cultural transmission). But for British Social Anthropology the origin of political anthropology as an academic subfield was Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's *African Political Systems*. In a preface to this classic, sometimes interpreted, perhaps over-generously, as a reflection of his youthful anarchist sympathies, Radcliffe-Brown insisted that the idea of "the state" as an "entity over and above the human individuals who make up society" was a "fiction of the philosophers". Following Weber in saying that "the political organization of a society is that aspect of the total organization that is concerned with the control and regulation of the use of physical force", but confronted with the need to understand African societies that they could not classify as "primitive states", both he and the volume's editors cast around for other "recognized procedures", such as moral sanctions against people accused of witchcraft, that could be seen as "rudiments of what in more complex societies is the organized institution of criminal justice". In my book *Power and its Disguises*, I objected to this entire line of reasoning as unreconstructed ethnocentrism (and in my teaching tried to show that Weber had more interesting things to say). Noting Clastres's argument against the idea that power is coercive in all forms of social organization, I also argued that Fortes and Evans-Pritchard's observation that it was difficult to separate "political" from other aspects of social organization in "stateless societies" failed to recognize that the apparent autonomy of the political in the modern West enabled power relations to be represented in a way that obscured their social foundations and the way that they worked in practice.

Resisting the evolutionism of *African Political Systems* opens the way to seeing different forms of political organization as interrelated developments in a regional framework of state expansion and resistance and/or accommodation to it. More fundamentally, it opens up an agenda for political anthropology as a comparative project focused on the historical differences between state forms, cosmologies of hierarchy and power, and the different meanings that people have invested in "the state", "government", and "politics" itself. Such a project makes an analytical virtue of the anthropological holism that political scientist David Easton found so problematic, conscientiously rejecting the separation of "the political" from the social everywhere, including North Atlantic societies. It is also compatible with critiques of conceptual fetishization of "the state" as an "entity" that are different from Radcliffe-Brown's, such as Abrams's argument that "the state-idea" should be understood as a dimension of legitimation processes, or Gramsci's "extended" concept of the state, which includes the role of non-political social institutions and the inter-class and inter-institutional dynamics of the formation of historical blocs. This is not to deny that "politics" appears a specialized domain in societies in which "representation of the people" is provided by bureaucratized political parties and professional politicians, which makes it vulnerable to wholesale "anti-political" rejection, but electors often speculate on whose interests other than their own their representatives might be representing even when the precise connections remain opaque to them. One of the advantages of studying in an elite university like Oxford was that it opened windows onto the backstage connections by which social elites and political classes reproduce themselves, together with opportunities to join them for those with that ambition.

I therefore see political anthropology as a comparative project aspiring to contribute to a truly universal history of humankind and all forms of human relations with each other and with "nature" (not, of course, a universally separate ontological category). Efforts to maintain particular forms of hierarchy and power relations could provoke localized ecological crises in the pre-capitalist world, although the planetary consequences hardly compare with those produced by the evolution of the "Capitalocene". Transcending conceptual Eurocentrism is more easily achieved if we adopt a long-term perspective that "provincializes Europe" and grasp the historical processes that produced the Westphalian territorial state. Although the socioeconomic and ideological development of "Western modernity"

depended on colonial expansion in general and the new Atlantic world in particular, we should not bracket out the coeval presence of Islamic networks even in that process. History should be central for a political anthropology that aims to study the workings of power and resistances to power in a more universalizing way. Understanding the differences between "modern" states and empires and earlier formations is not of purely antiquarian interest, because although the colonial order of things generally brought radical changes in social, legal, and ethnic, as well as political organization that were often at the heart of post-colonial conflicts, certain elements and logics of the pre-colonial order of things also sometimes reasserted themselves.

Various conclusions follow from this starting point. Firstly, political anthropology is more than the study of living people by ethnographic methods. Secondly, it should not be defined in terms of ethnographic methodology, as distinct from its comparative project, because ethnography needs to be complemented by other methods and an historical perspective even when research is primarily about contemporary issues (as most of my own work has been). Thirdly, there are advantages in a "four-field" definition of anthropology even if our interest is in political anthropology. I have a particular interest, and practical experience, beginning when I was an adolescent, in archaeology. Archaeology offers opportunities to look at forms of political organization that do not have direct analogies in living societies observed ethnographically and highlights inter-regional connections. In Amazonia, for example, non-state networks of regional organization were rapidly disrupted by European invasion, but the archaeological evidence refutes the idea that these were "simple societies" whose "development" was "limited" by environmental conditions. Historical archaeology, along with biological anthropology, also offers opportunities to explore the "hidden histories" of the worlds colonized by Europeans. In the Americas, one is in understanding how indigenous societies continually changed in response to the processes of colonization, in a manner aimed at "pacifying us, together with our germs and our commodities" from their own ontological perspective, as Manuela Carneiro da Cunha put it. Another is gaining fresh insights into the lives of African slaves and their descendants who moved northwards in the United States. All kinds of anthropology can contribute to politics (and justice). The forensic anthropologists who excavated and dated mass graves made a key contribution to the trial for genocide of former Guatemalan dictator Efraín Rios Montt, for example.

The other side of this coin is that archaeology and history, as well as anthropology more broadly conceived, become subject to their own forms of politicization. For example, now that building the nation state is more important than building the revolution for China's communist rulers, they are interested in searching for archaeological evidence of the antiquity of an entity that could be considered "China". The politics of "heritage" in general has become a major topic of anthropological research, but it intersects with other themes in economic, political, and urban anthropology when poor people of colour are displaced from "historic" urban centres by elites that seek to capitalize on the tourism income generated by marketing a domesticated black cultural heritage and creativity. An apt example is the social cleansing of the historic centre of Salvador, the original colonial capital of Brazil, and the movements of resistance and contestation that process has fostered. Broadening the scope of political anthropology broadens the scope of critical and engaged research, but it also obliges us to be reflexive about the politics of our own scholarly efforts and the uses to which they may be put that we cannot completely control. For ethnography-based political anthropology, this raises questions about how best to engage with the people we study. Max Gluckman apparently told his students to keep their eyes and ears open and their mouths shut. Yet maintaining "detachment" is often unrealistic when we are not the colonial masters and our research subjects demand more of us, even if we maintain "critical distance" in our analyses. I will return to this issue later.

II. Heritage

Does your research in political anthropology voluntarily relate to, or at the contrary, break with one or (m)any disciplinary traditions (as places for teaching, working and carrying out fieldwork)?

As a young lecturer at University College London I formed part of the collective that edited the journal *Critique of Anthropology*, dedicated to radical paradigm change. We taught courses offering non-Eurocentric world systems theory perspectives, explored Marxist approaches in anthropology in critical dialogue with French colleagues, and promoted feminist anthropology, absorbing poststructuralist contributions, especially Foucault, but remaining sceptical about the "postmodern turn". My choice of Mexico as regional specialization was unusual for a British anthropologist, although I didn't feel completely comfortable being described as a "Latin Americanist" until I started doing fieldwork in Brazil as well, after moving to Manchester in 1996. These choices would be conventional for a US-trained anthropologist, but being conscious that I was the product of another "imperial anthropology", in Stocking's sense, made me anxious to embed myself in local research institutions, contribute to their teaching programmes, and avoid treating Mexican anthropologists as "informants" rather than colleagues. I have always published a good deal in Spanish, and latterly in Portuguese too, and made sure that the people that I study have access to what I write about them. This is essential for taking responsibility for the politics of our own professional activity.

Even if deeply immersive, local level ethnography is not sufficient to answer all the questions we might pose as political anthropologists, its virtues are unquestionable. It enables us to understand how ordinary people understand "the state" and contribute to its construction. We can explore formal and public encounters between politicians, state agents and citizens, but also informal relations and part of the political "backstage". We can grasp the meanings of political rituals to the participants, including their levels of cynicism about the official narratives being projected, and, indeed, the extent to which electoral politics itself can be seen as a ritual process, as proposed, for example, by Palmeira and Heredia in their model of the "political season" in Brazil. Ethnography helps us to understand the governmental roles of NGOs and other non-state actors, of which drug cartels are especially important in my Mexican research, from a bottom-up perspective. Local-level ethnographic research often reveals ambiguities not easily documented using other methodologies, including what makes or breaks regimes of local-boss rule. It can show that political parties locally do not necessarily represent what they seem to represent nationally, or ideologically, and may simply be labels adopted by political actors according to a local balance of forces in factional conflict. The same may apply to identification with social movements, including the Zapatista Army of National Liberation in Chiapas. Ethnography is likely to reveal the internal contradictions of social movements, even when they are more or less what they appear to be. But determining whether they are what they appear to be often requires us to look beyond the local level to wider, real and popularly imagined, networks of political power.

We therefore need a variety of other methodologies, and I have always accepted the argument of political scientists that there are some questions that cannot be convincingly answered without systematic quantification. It was also difficult to defend a purely local perspective in the kinds of communities in which I worked in Western Mexico, where international migration to the United States has been a central aspect of social and political life for more than a century, and continuing transnational connections remain important, across class lines. Being able to adopt a longitudinal perspective on local developments is also valuable, even when it provides few reasons to be cheerful, as in the case of the escalating violence associated with criminal cartels, whose development I have been able to follow since the early 1980s. I was able to do long-term research in Mexico because I was fortunate in securing research funding from Mexican as well as British government sources and international foundations. Although I enhanced my Mexican studies over the years by working comparatively in different places, with different social, ethnic, and political profiles, I also returned to previously studied places with some frequency. At the same time, however, it is valuable to look at micro-regional differences and compare different "local" settings with each other and in terms of the higher-level political networks and processes. This was what the students who carried out research in Chiapas under my direction succeeded in accomplishing, working in diverse locales that included zones where the neo-Zapatista movement had not achieved hegemony to produce a broader understanding of its uneven impact and other dimensions of the state's politics obscured by focusing on the EZLN.

I have been privileged in terms of the opportunities for participant observation of intimate political processes that I have managed to convince local communities to give me as an outsider. But embeddedness in local academic institutions as a teacher, as well as a researcher, also opened doors into the social worlds of Mexico's elite and political classes, and gave me an understanding of the wider political role of academic figures and trade unions. I like to think that my close involvement with institutions in the regions in which I did fieldwork transcended the traditions of "imperial anthropology". I not only participated in, but also helped to develop, outreach projects between research centres and local society, many of which were quite "political", although teaching courses to local students who went on to play significant roles in social movements sometimes produced ironic consequences. One former student who became a leader of an important indigenous autonomy movement once apologized to me for resorting to "strategic essentialism" when speaking in a public meeting that I also attended. But I did not feel inclined to challenge a little "invention of tradition" given the stakes of that particular struggle.

III. Contexts and fields

How does the specific (political and disciplinary) context of your fieldwork shape your own approach of the political anthropology you are conducting?

Latin America is a region born in the genocide of its indigenous peoples and enslaved Africans, whose history has always been shaped by imperial rivalries and interventions. It is a complicated history, since different patterns of colonization of ecologically diverse terrain, associated with variable inter-ethnic and economic relations, created "new peoples" based on biological and cultural mixing whilst also conserving patterns of ethno-racial discrimination. It is a violent and conflictive history, because existing power structures have faced repeated challenges from a variety of disaffected social forces, often entering into fragile alliances across "castes" (racialized ethnic status groups) and economic classes, which seldom ended in ways that satisfied the aspirations of their subaltern shock troops. It is no exaggeration to say that genocide has repeatedly been on the agenda of Latin American elites and, as many black and indigenous activists assert, continues to be so today.

Working on the politics of this region presents a variety of challenges. For the early generations of professional anthropologists born in the region who made their careers there, the role of the anthropologist was to support "nation-building", in a close relation with government, although assimilationist "official indigenist" anthropology was on the wane when I began research in Mexico. The transition from the oligarchic forms of governance that characterized the original Latin American republics has generally been towards "low intensity" forms of democracy still susceptible to subversion by coups in which the hidden hand of US power remains significant, as recent experiences in Brazil and Bolivia demonstrated. Much has changed in society since the era of the military dictatorships (or the end of the seventy unbroken years in national power of Mexico's Institutional Revolutionary Party). Yet anthropological studies reveal the complexity, ambiguity and limitations of political changes, including those associated with the "Pink Tide" governments. Leaving aside the compromises with elites and ways of doing politics embedded in established party systems that governments committed to redistributive policies arguably had no option but to accept, it is difficult to ignore the dependence of redistributive policies on agroexports and extractivism. One of the contradictions of the Bolivian "Indigenous State" of Evo Morales was that its macro-economically successful economic policies provoked opposition from some indigenous people, and it was the Brazilian Workers' Party-led government that initiated the environmental and social catastrophe created by the Belo Monte hydroelectric dam.

Latin America provides ample opportunities to address well-established general themes, such as patron-client relations, in both urban and rural contexts, but it was particularly central to debates about "new social movements" in the 1980s and 1990s. Ethnographically-grounded anthropological research tended to throw cold water on utopian visions of the alternatives provided by "new" movements, exploring ways in which many were reincorporated into the politics as usual of party organizations or subject to "NGOization" under formally democratic conditions. Nevertheless, new forms of social mobilization have continued to emerge, including increasing female protagonism across a range of issues and classes, and more radical indigenous and black movements confronting rural displacement by capital, socially exclusionary neoliberal models of urban development, and the violence of militarized policing aimed at keeping everyone in their proper place and defending development models even at the cost of killing small children as well as young men of colour. But anthropological research also has to explain why everyone in the same social situation does not adhere to these movements. Why, for example, does the militant US-influenced black movement in Brazilian *favelas* generally have fewer followers than the kinds of evangelical churches that the Comaroffs saw as embodying the spirit of neoliberal capitalism?

Disillusion in the global North after the heady days of the Sixties refocused attention on the "infrapolitics of everyday subaltern resistance", to invoke James Scott's terms. Yet ethnographic studies highlighted the need to analyse the internal politics of subaltern groups, as stressed by Sherry Ortner, and the difficulties of linking "everyday resistances" to structural changes in power relations. It was not simply that "communities" might divide over whether or not to oppose mining projects or resist the "gentrification" of irregular settlements created by invasions of urban land. Nor was it simply a matter of "bringing the state back in", since national and transnational non-governmental organizations were also producing "modern government" in Foucault's sense. Whilst Sahlins complained that a "Foucauldian-Gramscian-Nietzschean obsession with power" had produced "anthropology's new functionalism", his own vision of "culture" as a structurer of history, rather than an evolving product of social action and relations, including power relations, seemed backward rather than forward-looking. As Eric Wolf argued, putting power at the centre of political anthropology seemed the better way to go, provided we defined the different "modes of power" that this "polymorphous" word might denote.

Latin American is a region shaped by the geopolitics of empires, whose societies and cultures are doubly unbounded, given that migrants came to Latin American countries from a broad range of other regions, including East and South Asia, whilst Latin Americans themselves have emigrated extensively, within as well as beyond the region. Its nature encourages a vision of political anthropology with power at its heart as a multi-scalar undertaking, taking us from locality and micro-region through larger-scale regional and national-level analysis, into the domain of international relations and geopolitics. This multi-scalar approach was adopted in a major contribution to building an anthropology of power by Richard Newbold Adams in his pioneering 1970 book on Guatemala, *Crucifixion by Power*, a work that Wolf reminded his audience to read in his own essay twenty years later, a suggestion I still endorse half a century later. Many reviewers of Wolf's own *Envisioning Power* book complained that it was too "macro" and totalizing, even reinstating the "over-coherent" view of culture that Wolf himself had so frequently criticized in the past. Yet as Anthony Marcus pointed out, in the case of the Nazis, Wolf's concept of "structural power" was composed of social forces that comprise millions of people. One of the things that political anthropologists can contribute through ethnography is to tell more complicated stories about the local, quite often at the expense of optimism about the ease with which we might change the world. But at a moment of generalized crisis in which the transition from one world order to another is taking the form of a new Cold War, the case for attempting more than that seems as strong as it was in the 1970s.

IV. Role

What do you think is the role of the political anthropologist both in the public and intellectual debate?

Which are the "solicitations of the present" (authoritarian regimes, repressions, revolts or revolutions, riots, social mobilizations and protests, etc.) that make political anthropology important for our contemporary societies? How does the present affect or disrupt research, methodologies, engagements, interpretations and theories?

How do you position yourself in relation to commitment and political transformations? Do you find it necessary or inevitable a dialogue with social movements? If so, why and what for?

As far as the "solicitations of the present" are concerned, I have published a lot recently about the relationships between the resurgence of the ultra-right (I have studied historical movements too), decay of social democracy, and the growing violence of the societies of control and surveillance emerging in a context of mounting local and global capitalist contradictions. Disillusion with liberal representative democracy and rejection of professionalized party politics may intensify as the economic consequences of the current pandemic begin to be felt. Even more of humanity may fall into the condition of Agamben's "bare life", or "disposables", a concept I used when talking about Latin America's social epidemic of femi(ni)cide. Yet although the Covid-19 pandemic has unmasked the scale of precarity, poverty and inequality in both North and South, along with the specific kinds of national structural malaise revealed in British and Brazilian central government handling of the pandemic, it has also provoked new stirrings of "resistance". These include poor communities organizing themselves to do what governments fail to do, and mobilizations by "Uberized" delivery workers and Amazon warehouse workers that are not simply about low pay and precarity but bids to redefine the category of "essential workers". The key issue is whether "politics as usual" will impede return to the old "new normal" produced by the rentier character of financialized neoliberal capitalism and the development model that produced the climate crisis and pandemic.

The challenges are daunting. The post-WWII international order, which was hardly wholly admirable anyway, is unravelling. Xenophobic nationalisms threaten those forms of internationalism that are genuinely humanitarian, lacking power-laden ulterior motives. Political polarization is widespread in democracies, and alternatives to traditional social-democratic electoral parties on the "left" of the political spectrum have yet to define coherent alternatives that might build hegemony across cleavages of class, race, and ethnicity. Yet it remains dubious whether horizontal alliances between fragmented "grassroots movements" can transform the basic structures of economic and social power behind existing political systems. We still need politics, and it could benefit from a more directly politically engaged (and left-leaning) anthropology.

Yet the pandemic is likely to lead to radical changes in university institutions, whose academic knowledge production was already challenged to overcome the alternative voices diffusing scepticism about it via digital social networks. Doing research may become an increasingly scarce opportunity. Our capacity to assume a public intellectual role was already dampened by academic audit culture and the fragmenting logic of neoliberal "competitive accountability". As someone who was always an active trade unionist, I ask myself how far academics will be willing to transcend our sectional economic interest and claims to be "experts" to embrace a broader politics of care for other workers.

There are, however, different ways of being a public intellectual. Since my wife is a Brazilian academic born in Argentina who also has family in Mexico, my principal concern now is the future of Latin America. One way of being more "political" in countries of which I am not a citizen has been to adopt collaborative styles of research.

In Mexico, I decided to study an indigenous group on the Pacific Coast of Michoacán who refuse to be "ventriloquized" by any outsider, including the EZLN's *subcomandante* Marcos, somewhat discomforted by their questioning when he paid them a personal visit as an allied "community in resistance". Convincing a community assembly to let me live there was a challenge, but once I was allowed in, people were prepared to discuss the findings of "critically distanced" research as they planned their responses to new external threats posed by mining as well as methamphetamine and cocaine processing and trafficking. Community demands shaped much of my research agenda. I reconstructed their whole, remarkable, postcolonial history and strengthened their land claims by revealing the anomalies that had characterized the official process of demarcating their territory. My ethnography documented a contemporary religious and ritual life that was integral to their resilience as a self-governing entity jealous of its autonomy, but I could also show how it had changed and adapted in the face of new challenges and new enemies. "The community" did not lack internal factionalism. The participation of community leaders in different political parties and the broader politics of the narco-municipality was one source of conflict, not easily removed from the backstage even after the communal assembly voted to ban political parties and participation in the state's electoral processes. Yet even after external violence intensified, the deep structures that bound eventually proved stronger than the conjunctural ties and events that divided. This research was collaborative in the sense that it supported the community's struggles to determine its own future by defending its territory, understood in an indigenous sense that links cosmologically coded space to identity rather than in the non-indigenous "land rights" bureaucratic sense. The two principles coexisted in tension, but the former remained encompassing, because it gave a meaning and dignity to subaltern lives that *mestizo* neighbours had often failed to understand.

My most recent collaboration, from 2006 onwards, is with a community on the urban periphery of Salvador, Bahia, carried out with Maria Gabriela Hita and students from the Federal University of Bahia. Bairro da Paz is a large *favela* which has a history of "resistance", but is more socially, religiously, and politically heterogenous than my indigenous example. Conflicts, especially between members of the neo-Pentecostal Universal Church of the Kingdom of God and followers of Candomblé, can be acute. Politics, which involves militancy in the radical Black Movement as well as political parties of the left, right and centre, also raises passions, and although the community is seen as uniformly "black" by middle class outsiders, there was a backlash against the PT's affirmative action policies from some lighter skinned residents. Our aim was to support community leaderships in their efforts to construct an overarching representative body that could mediate these divisions, serving as a forum for bringing different kinds of community organizations together to produce diagnostics of problems that could be presented to governmental officials as demands for action backed by everyone. The object of the exercise was to change the terms of negotiation not only by ensuring that "the community" would speak with one voice, but also by presenting demands transparently in public meetings controlled by community members and not by outside authorities, a break from established practices of "popular participation", even when government did not resort to finding a leader to co-opt as representative of a "popular consensus" that did not actually exist. Not surprisingly, this experiment had its ups and downs, but it did produce some successes. Our role as academics was not simply to provide useful data on the basis of our research, technical support, and advice on navigating the labyrinth of bureaucracy. Our team, along with an important Catholic NGO and some other external organizations that worked in the neighbourhood, was a member of the new organization. We could not keep our mouths shut because we were required to contribute to the collective deliberations before the public meetings, although we deferred to community leaders and residents in those.

This, then, is a type of collaboration in which the researchers become co-responsible for political outcomes. Our ethnographic observations contributed to evaluation sessions on what had and had not been achieved, as we all worked to make the organization more effective. Even in the midst of a pandemic that makes traditional ethnography impossible, we can continue to keep in touch with Bairro da Paz through WhatsApp, an everyday means of communication for everyone. Since social media "fake news" played a crucial role in the 2018 elections in Brazil, there is some purpose in pursuing digital ethnography. It is not an adequate substitute for the full panoply of methods we would normally employ in research on political life, another challenge facing anthropologists at this time of multiple, intersecting, global crises. Yet the most profound challenge is ensuring that we are not just talking amongst ourselves.

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AUTEUR

John Gledhill

John Gledhill is Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester and a fellow of the British Academy and Academy of Social Sciences. He has conducted ethnographic and historical research on society and politics in Brazil and Mexico, in both rural and urban contexts, and with mestizo, indigenous and afro-descendent communities. He also writes on broader comparative issues, and his best-known general contribution to political anthropology is his book *Power and its Disguises* (1994; 2000). His most recent books are *La cara oculta de la inseguridad en México* (2017); *The New War Against the Poor: The Production of Insecurity in Latin America* (2015); (editor, with Mariela Gabriela Hita and Mariano Perelman) *Disputas em torno do espaço urbano: processos de [re]produção/construção e apropriação da cidade* (2020) and (editor) *World Anthropologies in Practice: Situated Perspectives, Global Knowledge* (2016).

John Gledhill est professeur émérite en anthropologie sociale à l'Université de Manchester, membre de la British Academy et de l'Academy of Social Sciences. Il mène des recherches ethnographiques et historiques sur la société et la politique brésiliennes et mexicaines, en milieu rural et urbain, ainsi qu'auprès des communautés métisses, indigènes et de celle des Afro-descendants. Il publie également des études comparatives plus larges sur différentes questions. Sa contribution générale la plus connue à l'anthropologie politique est *Power and its Disguises* (1994 ; 2000). Ses derniers ouvrages parus sont *La cara oculta de la inseguridad en México* (2017) ; *The New War Against the Poor: The Production of Insecurity in Latin America* (2015). En tant qu'éditeur scientifique, il a également publié *Disputas em torno do espaço urbano: processos de [re]produção/construção e apropriação da cidade*, avec Mariela Gabriela Hita et Mariano Perelman (2020), et *World Anthropologies in Practice: Situated Perspectives, Global Knowledge* (2016).

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Power and the Politics of Anthropology

Margaret Jolly

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Mots-clés

Pacifique Sud, luttes autochtones, féminisme, décolonial, anthropologie historique

Keywords

South Pacific, indigenous struggles, feminism, decolonial, historical anthropology

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- III. Contexts and fields
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TEXTE

I. Definition

What is political anthropology for you? How do you understand both anthropology and politics (or the political): what is politics (or the political) and what does anthropology mean to you?

When I first started studying anthropology at the University of Sydney from the late 1960s, political anthropology was a subfield dominated by a formalistic, classificatory approach to political systems which divided polities into stateless and state systems and grappled with perduring questions such as what precipitated the emergence of the state. Framed by a structural-functionalist vision that compartmentalized institutions, it rarely pondered fundamental questions about the nature of power *per se*, or what we might mean by "politics". That rather staid, comfortable vision of "politics" was being challenged both beyond and within the academy as the energy of powerful social movements – anti-war and civil rights movements in the United States, decolonization struggles across the globe, feminist and gay liberation movements, and the student movements of 1968 – swirled around us and engaged many of us baby anthropologists. My own engagement in the movement against the anti-Vietnam war, the second wave feminist movement in Sydney and in support of Indigenous decolonial struggles in both Australia and Vanuatu raised critical questions about knowing power and the power of knowing. I was especially influenced by the feminist credo – the "personal is political" – and its embodied practice in consciousness-raising groups, which palpably connected the microcosmic character of intimate life with collective, sedimented power relations manifest as "structures". These engagements, as much as the scholarly influences of male theorists who dominated intellectual life in that time and place, like Marx, Foucault, and Lacan, prompted critical questions about what power is and how it is manifest – not

just in the gross structures of sovereign states and imperia but in the capillary powers coursing through embodied persons, creating subjects who obey, accommodate, resist, evade. I was persuaded by the fundamental Foucauldian insight that power is not a thing, as in liberal visions of social contracts and property, but a circulating flow that is not merely repressive. Power operates through discourses claiming truths, truths that can produce disciplined, conforming subjects, or who might challenge those empowered truths. I was especially concerned with how hegemonic power and self-surveillance might be unsettled or undone.

The power of anthropology as a discipline then and now continues to be grounded in that immersive practice of ethnography we call "fieldwork". The radical critiques of the very notion of the "field" and the practice of ethnography were yet to come (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). But feminist anthropology in the 1970s had earlier raised cognate questions about the "androcentricity" of anthropology and of fieldwork in particular. We stressed how ethnographers, male and female, had tended to privilege male interlocutors and the legitimacy of masculine perspectives on "culture", for example in structuralist theories about the "exchange of women", or the conjugation of dubious Eurocentric binaries in formulations such as male:female or culture:nature (see Rosaldo and Lamphere, 1974).

I was attuned to both feminist and decolonial concerns in my first doctoral fieldwork in Vanuatu, but less sensitive to how the values dominating anthropology in "Melanesia" at the time (what Trouillot, 2003, would later term "the savage slot") had led me to choose to live with people who were some of the most "traditional" or "remote" in an archipelago we now call Vanuatu. In 1970, this place was called the New Hebrides/Nouvelles-Hébrides, subject to the joint colonial influence of Britain and France, the Condominium, or the "Pandemonium" government as some preferred. Permission for my fieldwork had been granted through the office of the British Resident Commissioner – but that was no guarantee of my local acceptance, especially by the feisty anti-colonial, anti-Christian folk of the "*kastom*" villages of the southeast of Pentecost. When I was accepted and welcomed, successively in Pohurur and Bunlap, the relation between state-based colonial power (which had legitimized the dispossession of vast tracts of land and rendered Indigenous peoples' subjects, not citizens) and the gender politics of anti-colonial struggles became palpable (Jolly, 1994; Rawlings, 2015).

Kastom, a pervasive and powerful concept in Bislama (the pidgin lingua franca of Vanuatu) is a labile language of legitimacy and is much debated. It embraces not just the precolonial practices of ancestors but the persisting "ways of the place". Christians saw/see themselves as conjoining *kastom* and Christianity in the balance of everyday life – like a canoe and its outrigger. Those with whom I lived, who were then strongly anti-Christian, rather saw their own way of life as the true embodiment of *kastom*. In daily practice, the differentiation of gender was paramount. Boys and girls were socialized differently; after circumcision boys wore a pandanus penis sheath (plaited by women, dyed by men), girls wore a pandanus skirt which only women fashioned. Work was gendered – in the gardens, herding pigs, fishing, and hunting. Women and girls were primarily but not exclusively responsible for hauling wood and water, and for nurturing babies and children. Men and women cooked on different fires in shared family dwellings; adult men retired often to an exclusive men's house to drink kava (women were denied this drug which was thought to make them infertile). A woman moved a short distance to her husband's place on marriage but, unlike a man, did not make long journeys to other islands in the archipelago or overseas, to work on plantations or in towns or to engage in strategic political exchanges.

As a young white woman from Australia, it was challenging to conform to such quotidian protocols, but abiding by most was a condition of being accepted and adopted, becoming less of an *aisalsaliri* (a "floating foreigner") and more of an *isin na ut lo* ("a woman of this place"). In early writing I depicted this ideologically charged performance of *kastom* not so much as a perpetuation of ancestral practices but as a contemporary political choice. Much past practice had been transformed by men working first as indentured and then waged labourers on plantations, by the local incursions of the cash economy, by "pacification" and colonial controls, even of a divided and aporetic state, and by the ocean of Christians surrounding them. I depicted their staunch adherence to *kastom* as a self-conscious practice of anti-colonial resistance (Jolly, 1982, 1994). This resistance likely amplified male dominance, corralling women's agency within localized structures in a way distinct from women in Christian villages. In the struggle for independence throughout the 1970s, male chiefs in the *kastom* enclave were courted by various parties but remained highly suspicious of how *kastom* had been appropriated by Christian leaders like Father Water Lini, an Anglican priest from North Pentecost, in the wider struggle for independence. Leading the Vanua'aku Pati to power, Lini became the inaugural Prime Minister of the independent state of Vanuatu, declared on July 30, 1980.

My sense of the intimate entanglement between gender and colonial power subsequently developed at a different scale. Conversations with Grace Mera Molisa, a powerful leader in nationalist and women's struggles were crucial in this. From the matrilineal, Anglican regions of the island of Ambae, educated overseas in a New Zealand school, and then at the University of the South Pacific in Suva, Grace was the epitome of a new generation of women leaders who rose to national prominence if not to national "political" leadership. An early core member of the Vanua'aku Pati, she was appointed Second Secretary of the Ministry of Social Affairs. She was a member of the National Constitution Committee and signatory to the Constitution in 1979, along with her husband Sela Molisa, also a politician. She was personal advisor and spokeswoman for PM Walter Lini between 1987 and 1991 but left that role after political differences. She tried unsuccessfully to enter parliament and established a pressure group to help other women enter politics. She left the Vanua'aku Pati after they failed to endorse a single woman in the 1998 general election. In collections of forthright poetry and searing speeches, she

revealed the yawning gap between the independence of the nation and the lack of freedom experienced by ni-Vanuatu women (Mera Molisa, 1987a, 1987b; Jolly, 1991a). She saw introduced institutions like the state as intensifying male domination and argued that *kastom* had been resurrected like "a Frankenstein's corpse" to intimidate women and the powerless. She drew on CEDAW (the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) and the language of human rights, translating and "vernacularizing" the discourse to promote gender equality (see Merry, 2006). Grace's life's work, until her untimely death in January 2002, evinced how "power" could be exercised beyond the parameters of an excluding state apparatus, even one that was allegedly "postcolonial".

II. Heritage

Does your research in political anthropology voluntarily relate to, or at the contrary, break with one or (m)any disciplinary traditions (as places for teaching, working and carrying out fieldwork)?

The course of my own research – starting from a highly localized study to broader scales which encompassed the country of Vanuatu, and progressively to other countries in the Pacific region is also characteristic of trajectories in the discipline as a whole. My early work focused not just on gender relations, but how we might interpret the power manifest and accumulated in hierarchies of rank – whereby men (and to a lesser extent women) assumed more and more elevated titles, through protracted rituals in which pigs were exchanged and sacrificed and pandanus textiles exchanged. How did the divine power accumulated in such rites afford the title holder the power to control resources and exercise power over other persons? (Jolly, 1994) Early preoccupations involved comparisons with other rank systems in North Vanuatu and a consideration of how the politics of these grade systems interacted with colonially introduced, but locally legitimated, "chiefs" (all men) (Jolly, 1991b).

Although ethnographic studies grounded in particular cultures and language groups continue in contemporary anthropology of the western Pacific – and especially in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu (witness the stellar ethnography of John Taylor in North Pentecost, 2008, and Katherine Lepani in the Trobriands, 2012), there has also been a significant scaling up to national, regional, and even global scales. So, in Papua New Guinea for instance, the early research of Robert Foster focused on New Ireland (1995), then moved to the national scale in a study of "nation-making" in PNG (2002), and then to the consideration of globalization through the lens of the Coca-Cola company (2004). In Vanuatu, Greg Rawlings linked a concentrated study of the peri-urban village of Pango, as it was being fundamentally transformed by the commodity economy, and the leasing of land, with the politics of the tax haven at local and global scales (Rawlings, 1997). Eric Wittersheim early disrupted the mode of highly localized anthropological research in his studies of political elites, focused on the capital, Port Vila (2006), and also made compelling ethnographic films exploring human relations in fieldwork. Miranda Forsyth, a lawyer who deployed ethnographic methods, looked at the relation between indigenous forms of law and justice, and introduced legal systems across the archipelago (2009). Then, she examined debates about intellectual and cultural property at a regional and global scale, and pursued questions of gender violence and restorative justice in Papua New Guinea and more broadly. Later, another legal anthropologist, Siobhan McDonnell combined a grounded study of the role of "masters of modernity" in land dispossession in North Efate with a forensic analysis of the "shadow state" and corrupt politicians in processes of land-leasing, real estate development, and tourism (2017, 2022). She collaborated with the Honourable Ralph Regenvanu, when he was Minister of Lands, in drafting and effecting land reform legislation that successfully stalled land dispossession, even as those laws remain vulnerable to politically turbulent coalitions in successive parliaments.

Anthropological studies of power have broadened in scale in both place and time. A crucial factor in this was the emergence of a historical anthropology which brought an ethnographic sensibility to the study of the past and especially the study of colonialism. My own research was reoriented in this direction from the 1980s – partly precipitated by the moratorium on foreign research in Vanuatu for ten years after Independence (which I strongly supported, even though it halted my ethnographic work on Pentecost). Grace Mera Molisa was one of the prime movers in this ban on foreign fieldwork, inspired by the desire to promote more Indigenous research, akin to that of the *filwokas* associated with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre. My redirection was motivated by that long ban, by changes in my domestic life (especially becoming a mother), and by exciting developments in anthropological approaches to colonialism. This was manifest in the work of anthropologists like Bernard Cohn and Nicholas Dirks in India, Jean and John Comaroff, and Johannes Fabian in Africa, Ann Laura Stoler in Southeast Asia, and Sally Engle Merry, Don Brenneis, Roger Keesing, Marshall Sahlins, Alban Bensa, Serge Tcherkézoff, and Nicholas Thomas in the Pacific.

Sahlins and Thomas offered innovative (if rather divergent) interpretations of the "encounters" between Pacific peoples and the agents of European colonialism from early exploratory voyages onwards. I became engaged in cognate projects – suggesting how contrastive figures of women in the eastern and western Pacific were fundamental in emergent European ideas of race (Jolly, 2012), and arguing that a stress on mutual exchange in early colonial encounters occluded violence, bleaching the blood from the beach. New anthropological perspectives were thus brought to the study of Pacific history, asking questions not just about how Europeans saw

Pacific peoples and, on the basis of preconception and embodied experience, created hierarchies of race, but about how Pacific peoples saw and experienced these white strangers. Did Indigenous Hawaiians see Captain Cook as a manifestation of their god Lono, as Sahlins proposed? Many studies such as this aspired to offer a new view of the entanglement of Pacific and European peoples, a "double vision" from both sides of the beach. Yet there was still an immense challenge when scholars had such a surfeit of sources – texts, maps, images from Europeans but were less able to immerse themselves in Indigenous languages and appreciate the histories of Pacific peoples – told in story, song and dance, genealogies of origin, movement and dwelling, materialized in the ground and artifacts and, after Christian conversion, documented in texts in Indigenous languages. Chris Ballard (2014) consummately laments the failure of Pacific historians, even historical anthropologists, to appreciate the richness and the power of these alternative sources, suffused with a different sense of historicity, of what counts as telling truths about the past.

Sally Engle Merry's work was especially compelling in revealing the crucial significance of the introduction of Anglo-American law in the colonization of Hawai'i by the United States (2000). It linked questions about land dispossession, the development of sugar plantations, and the overthrow of the Hawaiian monarchy by a cartel of American interests with the transformation of intimate relations promoted by Christian models of sexuality, gender, and domestic life (see also Jolly and Macintyre 1989). Her work was expanded by Kanaka Maoli historians such as Lilikalā Kame'eleihiwa (1992), Jonathan Osorio (2002), and Noenoe Silva (2004), who used not just the archives of white settlers, but texts written in the Hawaiian language and Indigenous genealogies and stories. Ty Kāwika Tengan (2008) and J. Kēhaulani Kauanui (2008) showed how transformations in the intimate relations of gender and sexuality were entangled with macrocosmic imperial processes: Christian conversion, land dispossession, legislation about Hawaiian "blood", militarization, and mass tourism.

III. Contexts and fields

How does the specific (political and disciplinary) context of your fieldwork shape your own approach of the political anthropology you are conducting?

Although I grew up as an anthropologist, and later trespassed into the discipline of history, I have always had a strong transdisciplinary sensibility. This has been cultivated over decades because of the conjoint influences of gender studies and Pacific studies.

The movement of feminist knowledge out of discussion groups and marginalized feminist journals into universities started from the 1970s. We were wary as to what this institutionalization would mean – in terms of the dilution of the radical, collective character of the knowledge and the recreation of knowledge as a commodity, authored by teachers and sold to students paying ever higher fees. Our fears were soon realized. As a graduate student at the University of Sydney, I was employed casually to teach the first course in feminist anthropology in 1971. At least that was what I wanted to call it. But the Professor of Anthropology at the time refused that title and insisted on "The Anthropology of Women", and although I had already written the lectures and organized an exciting film program for the whole term, he summarily declared that a male staff member, Les Hiatt, should teach the final three weeks. Fortunately, the course proved very popular and my lectures were packed with many people sitting in. But I refused to teach it again under those conditions and accepted a position at Macquarie University where the Department of Anthropology and Comparative Sociology was headed by a Professor more open to radical changes – Chandra Jayawardena.

From the early days of second-wave feminism, we were aware of how the very nature of academic scholarship and the creation of disciplines was saturated by masculinist values. We were aware that the problem was not just about numbers – of getting more women into academic positions and positions of seniority – but of knowledge, of radically changing the frames which disciplines created – the focus and methods of study, what knowledge was valued, and what was seen as excellent. It was clear that certain disciplines were more porous and more open to feminist transformations. In Australia, at least, the disciplines of anthropology, history, and sociology effected radical changes in the last decades of the twentieth century, generating feminist innovations and impacts. Still, as contemporary studies by my ANU colleagues Fiona Jenkins, Helen Keane, and Marian Sawer (2020) reveal, disciplines like philosophy, economics, and political science are still supremely masculinist. They remain male dominated both in terms of numbers and in the character of the knowledge they create and disseminate. In Australia, feminist economics (which has robustly challenged the exclusion of care from the "economy" and promoted gender responsive budgets) is still described by the dominant profession and its associations as "heterodox". At least that is consistent with seeing malestream orthodox economics as a form of theology!

The institutionalization of feminism in higher education confronted the conundrum of both working within and between disciplines. And, as our politics matured, it was recognized that both were needed – to promote feminist revisioning within the disciplines, but also to build transdisciplinary programs – first of women's studies and later gender studies. Today at the ANU, where I work, we fortunately have both a robust undergraduate program in Gender, Sexuality and Culture and a suite of more than sixty undergraduate courses which bring a feminist perspective to the disciplines. Transdisciplinary collaboration and outreach is promoted through the work of our

cross-campus Gender Institute which funds grants and organizes public lectures, seminars, masterclasses, and reading and writing groups (which have in the context of Covid-19 continued online). But the valuation of such transdisciplinary collaboration, especially in research, has been challenged by "audit culture" and pervasive quantitative measures of research outputs and citations. These measures, as everywhere, often privilege the genres of publication of the natural sciences and moreover have involved a "redisciplining" in both senses. Fields of research codes (FORs) used by the Excellence in Research Assessment process (ERA) in Australia and by the Australian Research Council in the process of assessing grants are grounded in "disciplined" knowledge, despite a rhetorical celebration of inter- or trans-disciplinary research.

My own desire to pursue insights in a transdisciplinary way has been easier given the fact that my research is focused on the Pacific. The growth of Pacific Studies as a field, especially at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa and in some contexts in Aotearoa New Zealand, has celebrated a transdisciplinary approach. This is less true of the ANU where I work, where the strong, disciplinary genealogies of anthropology, archaeology, history, linguistics, and political science in the Pacific continue in staff research and graduate programs. Still, there is a challenge, more apparent in some undergraduate offerings in Pacific Studies, to nurture a more transdisciplinary perspective. It is inspired by the reframing of the Pacific offered by Epeli Hau'ofa (2008). In visionary essays like "Our Sea of islands", he displaced a view of the region as small, insular, and aid-dependent with a vision of Oceania, connected by the vast ocean, embracing the islands and the Pacific diaspora, and characterized by movement across space and time, from double-hulled canoes to jumbo jets. This vision is often coupled with a pedagogy which, apropos models for Pacific Studies proposed by Terence Wesley-Smith, favours an empowerment rationale. This entails a thoroughgoing decolonial interrogation of the whiteness of knowledge about the Pacific, a deeper consideration of what constitutes Indigenous Pacific knowledge, and a staunch desire to embrace and promote scholars of Pacific ancestry.

IV. Role

What do you think is the role of the political anthropologist both in the public and intellectual debate?

Which are the "solicitations of the present" (authoritarian regimes, repressions, revolts or revolutions, riots, social mobilizations and protests, etc.) that make political anthropology important for our contemporary societies? How does the present affect or disrupt research, methodologies, engagements, interpretations and theories?

How do you position yourself in relation to commitment and political transformations? Do you find it necessary or inevitable a dialogue with social movements? If so, why and what for?

As I see the arc of my career, first as an anthropologist and historian of the Pacific and now increasingly as a transdisciplinary scholar of gender and Pacific Studies, I have tried to sustain a position that connects intellectual and public debate. Clearly a focus on gender, inspired by the politics of second-wave feminism, connected major public challenges in the move to transform societies and promote gender equality with the challenges of creating new knowledge and pursuing scholarly feminist research. The insights of feminist anthropology were crucial in public debates as to whether all societies were male dominated, and whether this was a natural or a cultural universal. Anthropologists and historians were important public intellectuals in showing the diversity of gender relations across time and space and pondering the reasons for this. In the context of second-wave feminism in Sydney, I was opposed to the essentialism of radical feminism and the capitalist presumptions of most liberal feminists. I identified as a socialist feminist in this period and favoured materialist explanations of male domination. I was convinced that the inequalities of gender powerfully intersected with those of race and class, that there were profound differences and inequalities between women, and that these were as important as those between women and men. This approach, evinced in the early publications of British feminists, such as Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1989), was named "intersectionality" by Kimberle Crenshaw, a black feminist lawyer in the United States (1991). The crucial insight was to think not in additive terms about the holy trinity of oppressions – of gender, race, and class – but how such dimensions of individual and collective identity (broadened to include religion, sexuality, ability, etc.) were interactive and mutually constitutive.

My sense of inequalities between women was, from the 1980s onwards, fostered by conversations with Grace Mera Molisa about the differences between what she perceived as the individualism of "Women's Lib" in Australia and the collective orientation of women's movements in the Pacific. Grace, like many Pacific women leaders of the period, eschewed the "F" word of feminism as a colonial imposition. More Pacific women are now willing to embrace an identity as feminists, and I agree with Sara Ahmed (2017) that the travelling story of feminism as an imperial gift to women of colour needs to be challenged. But the political problems of the relations between white and non-white feminisms have been long-standing and continue. From the 1980s, black feminists and women of colour in the US, UK, and South Asia and Indigenous women in Australia delivered angry and resounding critiques of how colonialism and slavery had created huge inequalities between women and how the issues which were prominent in the agenda of middle-class white

feminists were not necessarily appropriate to them. So, for instance, a focus on abortion as a woman's right to choose was at odds with the history of forced sterilization, contraception, and child removal for non-white women. Ideas of reproductive rights needed to be far more nuanced and sensitive to address and redress these differential experiences and differential harms.

Yet we still find a certain genre of white feminism that too often aspires to talk on behalf of Pacific women, and even to "save" them from the domination of Pacific men. This "salvationist" posture has a deep colonial history. As I showed in some of my earlier writings about Vanuatu (Jolly, 1991c), it was sedimented early in the perceptions and programs of white Christian missionary women, who saw their life's work not only as saving heathens for Christ but as saving women from what they saw as the oppression of hard manual labour, forced marriages, and gender violence. As Lila-Abu Lughod (2013) has shown, such old colonial postures can be rechoreographed in contemporary geopolitics – as in the discourse of Laura Bush and others that saving Muslim women was integral to the war on terror. Such claims of saving Muslim women (and even forcibly de-veiling them) have been part of the Islamophobia generated in Australia by threats of domestic terrorism and the securitization of borders, even against refugees fleeing such terror and tyranny overseas.

In the Pacific context, the salvationist tones of white feminists can still be heard, especially in relation to gender violence in countries like Papua New Guinea. Without denying the very real problems of gender violence in PNG, and indeed across the region – this is a problem where Pacific women need to take the lead. At the outset, it is important to acknowledge that gender violence is ubiquitous globally – for instance in Australia one in six women are subjected to physical or sexual violence by a cohabiting partner, and one woman is murdered by a current or former partner every week. In PNG, the rates and the legitimacy of gender violence may be even higher, but it is important not to blame this on a monolithic view of "culture". This is not just because in a country like PNG there is huge cultural diversity and large differences in gender relations, but also because some of the potent drivers of gender violence in PNG derive from external sources – such as development grounded in extractive industries and the introduction of HIV, which became a generalized epidemic (see Jolly, Stewart and Brewer 2013). Aid and development programs to redress gender violence funded by foreign countries, NGOs, or multilateral agencies too often fail and are often labelled as "foreign" intrusion by men. More recent research, which has employed PNG researchers such as Fiona Hukula and Michelle Nayahumui Rooney working with Miranda Forsyth, have rather shown the crucial importance of Indigenous perspectives and local control in programs to redress gender violence.

Such problems of countering the salvationist impulses of foreigners and decolonizing power and knowledge in the Pacific are also central to the research we are currently pursuing on climate change and gender in Fiji, Vanuatu, and the Marshall Islands. Climate change is seen by the leaders of all Pacific countries as the biggest threat to their existence, a stance recently affirmed by the communiqué of the Pacific Island Forum Leaders meeting in Tuvalu in August 2019. (The 2020 meeting due to be held in Port Vila on July 30, to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of Vanuatu's independence, had to be postponed and was held virtually due to border closures because of Covid-19). There is little doubt that the Pacific region is contributing the least to and suffering the most from climate change induced by ever rising greenhouse gases in our atmosphere. Sea level rise, the most visible icon of climate change, is affecting not just low-lying atolls in Tuvalu, Kiribati, and the Marshall Islands, but the coasts of large volcanic islands with erosion and the salinization of fresh water sources and gardens. Anthropogenic climate change is also occasioning more extreme and frequent natural disasters such as supercyclones and, less obvious to outsiders, shifts in the seasonality of ground and tree crops, and of the movements of fish, which threaten subsistence food sources and food security (Jolly, 2019).

All of these problems have been studied by environmental scientists for decades. In our project we have confronted questions about the relationship between introduced environmental science and Indigenous knowledge and practice. Whereas earlier programs tended to focus on mitigation and adaptation to what was conceived as an external threat, recent programs have rather focused on building local "resilience" in communities to respond to the risks of disasters and climate change more broadly. But important as such reconfigurations are, they risk deflecting attention from the causes of climate change in the fossil-fuelled economies of countries and corporations, where the responsibility lies. Australia often appears in the region as a generous donor in times of natural disasters such as cyclones. But increasingly these disasters are not "natural" but caused by those humans who are heavily polluting our planet. Australia is among the worst countries, second only to Saudi Arabia in terms of greenhouse emissions per capita.

What inspired me to start researching climate change in the Pacific was in part my despair and anger at the "climate wars" that have dragged on in Australian politics. Parties within the federal Coalition (Liberals and Nationals) refuse to take climate change seriously (and indeed some are even denialists). They continue to serve the interests of the coal and gas lobbies, even though it is clear that the cheapest energy is now renewable energy – from sun, wind, and water. At the last COP 25 meeting in Madrid, our Energy Minister, Angus Taylor used the cheap accounting trick of carryover carbon credits in refusing to commit to raising Australia's targets to control our emissions. And, in late 2020, our Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, is suggesting that Australia's recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and associated recession will be "gas-fired". This was expected since the person appointed to head the National Commission on Covid Recovery was a CEO from the oil and gas industry. Given this blind intransigence in the face of a global climate crisis I feel compelled me to protest as an Australian citizen (see Jolly, 2019, 2021). And as a scholar of the Pacific, I suggest that if Australia is concerned to win

back trust and support from Pacific countries, as we face the rival influence of China, a rising power with an escalating totalitarian stance at home and abroad, the most important thing we might do is change Australia's policies on climate change and urgently reduce our greenhouse emissions.

In conclusion, I want to say that I do think it is important for anthropologists, like all scholars, to be public intellectuals. Clearly, we have had some inspiring exemplars, two of whom have recently passed away. David Graeber not only wrote searing indictments of capitalism but was an anarchist involved in the Occupy Movement. Sally Engle Merry was a scholar of colonialism and gender who was heavily engaged with UN debates about gender violence and human rights and who forcefully challenged the "seduction of quantification" whereby qualitative data is eschewed as anecdotal and not "evidence". I mourn them both. My own scholarly and public contributions have been less grand, but I trust have contributed something to the cause of gender and decolonial struggles in what is an increasingly unequal and challenging world.

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CITER CET ARTICLE ↑

AUTEUR ↑

Margaret Jolly

Margaret Jolly, born in Sydney (Australia) in 1949, is an historical anthropologist recognized as a world expert on colonialism and gender issues in Oceania. She is emerita professor in the College of Asia and the Pacific and was director of the Gender Institute at the Australian National University in Canberra until 2020. She is a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia and a recipient of the Order of Australia. Among her numerous books are *Divine Domesticities. Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific* (edited with Hyaeweol Choi), ANU Press, 2014; *Sites of Desire/Economies of Pleasure. Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific* (edited with Lenore Manderson), University of Chicago Press, 1997 and *Women of the Place: Kastom, Colonialism and Gender in Vanuatu*, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993.

Margaret Jolly, née à Sydney (Australie) en 1949, est une chercheuse en anthropologie historique connue pour ses travaux sur le colonialisme et les questions de genre dans le Pacifique. Elle est professeur au College of Asia and the Pacific et dirige le Gender Institute à l'Australian National University (Canberra). Elle est membre de

l'Académie des sciences sociales australienne et a été honorée de l'Ordre d'Australie. Parmi ses nombreux ouvrages, on peut citer : *Divine Domesticities. Christian Paradoxes in Asia and the Pacific* (dir., avec Hyaeweol Choi), ANU Press, 2014; *Sites of Desire/Economies of Pleasure. Sexualities in Asia and the Pacific* (dir., avec Lenore Manderson), University of Chicago Press, 1997 et *Women of the Place: Kastom, Colonialism and Gender in Vanuatu*, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993.

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Field-defying Political Anthropologies

Silvia Posocco

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Mots-clés

pratiques de connaissance, désidentification, identification croisée, horizon post-politique, zombies, violence, viralité, Guatemala, collaboration, plurilogues

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PLAN

TEXTE

I. Definition

What is political anthropology for you? How do you understand both anthropology and politics (or the political): what is politics (or the political) and what does anthropology mean to you?

The relation between anthropology and the domain of the political is very important to me in the sense that it orients and organises my understanding of anthropological research. It informs my research and writing endeavours in several registers in fundamental ways. As I reflect on your opening questions, I find them to be charged with great interpellatory force. They come across as an invitation to put forward a manifesto, a field-defining programme. Here, I think I am better placed to try and articulate a field-*defying* proposition, rather than a field-defining one. I am therefore wondering how I can hold within the same frame the idea of a manifesto or a programme – for the discipline, for the political – whilst at the same time acknowledging the relation between dis-interpellatory practices and a desire for the political. I am inspired by José Esteban Muñoz's (1999) reworking of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's insights into the counter- and cross-identificatory dynamics at play in social, political hund sexual boundary-setting and associated "turf-war thinking" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 8). It may be a question of emphasis: a *political* anthropology can help convey the distinct accent or inflection of a desire for the political to ground anthropological endeavours, whilst simultaneously marking a hesitation and a space between anthropology and the political that problematise and call into question disciplinary domains and the (neo- and postcolonial) contexts of their constitution. Another way

of opening up the issues at play here could be to consider whether political *anthropologies*, emerging at the intersections of lived experience and conceptuality (Strathern, 1991; 1999) as interplays of already pluralising, splintering and reassembling knowledge practices and situated experiences in precarious worlds (Posocco, 2020), might be a route towards questions of definition, not strictly or primarily as a matter of exact meaning and literal referentiality, but of definition as distinctness and vividness, a coming into focus and an opening up to cross-identification, subjects, objects and worlds.

I should state unambiguously that I am not at all invested in projects of inclusion into disciplinary canons or boundaries. I have always found thinking through and across domains of knowledge more stimulating and productive than the safety of established disciplinary histories. Neither am I particularly interested in upholding and policing the boundaries of disciplines or sub-fields. Relations of power manifest themselves through the delineation of the contours of areas and "segregated field formations" (Arondekar and Patel, 2016, p. 155), that is to say, borders and frontiers can be concrete manifestations of acts of disavowal of the politics that subtend knowledge formations. From this perspective, then, it seems appropriate to respond with restlessness and disquiet to intellectual or life projects grounded in problematic notions of belonging, when these turn out to be always in some way exclusionary. Conversely, it might be interesting to work towards imagining projects that may contribute to a *political* anthropology, or better still, to think about how one can shape political *anthropologies* with an eye to the "awkward relations" (Strathern, 1987) that exist between political praxis and anthropological worldmaking. I am therefore extremely excited by your proposition that we should work towards envisioning a plurilingual and de-centralised endeavour. It is an apt point of departure to work towards disrupting the tranquillity of disciplinary framings and/as power formations.

II. Heritage

Does your research in political anthropology voluntarily relate to, or at the contrary, break with one or (m)any disciplinary traditions (as places for teaching, working and carrying out fieldwork)?

To develop some of the points raised above with regard to the question of definition, it seems important to tackle questions of heritage and disciplinary tradition by asking how exactly these might be framed and addressed, if we are to work towards an inherently plural and pluralising *political* anthropology. Heritage and tradition have to do with "normative arborial grammars of reproduction and descent" (Franklin, 2007, p. 28). Here it is useful to return to Sarah Franklin's incisive work on queering genealogy. Whilst genealogy has the potential to disrupt linear and teleological figurations of reproduction and transmission (Foucault, 1971), Franklin astutely observes that genealogy – very much like gender and kinship – is an idiom for naturalising relations. Franklin offers Dolly the sheep as a figure for thinking through the contours of queer genealogy, thus unmooring assumptions about the stability of biological categories as much as sexual and reproductive orders (Franklin, 2007). Without exhausting the analogy too soon, Dolly is "an odd sort" (Franklin, 2007, p. 28) and cannot be fully or squarely encompassed in any assigned categories. As Franklin notes, Dolly is not even a "proper clone", and yet she is used to shore up notions of "stock", "kind", "species", etc. It seems very auspicious and urgent to keep these questions about genealogy in mind for an account of a *political* anthropology which can at once speak to the urgent questions that emerge in the present and carefully circumvent, and hopefully challenge, entrenched notions of "good breeding" and academic pedigree, the currency in use in academic systems steeped in postcolonial melancholia (Gilroy, 2004) such as the one in the United Kingdom, where I am based.

I should start by saying that I work on violence, conflict and genocide. These are key thematic strands which I have followed through a long-term commitment to ethnographic research in Guatemala, where I first worked with ex-combatants of Marxian guerrillas and their associates (Posocco, 2014), and subsequently, with communities directly affected by the Guatemalan conflict (1960-1996) in the country and in the diasporas that were engendered by long periods of political upheaval. My first experiences of fieldwork were, effectively, "fieldwork under fire" (Nordstrom and Robben, 1996), post-conflict. In the aftermath of the Peace Accords signed between the guerrillas of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and the Guatemalan government in 1996, individuals and communities with histories of militancy and direct involvement in the armed struggle were not confident that the Peace Accords would be respected and that the Peace Agreements would be implemented. They turned out to be right: the cessation of hostilities inaugurated a harsh post-Peace Accords re-entrenchment of structural and spectacular violence framed as increasingly distant from the ideological confrontations of the 20th century. Ideological distinctions were progressively couched in terms of obsolescence, as anachronistic remnants of the Cold War period, ushering in a new era of post-peace, seemingly post-political violence.

I can illustrate the emergence of this framing of violence as fundamentally post-political more concretely through a reference to the film directed by Ray Figueroa and Elías Jiménez Trachtenberg, *Toque de Queda*, or *Curfew* (2011). *Toque de Queda* is widely held to be the first film in the zombie genre made in Guatemala. In the film, a neighbourhood in Guatemala City is under a zombie siege and the undead are said to be infected with the violence virus. The widespread fear of zombies initially brings the local community together against the new common enemy, but it soon appears that individuals in the neighbourhood live atomised lives, and even family members are unaware of each other's past. The neighbours set up a shambolic militia group to patrol the boundaries of the settlement,

but in this partial sociality structured around individuals and their secrets, a violent response to violence – the film suggests – can only spread more violence virally. I found it to be of great interest that *Toque de Queda* should present the violence that characterises the present as structured around a viral mode of transmission. Violence is embodied – it physically marks those affected – and spreads through contagion. In this context, the frames that organised violent confrontations in the past, especially during the Guatemalan conflict (1960-1996), no longer make sense: this is post-ideological, post-political violence.

In this predicament, a *political* anthropology might ask: how can a sense of the politics of the post-political virality of violence be invoked or conjured up? According to Sampson (2012), the virality of violence speaks to a broad set of contemporary anxieties, in a global context where the global spreading of disease, corruption and insecurity through globalising networks cannot be adequately addressed by increasingly porous nation states. Sampson (2012) stresses the heady mix of abjection and dispossession of the contemporary condition, alongside the new opportunities that present themselves in the "age of contagion" (2012, p. 3). We can pause here and ask how the contours of the "age of contagion" have been reassembled yet again in Covid-19 times, given that the "age of contagion" is precisely a space for the staging of unprecedented "contagious relationalities". In *Toque de Queda*, there are partial connectivities between the residents of the urban neighbourhood and the zombies from "the other side of the hill". Such relationalities exist as potentiality, but are fundamentally disavowed, truncated and cast in the domain of impossibility. The police refuse to intervene due to lack of resources and other seemingly more pressing demands, but eventually show up. Repression follows and at dawn, after a night of open warfare, the neighbourhood looks like a war zone, with lifeless bodies strewn across the streets. The zombies are exterminated alongside most of the residents, and very few seem to have survived unharmed. The undead and the residents are slaughtered by state security forces and order is restored. In the early morning light, via the radio, the Chief of Police announces: "*multiples asesinatos, posiblemente guerra de pandillas*" – "multiple homicides, possibly gang warfare". The cover-up is already in place: the official narrative will be that the carnage was the result of an ordinary clash between gangs. Zombies are the collateral damage and markers of abject disposability, alongside most of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who have also been killed in the newly secured urban space.

I have been thinking about this turn to "violence as contagion" – and the simultaneous re-entrenchment of state violence it seems to shore up. I have therefore returned to the literature on virality and social theory. Sampson's analysis seems prescient here, as he argues that "virality is no metaphor. It is all about the forces of relational encounter in the social field" (Sampson, 2012, p. 4). Virality and contagion can therefore be invoked to shore up or disrupt presuppositions about coherent and bounded social wholes or individual subjects. In turn, different conceptualisation of sociality, community and personhood are presupposed, deployed, and made to matter for thinking contagion and virality. Virality can be oriented to uphold or disavow porosity, entanglement and relationality. I am interested in thinking through these questions in so far as they offer a glimpse into the residual politics attached to seemingly post-ideological and post-political cultural forms. In *Toque de Queda,* the inhabitants of the neighbourhood in Guatemala City and the zombies never find common cause, but virality and contagion engender a proximity that is fully realised when the inhabitants start turning into zombies, their bodies progressively acquiring the markings of the undead. This predicament, it seems to me, requires an attunement to a distinct sensorium of disavowed proximities, missed encounters, and modes of dead liveliness (Stewart, 2010, p. 34). Here, ethnographic attention and sensoria are oriented towards the post-political horizon and the succession of "quasi-events" (Povinelli, 2011) that unfold as potentiality. Quasi-events "neither happen nor not happen" (Povinelli, 2011, p. 13). Yet, they are concrete, and of political consequence. In turn, such socialities of contagion could be said to be underpinned by forms of what Tim Dean has called – with specific reference to the socialities of anti-homonormative barebacking – "unlimited intimacy" (2009) that exist in the domain of possibility across the contact zone around the perimeter fence of urban neighbourhoods and gated communities, at least up until the repression exerted by the security forces.

In *Queer Necropolitics* (2014), with Jin Haritaworn and Adi Kuntsman, we have argued, that the analytics of queer necropolitics seek to connect to, and make sense of, the complex intertwining of life and death which is spectacularly and mundanely manifested in the co-presence and proximity between the wealthy and the dispossessed, those deemed to have unfettered access to material resources and rights, and those deemed redundant, criminal or morally corrupt. Necropolitics, for Mbembe (2003), foregrounds the centrality of death, terror formations and death-worlds in the organisation of social and political life within the horizon of colonial orders and the broader condition of (post)coloniality. Mbembe's (2003, p. 39) formulation of necropolitics as to grapple with "contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death" and as inherently concerned with race and sexuality in the postcolony (2001) was key to the development of this argument. *Queer necropolitics*, then, re-focused attention on the disavowed proximities between subjects and populations singled out for their suitability for inclusion into the body politic and the political community through the extension of rights, entitlements and forms of visibility, and queerly abject populations confined to "death worlds" (Haritaworn *et al.*, 2014, p. 36; Puar, 2007). Queer necropolitical analysis is concerned with thinking through the co-presence of admittance and disposability in their

racialising dimensions and as articulated through sexuality, race and gender, and as most apparent in the consolidation of homonormative projects of inclusion vis-à-vis ongoing structural and spectacular assaults against queerly abject populations consigned to the status of "collateral damage".

Toque de Queda centres on the violence that engulfs "*la colonia*" – this urban neighbourhood – and evokes multiple colonial topographies of capture and enclosure, thus conjuring interrelation between violence and coloniality in the present. However, the film disavows the queer proximities and viral politics of the necropolitical socialities and intimacies that play out at the edge of an urban settlement. I have found it very fruitful to recast these viral and necropolitical fleeting encounters and intimacies through a reading of Moten and Harney's undercommons (2013). In their reflections on theories and praxes of the undercommons, Moten and Harney drew on the black radical tradition to explore the potential inherent in concepts such as "study", "debt", "surround", "planning", "logistics" and "the shipped" for drawing fugitive paths and lines of flight against the current (post-)political horizon. The undercommons are ways of thinking, doing and relating that coalesce in and through modes of self-organisation and spontaneous assembly. Moten and Harney note that "in war without end, war without battles, only the ability to keep fighting, only logistics matter" (2013, p. 88). However, the making of logistical populations through logics of containerisation, "cannot contain what it had relegated to the hold" (2013, p. 92). This movement of "nothing", that is, of the shipped who are at once commodity, nothing, and sheer flesh marks the articulation of a sociality, relationality and "hapticality of the hold" (*ibid*, p. 97-99). Whilst I think it can be problematic to appeal to "the shipped" as a generalised and generalisable category or constituency, thus erasing the specificities of "the hold", as in the hold of the ship in the context of transatlantic slavery and specific histories of colonialism and genocide (Hartman, 1997; Sharpe, 2016), a *political* anthropology may contribute towards offering accounts of how "nothing" gets to be differentially constituted in context, along situated political horizons and through knowledge practices, conceptual devices and epistemological presuppositions.

The image of "politics surrounded" foregrounded in Moten and Harney's analysis (2013, p. 18) seems to me to also structure the narrative of the film *Toque de Queda* and the daily experience of the current post-political horizon. "Politics surrounded" – Moten and Harney argue - relies on "the hard materiality of the unreal [to] convince us that we are surrounded, […] that we must remain in the emergency, on a permanent footing, settled, determined, protecting nothing but an illusionary right to what we don't have, which the settler takes for and as the commons" (2013, p. 18). Politics surrounded suggest the inevitability not only of the perimeter fence to keep the zombies at bay, but also of the violent curtailing of zombie relationality through extermination. Against the narrowing of the political imagination and sensorium, Moten and Harney invoke a politics of exposure to the anti-social energy which they call "radioactive" and that I, through *Toque de Queda*, suggest could also be envisioned as viral. The socialities of contagion and viralities of violence are ways to feel one's way out of the settler's figuring of "politics surrounded" and connect with the residual politics of the post-political condition and the undercommons. Such an emphasis on exposure complicates narratives of viral relationality that do not take account of how virality as a relation is always already socially mediated, as the racialised and racialising dimensions of the Covid-19 crisis make evident. These are some starting points to begin to question the contemporary necropolitics of "herd immunity" governance – an actual government policy under UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson – in Covid-19 times, when unlimited intimacy unfolds alongside and through a seemingly unlimited virality with a yet unknown prophylactic.

These are some suggestions as to how one can think through – and pierce through – the current post-political horizon, a way to show not only that "post-political world was never empirically accurate" (Postero and Elinoff, 2019, p. 3), but that this might be a good place to ground one's contribution towards an anthropological articulation of a political imagination for a *political* anthropology.

III. Contexts and fields

How does the specific (political and disciplinary) context of your fieldwork shape your own approach of the political anthropology you are conducting?

I continue to work on situated experiences of violence, conflict and genocide and their afterlives, as they manifest themselves in transnational dynamics and offer an insight into the interrelatedness of vitality and death, living and dying, and the nexus between biopolitics and necropolitics. In the course of ethnographic research on transnational adoption circuits, I have become increasingly interested in how adoption, surrogacy and other bio/necropolitical practices make explicit the relations between structural violence and crisis, and global shifts in the organisation and governance of kinning and relatedness. I have documented forms of "genocide kinning" (Posocco, 2020) which re-inscribe the transnational movement, circulation and exchange of persons, substance and bodily capacities within the logics of multiple genealogies of war, violence, and extraction. It has been interesting to think about these dynamics as they have become visible across globalised borderlands, specifically those between Guatemala and Mexico. From the perspective of these borderlands, I have sought to makes sense of the simultaneity of the demise of transnational adoptions in Guatemala, on the one hand,

and the exponential growth in surrogacy arrangements in the southern Mexican state of Tabasco. This has led me to ask how these might connect to the inception of the practice of oocyte harvesting for IVF in newly established reproductive medicine providers in Guatemala City.

I have therefore turned to examine the forms of expertise and the technical infrastructures that enable the collection, processing and storage of bodily substance across national borders and across domains of knowledge and practice. The "ethnographic effect" (Strathern, 1999) engendered by a focus on expert knowledge has conjured up and brought into focus the proximity between reproductive medicine and forensic science, notably forensic expertise in the collection, processing and storage of forensic bioinformation – notably DNA – in the aftermath of human rights violations. I have been reflecting on how DNA analysis used in forensic anthropology to document human rights violations and resolve cases of forced disappearance is also offered by the same forensic laboratories as commercial services to the expanding reproductive medicine sector. It seems to me that a new articulation of a biopolitical and necropolitical interface is at play here, in the context of broader global transformations in medical and forensic infrastructures. I am also interested in thinking through what configurations of biolabour can be said to emerge when extractive practices appear to increasingly tie together medicine – and reproductive medicine specifically – and forensics. It seems to me that biolabour – the embodied labour which is indispensable for the functioning not only of reproductive medicine but biomedicine more broadly, and which according to Cooper and Walby's insightful analysis (2014) increasingly props up bioeconomies globally – here connects to the production and uneven distribution of liveliness and deadliness, privilege and dispossession, accumulation and alienation, as persons, bodily substance, and, increasingly, bioinformation cross contexts, jurisdictions and social and racial formations. In this sense, the context of my fieldwork continues to profoundly shape the anthropological research I am conducting.

I am very fortunate here in that whilst I am immersed in, and therefore think through, the specific political and disciplinary context of my fieldwork, I have been able to do so in conversation with colleagues – Marco Chivalán Carrillo and EJ Gonzalez-Polledo – who work on allied questions (Chivalán Carrillo, 2015; 2020; Gonzalez-Polledo, 2017) and with whom I have had the opportunity to set up and pursue very rewarding collaborations. These collaborations have centred on thinking together experimentations with a speculative mode of analysis which has mobilised technoscience, multispecies thinking and Indigenous epistemologies to develop a decolonial theorization of the multiple agential modalities at play in contemporary dynamics of expropriation, extraction and terror in Guatemala (Chivalán Carrillo and Posocco, 2020). They have explored entanglements of life, death and data in contemporary infrastructures, apparatuses and social practices tied to bioinformation aggregation, circulation and interpretation (Gonzalez-Polledo and Posocco, 2021, forthcoming). Plurilogues are perhaps modalities, inflections or methods for pursuing field-*defying* propositions and projects.

IV. Role

What do you think is the role of the political anthropologist both in the public and intellectual debate?

Which are the "solicitations of the present" (authoritarian regimes, repressions, revolts or revolutions, riots, social mobilizations and protests, etc.) that make political anthropology important for our contemporary societies? How does the present affect or disrupt research, methodologies, engagements, interpretations and theories?

How do you position yourself in relation to commitment and political transformations? Do you find it necessary or inevitable a dialogue with social movements? If so, why and what for?

When reflecting on anthropological research as commitment, the points of reference that have stayed with me over the years are Myrna Mack Chang and Ricardo Falla. I often think of their role as public figures and return to their writings, as well as to the research they have inspired. On 11th September 2020 was the 30th anniversary of Myrna Mack Chang's death. A Guatemalan anthropologist who worked with Maya communities displaced by the conflict (Oglesby, 1996), Mack was murdered by government forces – military death squads – in Guatemala City in 1990. In the past, I attended vigils held by her family, friends and colleagues outside the offices of AVANCSO, the Association for the Advancement of the Social Sciences in Guatemala, in Zone 1 in Guatemala City. I have learned more about her work and life by reading accounts such as the one offered by José Flores (1999), the pseudonym for the author of many works of fiction about the experience of militancy during the Guatemala conflict, which are also exceptional ethnographies (Posocco, 2014). Ricardo Falla is the Guatemalan anthropologist and Jesuit priest who wrote *Quiché Rebelde* (1978) and *Masacres de la Selva* (1992). In these books, Falla provided, *inter alia*, powerful accounts of the massacres that took place in region of Ixcán in the early 1980s. Unlike Mack, Falla has had a long career and has been incredibly prolific. Falla's early work directly informed calls for an "*antropología comprometida*" (Manz, 1996), that is to say a theoretical and methodological practice of social and cultural analysis that refuses the "luxury of indifference". It seems important to return to Mack and Falla in the present conjuncture as they are anthropologists who responded to the "solicitations of their present" through scholarship that was at once methodologically innovative and committed to political transformation. Mack and Falla put the politics back into the emergency they found themselves in. As I return to their work, I am

struck by how their research emerged out of the exigencies of a specific historical context and I want to think further about how the experience of "politics surrounded" and "fieldwork under fire" can orient one's research towards an anthropology which reaffirms or re-inscribes the political into post-political horizons.

If *political* anthropologies are to tackle the urgent questions of the present, they ought to address the politics of the academy and the university as an institution, or set of institutions, also currently seemingly "surrounded" and "under siege", as a matter of urgent public and intellectual debate. Against the spectre of a "pure anthropology" – a rhetorical artefact which is, remarkably, not only still in circulation but also energetically brandished in places – I can invoke again the counter-, cross- and dis-identificatory passions of field-*defying* scholarly work that is often a lifeline in the current landscape of ruination that Higher Education is in the United Kingdom (see Peano, 2020). The "awkward relation" (Strathern, 1987) between radical political praxis and anthropological world-making sustain scholarly work, which is often collaborative, open-ended and enduring. I am lucky to have had the opportunity to be in conversation with Suhraiya Jivraj and Sandeep Bakshi (Jivraj *et al.*, 2020). Together, we have been running the Decolonizing Sexualities Network (DSN) for ten years, thinking collectively about research, methodologies, engagements, interpretations and theories. We have been recently joined by Paola Bacchetta and continue to work transnationally on a range of projects. The DSN has been an invaluable space for thinking through what it might mean to disrupt coloniality and what is made to appear as the current post-political horizon. These spaces of experimentation are key for the cultivation of knowledge practices and representational practices which might be attuned to the cross-identificatory passions through which subjects, objects and worlds come into focus.

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AUTEUR

Silvia Posocco

Silvia Posocco is Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychosocial Studies, Birkbeck, University of London, UK. Her research interests are located at the intersections of social anthropology, social theory, gender studies, transnational sexuality studies and queer theory. Posocco has a long-term interest in, and a commitment to, ethnographic research in Guatemala, having first worked with ex-combatants of a guerrilla organization. Since 2009, Posocco has been working on legacies of the Guatemalan conflict from the perspective of an ethnography of transnational adoption circuits. A new book co-edited with Paul Boyce and EJ Gonzalez-Polledo, *Queering Knowledge: Analytics, Devices, and Investments after Marilyn Strathern*, was awarded by the 2020 Ruth Benedict Prize for Outstanding Edited Volume.

Silvia Posocco est maître de conférences au Département d'études psychosociales de Birkbeck, Université de Londres. Ses recherches se situent à l'intersection de l'anthropologie sociale, de la théorie sociale, des études de genre, des études sur la sexualité transnationale et de la théorie queer. Elle s'intéresse depuis longtemps à la recherche ethnographique au Guatemala, où elle a d'abord travaillé avec d'anciens combattants membres d'une organisation de guérilla. Depuis 2009, Silvia Posocco travaille sur les héritages du conflit guatémaltèque, dans la perspective d'une ethnographie des circuits d'adoption transnationaux. Son nouveau livre, coédité avec Paul Boyce et EJ Gonzalez-Polledo, *Queering Knowledge : Analytics, Devices, and Investments after Marilyn Strathern*, a reçu le prix Ruth Benedict 2020 récompensant un ouvrage collectif d'excellence.