

Panel 4: History's Lessons: Uses of the History of Anthropology

Tuesday, 5 December 2023 – Stream 1

[Session I: 19:30-21:15 pm CET // Session II: 22:00-23:45 pm CET]

This panel seeks historicist, ethnographic, and/or theoretical accounts of the uses that underlie and guide the writing and teaching of the histories of anthropology. How have historians of anthropology contributed to the development of particular schools, approaches, movements, etc. across disciplinary history? Have such projects used historical scholarship as a source of ethical lessons (role models or cautionary tales), of enlightening epistemological insights (whether by recuperation or reappraisal), or a combination of the two? Are there other important uses for historical research? How has the production of the histories of anthropology varied depending on its intended audiences (e.g., academic anthropologists, applied anthropologists, historians of science, undergraduate students, graduate students, non-traditional students, and various non-academic audiences.)? How have uses changed in concert with (or as a response to) broader material shifts in academia (e.g., neoliberalization; the contraction of the humanities and social sciences; enrollment decline/growth; the emergence of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity initiatives, student activism, etc.), perennial debates within anthropology itself (e.g., over disciplinary complicity with colonialism and possibilities for decolonization), and/or emergent philosophical or ethical stances of practicing anthropologists (e.g., “radical humanism,” activist research [as opposed to cultural critique], ethnographic refusal, etc.)?

Conveners: **Grant Arndt** (Iowa State University), **Nick Barron** (University of Nevada, Las Vegas)

Session I [19:30-21:15 pm CET]

Nikola Balaš (Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic)

The Myths of Origins: The Shifting Representations of Disciplinary Histories in socialist Czechoslovakia and post-socialist Czechia

Contemporary Czech ethnologist and anthropologist like to think in terms of a clear-cut and timeless distinction between Western sociocultural anthropology on the one hand and European ethnology on the other. To uphold this distinction, scholars of either disciplinary allegiance usually evoke the different historical-epistemological trajectories of the two disciplines. In my talk, I will argue that the distinction that contemporary Czech ethnologists and years. Beginning with the

situation in the mid-twentieth century, I will focus on the shifting and competing representations of the relationship between the two disciplines. I will argue that the representations' evolution in time was caused by the changing academic environment. Ultimately, I will point out certain paradoxes and suggest that especially the institutional conflicts in the past thirty years led to a serious misrepresentation of anthropology's and ethnology's disciplinary histories.

Patrícia Ferraz de Matos (University of Lisbon, Portugal)

The history of anthropology allows the study of changing contexts: the role of Jorge Dias (1907-1973) in the Portuguese colonial field

This paper reflects on the ways of doing anthropology, or what was considered anthropology, in special contexts. Doing history of anthropology can also serve to understand historical changes and how different contexts influenced the production of knowledge. This happened, for example, in the period after the Second World War, when there was a change in studies carried out in the colonial context, especially in those that were based on racial criteria to identify, differentiate and hierarchize populations. These studies often resulted in exposing a civilizing scale, in which the colonizing White were at the top and the colonized Black were at the bottom. This differentiation, based on supposedly scientific criteria, could be one of the arguments used to justify colonization. The action of the Portuguese anthropologist Jorge Dias (1907-1973) contributed to a paradigm shift. Although he was sent on a scientific mission, financed by the government (between 1956 and 1960), whose objective was to study the Makonde in northern Mozambique, and he published part of the results of this mission, he also produced confidential reports in which he exposed the weaknesses of the colonial system. Inspired by the work of Rui Mateus Pereira, author of the posthumous book *Anthropology at the service of Portuguese colonial policy in Mozambique* (2021), this and other examples allow to argue that, although anthropology participated in the process of colonial domination, in the post-Second World War context the anthropologists also contributed significantly to colonial criticism and to important theoretical, conceptual, and methodological changes in anthropology.

Giuseppe Tateo (University of Bucharest, Romania)

Bringing Russian Formalism Back in the History of Social Anthropology

Here, I explore the bond between two intellectual paradigms that have more in common than we used to think: Russian formalism—in the shape of Viktor Shklovsky's "enstrangement" technique in literary theory—and ethnographic theory as conceived by Bronislaw Malinowski. Inspired by the winds of change of modernist Europe, they were both elaborating a new narrative device: Shklovsky built his enstrangement technique on Tolstoy's descriptive style; Malinowski introduced a new set of rules of ethnographic theory and practice

through an unprecedented literary genre, the ethnographic monograph. While the relationship between structural anthropology and structural linguistics has received considerable scholarly attention, it seems that no one has yet tried to investigate systematically the common roots of Russian formalism and modern British social anthropology, as they both took shape in Europe in the 1920s. The complete absence of Russian formalism in the family tree of European social anthropology is ironic, since structuralist theory—which owes much to formalism—was by contrast a privileged interlocutor of our discipline. This paper brings into discussion this specific gap in the history of social anthropology. It reconstructs the history of formalism and ethnographic theory, introducing two main elements that they have in common: their academic ancestors and the kind of scientific endeavour they pursued. The likeness between their respective scientific endeavours poses an immediate question: why is Russian formalism left out when anthropologists reconstruct their disciplinary kinship diagram?

Miloš Milenković (University of Belgrade, Serbia), Marko Pišev (University of Belgrade, Serbia)

Ethnology as "national science" in Serbia: some useful lessons from the past

The dominant registers for discussing identity-based social and political issues in Central, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe are "nationalism," "multiculturalism," "post socialism," and "transition." Instead of seeking solutions within these debates, we shift our focus to examining the discipline's history, specifically the concept of the "anthropologization of ethnology" in Serbia. Namely, in the past four decades, Serbian anthropology has undergone significant changes in theories, methodologies and themes, which have not been widely acknowledged by the public. This lack of public awareness can be, paradoxically, considered useful in terms of the discipline's politics. As the region experiences retraditionalization after a brief period of democratic progress, the traditional image of ethnology – as a "national science" supplied with a "toolkit" for safeguarding collective identity – can become a practical instrument for achieving anthropological means. This Ketman-like maneuver presents an opportunity for contemporary Serbian anthropology facing retraditionalist and fundamentalist social trends to advance a cultural critique by operating from an ethnological niche – and thus securing its social legitimacy. One of the possible pathways to achieve this twofold goal is the disciplinary engagement with UNESCO's concept of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), which can, arguably, be employed as a reconciliation rather than conflict provoking platform for negotiating the cultural politics in Western Balkans, as well as in the other post-conflict regions.

Elsie Mégret (EHESS, France)

Ages, genders and figures: anthropometric tools in developmental medicine during the early 20th century

Based on an ongoing doctoral thesis that examines the medical production of anorexia during the third French republic, this paper aims to highlight the circulation of anthropology knowledge in paediatric and child medicine at the beginning of the twentieth century. Since the 19th century, hygienists and doctors have employed anthropometric tools to produce growth standards and establish biological law of development. Growth is conceptualized as a process punctuated by bodily and physiological changes. Graphs, figures, and numerical data play a crucial role in the production and the circulation of these growth standards that are considered to be different for men and women. Based on articles and anthropometric figures dating from 1913 to 1935 and published in the French journals *La pédiatrie pratique* and the *Bulletin de la société d'anthropologie de Paris et de Lyon*, I'll question links between the numbered writing of the body and the normalization of age. Specifically, I'll investigate how the normalization of biological age contributes to the naturalization of gender. Furthermore, I'll explore how anthropological knowledge, particularly pertaining to environment and diet, was employed in the field of developmental medicine in the early twentieth century to analyse human beings and their bodily development. This paper will propose an anthropological exploration of the bodily construction of biological age. It'll challenge the conventional dichotomy between biological age and social age, as well as explore how age anthropology can improve our understanding of contemporary use of anthropometric tools such as BMI or growth curves.

Session II [22:00-23:45 pm CET]

Caleb Shelburne (Harvard University, US)

The Present and Past of Teaching History of Anthropology: The HAR Syllabus Project

The History of Anthropology Review has recently created a new online collection of syllabi in fields related to its topics. Building on HAR's other work to promote scholarship and collaboration in the history of anthropology, the new syllabus collection will both broach new topics around pedagogy and offer further resources to exploring the history of our field. In particular, the collection is intended to bring attention to the crucial but often unappreciated work of syllabus writing by highlighting especially innovative or topical approaches featured in our collection. This presentation will discuss the value of the syllabus collection to

the field, highlighting how reading syllabi can promote conversations on such pressing topics as the value of historical study for anthropologists, the relevance of our field to current political events, and new approaches to 'decolonizing' syllabi. Finally, I will describe how this collection will be used to study the history of our field itself, including the emergence of different 'schools' of thought, the rise and fall of canonical texts, and the influence of changes in higher education and our society on teaching the history of anthropology.

Joshua Smith (Independent Scholar, Canada)

Action Anthropology as Decolonial Pedagogy: HOA as Educational Praxis

The History of Anthropology (HOA) as a specialization and a relatively marginalized sub-field of anthropology continues to hold immense potential in directly taking on the contemporary challenges of decolonizing education and schools, not merely of anthropology as a discipline, community, and endeavour, but quite directly the systems and relations of our everyday lives and institutions. This presentation outlines the framework of the pedagogical theory and praxis that is at the core of action anthropology as a cogent example of how HOA, when understood as a vehicle for educational transformation (not merely for universities, but especially in grade school and community programming), is well suited in decolonizing, rethinking and re-imagining teaching and learning. Specially, personal success and examples are discussed in my own approaches to teaching the new English First Peoples curriculum in British Columbia with emphasis on the recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the implementation of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Herbert Lewis (University of Wisconsin, US)

A Historicist versus a presentist view of American anthropology and colonialism

In 2023 it is not only taken as certain among American anthropologists that their field was and probably still is complicit with colonialism. A professor at a major university just claimed (6/30/23) "Anthropology carries into the present inexorable and bloody traces of the past. Can the discipline be divested of its entanglements with colonialism, anti-Blackness, imperialism, and civilizational discourse?" The panel organizers ask, "Are there other important uses for historical research?" This paper asks, "What is the use of the historiography of anthropology if 50 years of such writing has had so little impact on the popular mind of today's anthropologists.

Jessica Taylor (American Council of Learned Societies, US)

Work and the work: Anthropology outside tenure in the US in the 1920s and 30s

In 2019, only 54% of those completing a PhD in anthropology at US schools had a definite commitment for employment, with 18% going on to postdoctoral positions and 18% to academic employment (Survey of Earned Doctorates, NSF). The question of precarious employment in anthropology has been an important topic of conversation in American and Canadian anthropology for the past 15 years. This paper considers how the work (that is the theory, methods, and knowledge) of anthropology is connected with the work (that is employment) of anthropology through the lens of American scholars working in the 1920s and 30s not employed in faculty positions. Whose knowledge-production made it into the shape of the field then, and whose did not? Racism shaped the pathway of Louis Eugene King, who (as discussed by Harrison 1999) went from unemployment to a government junior historian position to employment at the Naval Supply Depot. Zora Neale Hurston worked across many jobs, and had her ethnographic research in the 1930s funded by a Guggenheim fellowship, yet has been being recovered since the 1970s, including in anthropology (see for instance, Freeman Marshall 2023). This paper takes the histories of employment for these scholars (and others at the time) and uses them as provocations to consider how we structure who is contributing to the work of anthropology today, drawing on my own position as a researcher in non-profits examining career trajectories and disciplinary commitments in the humanities and social sciences more generally.

Amy Woodson-Boulton (Loyola Marymount University, US)

Disseminating Anthropology in Imperial Britain and now

Thomas Hylland Eriksen has recently argued that “broader dissemination, popularization and making a social impact have not been given priority in academic anthropology after the Second World War; the urgency of climate change has to be understood as an unequivocal call to arms” (Anthropology Today, 2020). My paper connects anthropology’s potential current role in shaping popular narratives on climate change to earlier, very successful attempts to disseminate anthropological knowledge. At the turn of the twentieth century, anthropologists such as A.C. Haddon at the Horniman Museum in London tried to make ethnographic collections educational for a wide public by using them to illustrate socio-cultural evolution, according to which human societies “develop” through technological innovation alone. Their new museum techniques turned objects from other cultures into a metanarrative that offered an apparently scientific explanation for British exceptionalism: the “rise of the West” without Empire. Combined with outreach, lectures, and school trips, the narrative of unilinear stadial evolution through invention helped to raise generations of visitors to think of Britain as a powerful imperial and industrial nation not through colonial conquest and extraction, the transatlantic slave trade,

great geographical luck, or imposing favorable trade systems through violence, but through technical (and sometimes explicitly racial) superiority. Such myths are surprisingly persistent and still form a key barrier to action on climate justice, occluding historical explanations for differentials in global wealth and development. The creation of these clear educational narratives offers a compelling model and rationale for anthropologists' climate action, undoing their own past success.