

## Introduction: Integrating Humanistic and Scientific Perspectives in Anthropology

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This edited volume weaves together scientific and humanistic approaches in anthropology in a way that they complement each other. The scientific ‘camp’ in anthropology affirms the material, social and symbolic reality of culture. Whereas, the more humanistic camp, by and large, rejects the noun ‘culture’ and favors the adjective ‘cultural’ as a means of signifying something that is shared among people, that has been constructed by the people themselves and is a product of local history (Lughod 1991). More recently, there emerged a trend that rejects anthropology’s association with science. Instead, the *new* (now *old*) trajectory embraced a humanistic anthropology that avows the intersubjectivity and personal biases that inherently make cultural descriptions of ‘the Other’ (subjective) interpretations rather than (objective) representations. By definition, ‘interpretations’ eliminate the possibility of objective reflections of ‘the Other’. Our trajectory offers yet a ‘newer new’ dialectical trajectory which opens the gateway for the emergence of a synthesis between the humanistic and scientific visions of anthropology.

Participants at our conference titled *Old Discipline, New Trajectories: Theories, Methods and Practices in Anthropology*<sup>1</sup> held on June 16–18, 2022, at Vilnius University, participated in molding a new trajectory, consisting of intellectual, ethical and multi-modal anthropology that is nonbinary as it embraces both science and humanistic approaches. This edited volume provides a front-row seat to recover and review this event and its intellectual output.

This volume brings together the conference’s papers addressing the persistent divide between scientific and humanistic approaches in anthropology, while also examining methodological complexities, interdisciplinary connections, and the global and local challenges shaping the field today. Beyond these disciplinary debates, the volume engages with various contemporary issues: minority and majority relations in Poland, China, Palestine-Israel, India; localized effects of neo-lib-

1 <https://www.sasciconf2021.fsf.vu.lt/>

eralism and its impact on the environment in Mongolia; social inequalities and marginalization linked to ethnicity in Lithuania and caste in India; evolving family dynamics and population decline in Europe; minority religions in Ukraine and India; and precarious labor on Indian opium farms. This edited volume presents a rich and multifaceted exploration of anthropology as a discipline while illuminating the complexities of contemporary human condition.

Below, we briefly discuss the current state of affairs in anthropology which motivated us to hold this conference. Thereafter, we will give an overview of the keynote talks and the papers presented in various thematic panels of the conference. We end our introduction with an acknowledgement of all the people who contributed to this conference behind the scenes.

## Unravelling anthropology's present landscape

The complementarity of scientific and humanistic approaches to many anthropologists may appear as a pollyannish pipedream that hearkens back to the 1960s, when anthropologists were mostly unified, primarily because they did not get their knickers in a knot about whether anthropology was science or humanities. In their world, anthropological data is typically both qualitative and asystematic as it is primarily obtained through participant observation and interviews. Yet, what made this 'scientific' was that the anthropologists thought of themselves as objective observers who could gain enough understanding of the culture of a particular community to be able to represent it ethnographically. One might wonder how anthropology could ever claim to be a science as the methods are fundamentally not systematic or reliable, or even valid, given the lone-wolf approach of most anthropologists. Hence, the epistemic bias of anthropology as a self-identified science must seem dubious to natural scientists and those nearer to home, like psychologists, sociologists and political scientists, all of whom, in the main, have bought into the scientific paradigm. This hubris of anthropologists who claimed anthropology to be a science was gradually — and then at hyper speed — deconstructed, partially as a result of Foucault and his notion of distinctive epistemes, and also Derrida, who undermined the stability of any kind of claim to objectivity with his notions of the unstableness of any definition for any word.

In the social sciences, concepts must be operationally defined, theories should produce deductive causal and correlational claims, and all data collection methods should be systematic, adhering to established sampling criteria. Such professional

structures are impossible for anthropologists to adhere to when collecting data. Systematic methods for data collection and analysis require that methods are prioritized over becoming an ersatz member of the community in which the anthropologist lives and seeks to study. Anthropology becomes an obvious qualitative discipline, given that life unfolds and is experienced qualitatively. At best, anthropology can rely on case studies that provide a qualitative sidebar affirming the strength of hypotheses deductively derived. Analogous to how the universe is rapidly expanding toward increasing entropy, similarly, the discipline of anthropology has fragmented into ever more associations that hold very different ideas about the nature, purpose and products of anthropological research.

The entropy of our discipline was evident in the recent online discussion between the President of *The American Anthropological Association* (Professor Akhil Gupta) and his colleague (doctoral candidate Jessie Stoolman) and, on the scientific/empirical side, Professor Herbert Lewis and Associate Professor Gitika De (who served as a discussant)<sup>2</sup>. The two sides promoted prominently different visions of the history, methods, and purpose of anthropology. Such a process of fragmentation promotes a positionality analogous to Frankenstein adrift on a shard of ice; no one is listening or talking back. The field is undergoing fragmentation with multitudes of epistemic and ontological shards, as if anthropology is a broken vessel.

Perhaps the state outlined above is an overly pessimistic view of anthropology, but, without strong claims, there is no effort put into healing the discipline and re-creating a holistic conception of what anthropology is about and how we can regain our mojo. The purpose of the conference was to offer a meeting place for positioned imaginaries to converse with each other and agree to a dissonant orchestration of panels that, in their very performance, created intrigue and interest rather than an orchestral accommodation of different voices and visions. This means that the organizers of the conference did not intend to be the choir for science or humanism; we intended to bring together practitioners in both camps and let the ‘wisdom of the crowds’ lead to interchanges and theoretical crossings.

The conference offered an opportunity to anneal the shards back together without silencing their respective theoretical and methodological voices. We embraced Eric Wolf’s dictum, “Anthropology is both the most scientific of the

2 This event was co-organized by the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies at Vilnius University and San Diego State University: <https://www.sasciconf2021.fsf.vu.lt/conversations-in-anthropology>.

humanities and the most humanistic of the sciences” (1964, 88). Of course, the task of inviting participants and organizing and presenting papers that shared this contrapuntal vision of anthropology was a difficult chore. We wanted to make sure that scientific and humanistic studies were displayed so that the audiences could eat and digest data and ideas from all sorts of perspectives. For this purpose, we sought to sequence talks in ways that provide opportunities for participants and audience members to attend both *science*, *humanistic*, and *in-between* types of talks. Our imprint on the world of Anthropology is small, but the conference provided a template for accommodating different voices without relying on soundproof rooms.

## Organization of the edited volume

In this edited volume, we present a small yet significant part of the conference talks. The conference panels and papers showcased the thematic and methodological diversity existing in anthropology today, and we seek to provide space for this diversity in this edited volume. Conference papers covered such diverse topics as the history and nature of the discipline of social anthropology, various methodological frameworks for data analysis, religion, family, ethnicity, social exclusion, environmental issues and the state’s regulation of precarious labor. From the methodological point of view, they count on the traditional methods of ethnography, such as interviews, conversations and participant observation, but also historical, free-list, theoretical and methodological analysis. They present empirical research conducted in China, Poland, Palestine-Israel, Mongolia, Ukraine, India, Lithuania, etc. and also the theoretical analysis that moves beyond particular regional contexts.

The edited volume is divided into three sections. The first section, ***Overview of Key Issues in Anthropology*** contains the papers written by the conference’s key note speakers. Ideologically, the key note speakers placed their stamp on what each perceived to be a key issue (or set of issues) in anthropology. Each of these papers is bold and ‘full screen’ in its view of the frailties, function, tools, and aims of anthropology.

Our first keynote speaker was Professor Chris Hann. He is committed to ethnography not as a preliminary stage of research, but as the basis for how we conduct research on human beings and the social systems they construct. Hann’s paper *Anthropology, Science and Politics: Renewing the Vocation* is both diachronic and synchronic; he traces the trajectory of his research in both China and in Po-

land. His paper is a *tour de force* overview of how anthropology is both a scientific and political endeavor. In the fieldwork phase anthropologists are also engaged in the political realities of the behavioral environment — the people they want to study, the politicians and bureaucrats that they have to deal with to obtain a visa, permissions to conduct research, assistants to translate and connect them to people — and so on. Hann explores the back stage world of the anthropologist as well as the front stage. He knits these two stages together as inseparable parts of fieldwork. Anthropologists tend not to mention the politics inherent in getting to the field, using assistants to interpret and swerve through the legalities and morality of field research. It is to his credit that Hann does a remarkable job of combining both realities over a diachronic analysis of two fieldwork sites. Hann covers a wide range of contemporary topics concerning the history, purpose, and ideational hemorrhage that is currently occurring in the field of anthropology. He is quite clear about favoring a scientific approach to research and curtailing one's own political stances when in the field. Combining these two positions allows him to emulate Weber's idea of 'Verstehen'. Hann's theoretical perspective and methods rely on an agented, cultural circuitry connecting symbol, speech, institutional roles, affect and collective behavior to understand the processes by which leaders cloak their own interests within a narrative that spawns ebullient nationalist sentiments. His discussion focuses on his wife's and his own ethnographic work in the southern Xinjiang region located in the northwest of China. There, the Uyghurs are being fully displaced by Chinese Han (an ethnic group). Hann captures the intrepid highs and depressive lows of anthropological fieldwork, while also providing an excellent example of how to carry on anthropologically substantive research under challenging conditions. Hann also writes about his ethno-historic work on Ukrainian minority in Poland which sheds light on the current relations between the two countries.

The second keynote talk was delivered by Smadar Lavie, professor emerita of Anthropology at the University of California, Davis. She was a Fulbright scholar at Vilnius University for the semester at the time the anthropology conference took place. In her paper titled *Who Can Publish Decolonized Ethnography and Cultural Theory with the Anger it Deserves? Unclassified Lloronas and the Academic Text*, Lavie provides a deep dive into how hegemonic forces constrain what and who is 'in' and 'out' in academic business. She points both to the 'tyranny' of the English language and that of the academic elite who control the academic reward system. She makes visible the hegemonic wall built by elite feminist academics to keep out or belittle the work of grassroots indigenous scholars. She talks about a feminist-of-color positionality which critiques the US-UK academic

establishment's domination over the publication process in terms of the decision-making criteria for what constitutes a publishable paper. Lavie explores who is entitled to narrate the anger of the woman-of-color in academic text. She argues that tenured women of color of what is considered "recognized US minorities" are able to express emotions such as anger or sadness in their texts. However, women scholars of color from the Global South are not, and, if they do, they do not fit the racial classification of the US-European academe. Lavie's essay shows the means and manipulative tools which those in the majority use to deflect, neglect, and closet the work of women from minority ethnic groups and women who speak, in essence, "truth to power." She contrasts female scholars from the Global South with those of the Global North. The latter are motivated to simplify the works of feminists in the Global South for the sake of creating a unified feminist epistemology that counters the dominant master narrative supporting patriarchy and its offshoots (for example, Perry's 2022 book *The Case Against the Sexual Revolution*). Particularly, Lavie discusses the *conocimiento* model of Anzaldúa which seeks to replace the "monological and unidirectional anthropology" of the North (p. 43) with a subaltern voice that equalizes the scholarly landscape. Lavie continues her historical critique of how the academic establishment filters what is acceptable to be published and what is not by turning to Palestine-Israel and intra-Jewish relations from the perspective of Mizrahis, so-called Eastern or Oriental Jews, who also constitute a 'racialized majority'. She reflects on the complicated situation of "Mizrahi feminist author-activists" who reject Zionism and Ashkenazi dominance, as "they must fight to carve out a third space between the binarisms available for international public consumption: One is the Jewish State versus its Arab-enemy neighboring states. The other is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" (p. 45). Lavie's essay is a diachronic analysis of the historical process of silencing minorities or non-dominating groups by means that are not just immoral but purposefully cruel, even abominable. It is that very abominableness that leads to the importance of justifying writing with anger.

Another keynote speaker at the conference was Professor Dulam Bumochir who at the time of the conference was the chair of the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, National University of Mongolia. In his paper titled *Indigeneity of Neoliberalism in Mongolia's Nation Building*, Bumochir traces the history of corporate and foreign interests in mining in Mongolia. These companies were invited as the government embraced neo-liberal policies for the 'development' of the nation (shades of Hann's theoretical model). He follows the engagement of Mongolian environmentalists (comprised mostly of locals) to stop or modify

the encroaching activities of multinational corporations to excavate mineral deposits along the rivers of Mongolia. Bumochir's *emic* (inside) perspective and participation in supporting the rights of those Mongolians most affected by the degradation of their environment shows us the power of ethnography as a "weapon of the weak" that can effectively counter the aims of neoliberal policies. Mongolian resistance to foreign mining companies is examined at the micro level of decision-making by people most affected by the incursion of mining into their lives and country. These people — politicians, entrepreneurs and the common folk — seek to defend their Mongolian heritage and land use traditions. Bumochir moves to the institutional level by examining government policies as they seek to find a middle ground between modern capitalism and traditional practices. While his account of the incursions of mining industry is specific to Mongolia, similar anguished issues can likely be found in many other countries. His account is not just about the Mongolian nation but about all countries where foreign business has deep economic interests that, in turn, have importunate consequences on the environment and on the lives of people living in the mining areas.

Our keynote sessions were closed by Professor Vytis Čiubrinskas, perhaps the most well-known Lithuanian anthropologist, who possesses knowledge of the birth, growth, and tribulations of anthropology in Lithuania. In his paper *Social Anthropology in Lithuania: Challenges, Resilience, and Particularity of the Discipline*, Čiubrinskas traces the diachronic ups and downs of the viability of an anthropology discipline in Lithuania. In doing so he excavates into the history of American-Lithuanians who returned to build a department at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas in the 1990s and then discusses the support of Scandinavian anthropologists that were crucial in building the anthropology program at Vilnius University at the turn of the millennium. He then focuses on further developments of the anthropology field at Vytautas Magnus University and other institutions through cooperation with various European and American colleagues and universities. Čiubrinskas' recounting of the history of Lithuanian anthropology demonstrates the central importance of anthropology for constructing a worldview in which the Lithuanian culture is weaved into the cultural patterns outside the territory of Lithuania, and, in that way, the Lithuanian culture is not just a national but part of a global culture.

We have labelled the second section *Engaging New Diachronic and Synchronic Methods for Ethnographic Research*. Most of the contributions in this section rely on important emic methods that are also systematic.



One of the primary goals of the conference was to provide a platform for the exchange of knowledge between scientific and humanistic approaches within social anthropology. James Rose's paper *Science and Social Anthropology: Resolving Hierarchical and Horizontal Knowledge Structures* aptly untangles this theme. Rose explores the relationship between social sciences, particularly social anthropology and natural sciences, by focusing on how knowledge is produced and reproduced in these disciplines. He relies on pedagogic sociology to ground his argument about the differences between social and natural science disciplines and their pedagogies. In his view, natural sciences and their disciplines are paradigmatic, which means that they integrate each other's findings and theories, while building a coherent paradigm which serves as a consensual base for these disciplines. Meanwhile, social sciences and social anthropology continue to be pre-paradigmatic because they tend not to build upon already existing discoveries within the social science field, but rather seek to challenge the already existing theories with new theories. The literary turn or, what Rose calls linguistic philosophy, further distanced social anthropology from the systemic integrative approach. Rose argues that, within social anthropology, specific fields of research have had more of an integrative systematic character (i.e. kinship, religion, language and economy studies), and consequently they can serve as a base for seeking greater integration in social anthropology and in the other social science disciplines that continue to be "trapped in a persistent 'pre-paradigmatic' state of self-contradiction and conflict" (p. 100). Rose discerns certain scholars within natural sciences (Kuhn, Wilson) and social anthropology (de Munck and Bennardo, Leaf and Read) whose work could be used for creating a more integrative approach with a 'strong grammar' (p. 113) in the natural and social science disciplines.

Another contributor, Ann Feuerbach, approaches the question of science in anthropology from a methodological angle. In her paper *An Easy Framework to Organize Complex Data*, she highlights that social anthropology and other social science disciplines (e.g. Archaeology) often lack a systematic approach towards data analysis. Even though some anthropologists expressed the need for a scientific approach in research methodology, many works have been theory and not primarily data-driven. Therefore, she proposes a model, or a 'framework', for complex data analysis which relies on merging inductive and deductive approaches. This approach initiates with an inductive method, where the testable evidence is re-evaluated to identify patterns by aiming to narrow down the variables that are significant for addressing the specific research



inquiry. This model includes such aspects as space, time, matter (i.e. people and things) and energy (i.e. actions) described and analyzed from the emic and etic perspectives. Feuerbach not only presents this model in abstract terms, but also shows how it can be used in practice for specific case studies. She describes two well-known archaeological cases, *Mappa Mundi* and the *Ulfberht* swords, to show how this framework could bring more depth to the analysis while revealing the worldview and knowledge of people who created the map and how *Ulfberht* swords can be linked with specific personalities and the wider social, biological, economic, religious, and military circumstances of the time. This model can be useful for creating a theory built on robust, credible and rich data. Even though most of the criteria of data analysis presented in the model might be intuitively applied by many researchers, this framework could work as a good reminder for anthropologists to keep the systematic approach and not miss any of the previously mentioned criteria in data analysis.

The three following papers fall under the theme of family, its historical evolution and contemporary forms. Inés Gil-Torras explains the trend of co-habitation in Europe as a historical legacy of the pre-industrial family system. She points out that, historically, there were diverse family systems in Europe, and that marriage as a formal union was institutionalized only after the Council of Trent (1563). Apparently, marriages tended to get more institutionalized in the contexts where dowry customs were prevalent. Gil-Torras argues that the current co-habitation practices could at least be partially related to the pre-industrial family systems in Europe and that “the common sense linked to these family structures has persisted till today and is still affecting our behavior even after these family systems changed their historical structure” (p. 143).

Two other papers on the family theme are a part of the larger project “Love Relationships in Contemporary Lithuania and their Effect on Marriage, Fertility and Family Choices” (led by Prof. Victor de Munck; funded by The Research Council of Lithuania). Jūratė Charenkova explains the declining fertility rates of Lithuanians by looking at the changing perception of children. Žygimantas Bučius explores the changing conceptualization of family among Lithuanians. Drawing on the free-list data, both researchers focus on the changing cultural meanings and conceptualization of children and family among Lithuanians representing four age groups. Charenkova’s research shows that, regarding children, adults in the older age group expressed mostly positive meanings to children, while the younger groups associated having children with challenges, difficulties and responsibilities. In terms of marriage, Bučius argues that “Rather than being a natural (or organic) part of the life cycle, marriage has now become a choice”

(p. 194). Both papers are based on a preliminary free-list research model that could later serve as a useful base for the emic-informed interviews and surveys. With a focus on cultural meanings, norms and values, these two papers provide valuable insights that could help explain the worrying demographic tendencies in Lithuania.

The edited volume contains four papers dealing with very different themes and contexts. However, each of them focuses on marginalized social groups that are on the fringes of the normative boundaries of society. All four chapters use ethnographic methods to portray the way individual members of liminal social groups understand and act on their positionality within the larger cultural landscape. Because of the liminal position of the groups under study we label this third section *Liminal Transitions*.

Eugenijus Liutkevičius' paper analyses the worldview of Baptists in Ukraine. He shows that Baptist followers develop the capacity to perceive the world beyond the constraints of time and space, while including the third dimension encompassing the biblical narratives and symbolism into their everyday perception of reality. Liutkevičius argues that "The Bible thus serves not only as the expression of the eternal divine will, but also, at the same time, the Bible offers templates for interpreting the contemporary events" (p. 209).

Afsara Ayoub's paper explores the religious conversions of Dalits (so-called ex-untouchables in the Indian caste system) from Hinduism to Buddhism in Shabbirpur village in the northern Indian state of Uttar Pradesh. By looking at religion beyond faith and belief, she explores the sociocultural and political dimensions associated with religious conversion. Rather than spiritual acts, conversions are recongnized by her interlocutors as political and social strategies which enable Dalits to fight caste discrimination and assert their different religious identities from Hinduism.

Agnieška Avin explores the meaning of 'here' and 'there' among Lithuanian Roma individuals. She explores their decisions to emigrate to Western Europe in search of a better life or to stay here in Lithuania, where social stigmatization continues to shape their identity. She contends that "for Vilnius Roma, (im)mobility imaginations can be seen as a space for social critique of experienced inequality and injustice" (p. 246). These imaginations also allow Roma individuals, whether staying or leaving, to better understand and relativize their social, cultural and ethnic identity.

Linás Tavaras explores legal opium farming in India, the everyday reality of these farmers and the State's regulatory practices regarding opium farming. Based on the fieldwork in two villages in Madhya Pradesh among legal opium

cultivators, Tavaras shows how opium farmers' lives and profession unfold at the intersection of the cultural tradition, burdensome regulatory policies of the Indian Government and temptations from the black market.

## Acknowledgements

Our texts, whether humanistic or scientific, inevitably represent 'the Other'. At one extreme, we can represent 'the Other' like Paul Gauguin, invoking the sensual beauty of what it means to be 'this human,' or, like Francisco Goya, capturing our capacity to kill each other. The conference panels worked across such varied dimensions. From the first to the last day, the participants practiced the principle of unity in diversity. This unwritten principle not only greased the wheels that propelled the daily slate of talks but also led to the porous nature of groups; we intermingled, and there were no outsiders or insiders, no ideological factions rattling sabers. While always respectful, we did not need to be cautious for fear that our discussions or debates would produce embers of rancor; indeed, they stoked the fires by which we could stay warm into the night. We could sense that many held views in opposition to others, but this led to detailed, informative discussions from which we learned to appreciate new ways of drinking old wines.

The very idea and possibility of the conference emerged from a number of sources. It could not have happened, or even been considered, without the enthusiastic support and open channels between two institutions on the opposite sides of the Atlantic. In North America, the Society for the Anthropological Sciences (also called SAS) and, on the Eastern shores of the Atlantic, the Institute of Asian and Transcultural Studies at Vilnius University. The conference was held and mostly supported in all ways by Vilnius University and the efforts of both the Institute's staff and students. It was funded by the Research Council of Lithuania. We thank Stephen Lyon, the former president of SAS for his support, attendance and inspiring speech to open up the conference.

Victor de Munck, a professor at the above Institute and an executive member of SAS, and the Institute's former director, Dr Kristina Garalytė, recruited a working committee of anthropologists from around the world. The committee consisted of members from UK/Pakistan (Stephen Lyon), India (Gitika De and Eswarappa Kasi), Ukraine (Kateryna Maltseva), the United States (Giovanni Bennardo and Douglas Hume), and Lithuania (Victor de Munck and Kristina Garalytė). As a result of the geographically ecumenical makeup of the committee, we were able to recruit researchers from nearly every continent except Africa.

We are grateful to a number of people who helped us make this conference come into being, to name a few: Vilmantė Matuliauskienė, without her, we would not have even had our name tags, much less bags. Second, Tomas Bedulskij, who took upon himself all software issues – the *Zoom* connections, printing, and whatever else computers can do. Deimantas Valančiūnas, who oversees, participates, nods, and ensures that things go smoothly, while looking for adaptive shortcuts when we are stumped and finding ways to go forward. Then there are all the undergraduate and recently graduated students who have helped, Ieva Svigarytė and Emilis Nikitinas certainly ranked first, but then there are those who helped just to help – Rapolas Vrubliauskas, Ieva Jokužytė and Linas Tavaras.

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