

First International Conference of the Histories of Anthropologies

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This major conference of nine panels, each with ten papers, two keynote addresses, and one roundtable, results from years of sustained effort of the History of Anthropology Network (HOAN) within the European Association of Social Anthropologists. The spiritual movers in this network have been David Shankland, Aleksandar Bošković, Andrés Barrera-González and Han F. Vermeulen, Halle (Saale) based Dutch anthropologist, the author of seminal volume *Before Boas* (2015). The actual organisers were, however, two lady anthropologists, Fabiana Dimpflemeier (Pescara) and Hande Birkalan-Gedik (Frankfurt), who were logistically supported by the University of Pisa and the NomadIT. There were 14 members Scientific Committee and 4 members Honorary Committee (Regna Darnell, Ulf Hannerz, Sandra Puccini and Han Vermeulen). It should be said from the outset that the conference confirmed the strategic status of historical research on anthropology, conceived mostly as the study of individual anthropologists by anthropologists acting as historians of their own discipline. As such, it was a resounding success. It was only taking place online, which enabled the participation of Europeans and specialists from all over the world (sessions started at noon CET, thus ideally enabling the participation of Americans and Australasians). Each session had its own link, which ensured the high technical quality of meetings.

Two panels always ran concurrently. That obviously allowed one to be present at the same time at only one session. My report will, therefore, comment on those sessions I could follow or in which I participated. Quotes are from the abstracts.

Keynote 1

The conference was opened with the first of two keynote addresses. The speaker was **Solimar Otero** of Indiana University. She characterised her talk as follows:

“Rooted in epistemologies from Afro-Caribbean religious and cultural work, as well as engagements in archives of ritual activities, this keynote lecture interrogates how anthropological collaborations with communities and objects of study are deeply engaged with inhabited pasts.”

Panels

Dmitry Arzyutov, Sergei Kan, and Laura Siragusa, all based in US universities, spoke about “relationships between the pioneer of American anthropology Franz Boas and his Russian colleagues and friends of the period between 1897 and 1942”, thus reimagining the history of Arctic anthropology.

Eszter Ruttkay-Miklián of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences described her experiences with preparing publication of materials left by Antal Reguly, a 19th century traveller to Siberia. Reguly was one of the first searchers for Hungarian roots in Siberia.

Ciarán Walsh revived the old tension between humanist and scientist approaches in anthropology in his paper. As he put it, “I compare a class war fought between post-evolutionist ‘culturals’ (led by Haddon) and academic ‘physicals’ (led by Galton) with the current stand-off between ‘emancipatory’ traditionals and ‘practical’ academics.”

Richard Kuba of the Frobenius Institute in Germany looked at Leo Frobenius’s last field expedition. In 1938–39, he sent five members of his institute to Kimberly in Northwest Australia but the processing of rich materials from the expedition takes place only today. “85 years later, the extensive expedition materials are rediscovered, reassessed and returned to the source communities. This paper explores how far the different ontologies – the one from the archive and the local living one – can be reconciled in a collaborative process and used productively to reach a more nuanced understanding of the research process as well as of the history of the country and culture.”

Sergei Alymov of the Russian Academy of Sciences discussed the failed Soviet attempt, led by the historian Liudmila Danilova, at dedogmatizing Marxist historical materialism. “This paper focuses on the fate of Marxist anthropology in the USSR in the late Soviet period (the 1960–1970s). It recovers the story of the ‘sector of the methodology of history’, which became the center of interdisciplinary debates among historians, ethnographers, and philosophers, who were intent on modifying the Marxist narrative and suggesting new approaches for thinking about the early states and creation of class societies, modes of exploitation under slavery and feudalism, and changing the Stalinist narrative of ‘social-economic formations’.

Henri Wagner (Université Bordeaux Montaigne) pointed out that “Sahlins’s uses of the concept of mutuality is in line with Lévy-Bruhl’s concept of participation inasmuch as it runs counter the traditional logic of individuality.” As well, “the concepts of participation and mutuality are used to define a third way to the traditional alternative between culturalism and naturalism.” Wagner concludes that “Sahlins’s use of the concept of participation should be read in light of his earlier book *How ‘Natives’ Think*.”

Ildikó Kristof of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences revived letters, published in a Hungarian newspaper in the 1890s, depicting the daily life of the Sioux. Their author was a mother of a woman who married one man of the Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show when it was touring Eastern Europe. The mother-in-law visited Pine Ridge Reservation, and her descriptions are very realistic and differ very much from the then-prevailing evolutionist discourse. “They should become an essential part of the history of anthropology of the region, from which they are still missing.”

There were also two papers about anthropologists whose communist persuasions led to changes in careers and subsequently obscurity. One of them was Frederick Rose (1915–1991), who carried out highly innovative research among the Australian Aborigines but could only develop his anthropological career when he emigrated to the German Democratic Republic in 1956. **Petr Skalník**, in his paper “With British Passport to the GDR via Australia: Rehabilitating Frederick Rose’s contribution to anthropology”, tried to show that Rose was one of the most underrated anthropologists of the 20th century. The other was German ethnohistorian Paul Kirchhoff, who emigrated to Mexico in the late 1930s. His double life in anthropology and politics was aptly characterised by **Mechthild Rutsch** (National Institute of Anthropology and History, Mexico).

Nikola Balaš of the Czech Academy of Sciences came with a paper on “The Myths of Origins: The Shifting Representations of Disciplinary Histories in socialist Czechoslovakia and post-socialist Czechia.” He depicts the competition between “ethnologists” (who were, in fact, a kind of turncoat home positivist peoplegraphers) and a few pioneers of sociocultural anthropology as a balanced duel. However, the former were much more numerous, and their power play resulted in the temporary defeat of anthropology on the Czech turf. The author admits that “the institutional conflicts in the past thirty years led to a serious misrepresentation of anthropology’s and ethnology’s disciplinary histories.” Does he not contribute to a new phase of mythology building?

In the panel on regional anthropologies, a paper by **Nava Kishor Das** (Anthropological Survey of India) entitled “Indigenizing Indian Anthropology” argued that during the British rule, it was anthropologists who attacked the Orientalist vision of India and “emphasised India’s cultural, socio-economic,

religious and political heterogeneity, thus questioning the British presentation of India as a monolith.” Daniele Cantini (Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Germany) spoke about “Anthropology in the Arab World”. He admitted “the development, or lack thereof, of anthropology in all Arab countries.” He tried to explain the problems by analysing “the institutional development of anthropology, its insertion into transregional contexts, and the material difficulties of conducting research in some countries.”

Han Vermeulen gave a talk in the *Doing History of Anthropology* panel. It was called “Early Ethnographers Before 1870”, and it seemed to be a development from the recently published collective volume *Ethnographers Before Malinowski* (Rosa and Vermeulen 2022). Vermeulen appealed to the listeners to send him information about pre-1870 authors whose work could be considered ethnographies. As we go further into the past, only some travelogues can be called ethnographies. Let us wish Han and his collaborators success in distilling worthwhile but unknown ethnographies of the 18th and earlier centuries.

An interesting paper was presented by **Maria Beatrice Di Brizio** (French member of HOAN), who studied the research methods of Edward Tylor. She proposed “to demonstrate that not only Tylor’s in situ observation of Mexican society and antiquities but also his armchair research practices – culling of data from written sources, strategies for checking and classifying borrowed data – attest to a sustained effort to establish anthropology as an empirical and inductive science.”

Peter Rohrbacher (Austrian Academy of Sciences) tackled one of the mysteries of the history of anthropology: was Richard Thurnwald a National Socialist or not? After WWII, the founder of ethnosociology and still existing journal *Sociologus* managed to persuade victorious powers and influential anthropologists that he had been “a staunch Nazi opponent”. Rohrbacher showed in his paper that there were documents testifying otherwise and it seemed that it was high time that Thurnwald’s politics be reviewed.

István Sántha (Institute of Ethnography, Research Center for the Humanities, Budapest) and **Tatyjana Szafonova** (Comenius University, Bratislava) related about Vilmos Diószegi’s fieldwork sojourns in Southern Siberia and Northern Mongolia that took place between 1957 and 1964. The first fieldwork was made possible just a few months after the Soviet crushing of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. The paper-givers did not explain this apparent puzzle, which may be connected with Diószegi’s political stance. Also interesting was the assertion that Diószegi’s motivation for his shamanism studies (*Tracing Shamans in Siberia*, 1968) was a search for Hungarian Asian origins.

Another revealing paper was by Staffan Müller-Wille (University of Cambridge) and **Elena Isayev** (University of Exeter), who discussed the youthful field trip of

the great botanist Carl Linné to the country inhabited by the Saami (then known as Lapps) on the divide between northern Sweden and Finland. The authors of the paper mentioned their “new English online edition and translation of Carl Linnaeus’s diary of a journey through Lapland undertaken in 1732” and reported about “a re-enactment of that journey.” Indeed, they more or less moved on the traces of Linné. As they wrote, “by combining re-translation and re-enactment of the journey we envisage an entirely novel methodology of scholarly edition.”

One should not omit another revealing paper: “Before Lady Frazer: Glimpses of Mrs Lilly Grove, FRGS” by **Luis Felipe Sobral** (University of Sao Paulo, Brazil). Mrs Lilly Grove (1855-1941) is nobody else than the later Lady Frazer, who immensely helped her (second) husband in his laborious volume writing. As Mrs Grove, she was an independent researcher on the history of dance, and as an expert of South American geography, she was “one of the first women elected fellow of the Royal Geographical Society.”

Independent British researchers **Hugh Firth** and **Loulou Brown** gave a fascinating paper on “Rosemary Firth: An Anthropologist in the Shadow of Raymond Firth and Edmund Leach”. It appears from their paper and their recently published book *Love, Loyalty and Deceit. Rosemary Firth, a Life in the Shadow of Two Eminent Men* (Berghahn 2023) that both later Sirs have been serially in love with Rosemary but it was Raymond, her husband since 1936, who made her anthropology possible albeit as a representative of the second sex. Rosemary Firth left a legacy of her solid anthropology writings and students whom she taught.

Amalia Dragani (University of Florida, US // KU Leuven, Belgium), in her paper “The Other of Biography and the Anthropologist as a Poet: the explosive encounter between Bronislaw Malinowski and Stanislaw Witkiewicz”, reminded the listeners about the poetic contents of the relationship between Malinowski and Witkiewicz (alias Witkacy). Dragani then speculates: “How has he contributed with his presence, his reflections, his intellectual and artistic background to Malinowski’s fieldwork and, more in general, to the birth of anthropology?” It should be noted that Witkacy broke with Malinowski and did not accompany him to New Guinea.

Roundtable

The conference was made even more lively by the introduction of a Roundtable *Writing Transnational Histories of Anthropologies* animated by anthropological stars **Gustavo Lins Ribeiro**, **Susana Narotzky**, **Yasmeen Arif**, **Michał Buchowski** and **Benoît de l’Estoile**. They asked “how anthropologists have generated and exchanged transnational and intercultural knowledge in different professional

settings. Central to this endeavour is the understanding of cognitive extractivism's role in the relationships between non-hegemonic and hegemonic anthropologies. How does it relate to the undervaluation of non-anglophone anthropological writings? What do non-hegemonic anthropological traditions and their respective histories bring to a global polyphonic interpretation of disciplinary history and to its decolonisation? How do national traditions, differently located within the world system of anthropological production, become lenses through which world anthropologies are seen?" These questions have become evergreens in the world anthropological discourse in recent years.

Keynote 2

Finally, there was a closing keynote address by none other than **Thomas Hylland Eriksen** of the University of Oslo. His entertaining talk was called "The many languages in the history of European anthropology". Eriksen stressed that "English is totally dominant in the field, which places most European anthropologists at a disadvantage when it comes to publishing, funding applications, professional communication and informal networking." He regretted that "[A] great deal of significant anthropological work has been and is being published in languages other than English. Most of it never makes its way into official historiographies of the discipline." In my comment, I mentioned that English as the language of anthropology would be okay, but that non-English speakers need funds for copy-editing so that their writings are fully competitive.

References

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