

27. Ethnographies of Historicity

Convenors:

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The realisation that the historical dimension of societies cannot be neglected has prompted anthropologists to make the 'historical turn'. They may have turned too quickly, however, without checking their understanding of 'history' or examining comparable ideas about the categories of historicity, historical consciousness, or historicization, more generally, in the societies they study. This panel invites contributions offering conceptual clarification through ethnographic contextualisation. The modern, conventional understanding of history in Western societies is a factual narrative about the past composed according to rational principles. This conventional understanding poses history as an explicit domain of human existence. However, it cannot be assumed that all societies necessarily construe knowledge about the past in this manner. Although historicity is common to all societies - a (social) past that informs the present and constrains the conditions for future possibilities - the response to it is variable. Under what conditions (e.g. colonialism, missionization) do representations of the past emerge which are locally recognised as 'historical' or 'history'; or perhaps these representations are a given in all societies? What form does this 'history' take: as distinctive narratives and/or as non-linguistic ritual, music, dance, sculpture, visions, possessions, or as places and landscapes? Significantly, then, what are the connections between historicity and history - how does one affect the other? The panel invites all manner of ethnographic presentations which seek to conceptually clarify the use and the limits of the notion of 'history' by anthropologists and by the people they study.

Experience, Emotion and the Formation of Historical Consciousness Among the Banabans in Fiji

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Oceanic societies' historical representations challenge ethnographers to examine the cultural specifics of historical consciousness, thereby offering an opportunity to critically reconsider western concepts. This case study deals with historical discourses of the Banabans, a group with origins on the island of Banaba in the central Pacific who were relocated to Fiji. Under the hegemony of western 'regimes of historicity' that went along with Christianisation, mining, colonization, war, resettlement, and finally decolonization, the Banabans created a new specific historical consciousness, transforming in the process their selves as well as their relationships with others. In doing so, they incorporated just those emotional experiences into their historical consciousness that were best suited for use in constructing an independent ethnic identity in a particular historical situation. I would like to demonstrate this by analysing a piece of Banaban dance theatre – an exemplary Banaban genre for transmitting knowledge of the past. I argue that any ethnography of Banaban historicity must take into consideration the role of experiences and emotions in the making of historical consciousness and history.

Conceptions of History and Political Institutions: Views from Tokelau and New Zealand

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Much anthropology in the Pacific is historically oriented. Early studies set the trend through their coupling of a holistic ambition with an interest in the recovery of a pre-contact past. To this literature has been added studies of 'neo-traditional societies', of 'post-colonialism' and of contemporary cultural revival of presumed ancient practices. However, studies of historical processes in contemporary society, akin to what D. Handelman describes as doing micro-history, 'in the making', are still in the minority. I shall explore the possibilities of such an approach in this paper. In Tokelau terms, the genre that most closely resembles 'history' is what is called *tala mai anamua*, '(true) tales from the past'. Such knowledge of the past is also preserved in songs and in genealogies, and is carefully guarded. Possession of this kind of knowledge is an important factor when it comes to achieving and maintaining political leadership. In this paper I shall investigate how genealogical, 'historical' knowledge enters into political life, and show how local conceptions of the past play a significant role in shaping relationships with Tokelau's counterpart, New Zealand, in the present.

Ethnographies of Historicity in Creole Societies: Examples from Indonesia and Sierra Leone

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Creolization involved people of both different foreign and local descents developing a new common identity of ethnic reference which, in time, also provided trans-ethnic reference for others who did not become part of the respective creole community. Conceptions and accounts of creole ethnogenesis tend to be extremely contested within the creole community itself as well as among those adhering to creole-ness transethnically. In either case they depend on – often contradictory – social and political intentions that evolved in the given postcolonial, multiethnic environments. For example, processes of both Krio (Sierra Leone) and Betawi (Jakarta, Indonesia) ethnogenesis were connected to slavery. The Krio historicize slavery in manifold ways positioning themselves either as people who have had the advantage of early proximity to (white) civilization or who can justly claim pure African heritage, while still others claim a middle position. The Betawi usually deny the existence of ancestral slaves or call them a Dutch invention intended to punish the Betawi for fighting colonialism. This latter "tale of resistance" has been introduced lately to promote "Betawi-ness" as the core of Jakartan culture and the prime bearer of Jakartan tradition and nationhood.

Inuit Historicities in Transition: Examples from Greenland and Nunavut

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No one will dispute that Inuit and non-Inuit senses of their own, and others', 'history' are not identical. But, beyond a few stereotypes framed as oppositions between written and oral, history and myth, etc., we know little about the ways in which they differ. All historical consciousnesses are historically situated; recently, Inuit historicities have been undergoing changes paralleling the rapid transitions of their

cultures and identities. What role does the modern education of Inuit schoolchildren, students, and researchers in Western scholarly traditions, play in the redefinitions of Inuit historicities? And what about the fact that, increasingly, Inuit read and construct their own history--on the basis of data collected and interpreted mostly by outsiders? Under the pressure to adopt 'participatory' research strategies, itself connected to the devolution of powers (e.g. Nunavut), a number of recent oral history / social memory projects have shed light on current Inuit concepts of history. I will present and discuss a few contrasting examples from Nunavut and from Greenland.

Pots for Ancestors: Commemorative Gifts and the Background of Historicity

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The idea of historicity is related in this paper to the ancestors' cult. Among Romanians the main form of ancestors' cult is the ritual of *mosi*. ('founders of the village', 'ancestors', generally 'the dead'). The *mosi* are celebrated on certain days of the year, but especially on Ascension Day (the 'summer *mosi*'). The celebration consists in a gift exchange of pots practiced by women (as officiants of the cult) to commemorate the dead. Each pot (or vessel) is offered in the name of a dead kin person. Through this gift exchange, the presence of an individual in the memory of community is periodically reiterated, and, in turn, the community benefits from reinforcing the solidarity among living people and the solidarity between the living and the dead. This collective solidarity in and against the time satisfies the profound human need for unforgetting and continuity, which represent the hidden but common component of all conceptions about history as the knowing of a human past. That is why the ancestors' cult may be regarded as the *background of historicity*. It is in this sense that Bacon's idea of history as a function of memory must be interpreted.

Town-Twinning in Greece: An Experience of Recognizing 'History' as a Domain of Practice

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Since 1989, Greek municipalities have twinned with countries in which their ancestors had established 'colonies' (e.g., Italy, Turkey), and with which they have lived a 'common history' (e.g., 'the Balkans'). However, town-twinning does not resonate with all residents' feelings: there are Greeks who would recognize a 'common history' with Turks and those who would not; also, there are immigrants (e.g. Kurds), who would recognize Greeks' relations with Turkey as 'historical', but not relations with Italy. The recognition of 'history' as a domain of practice depends on the extent to which the residents of a town share common experiences of the past and the present, (e.g. Greeks' relations to Turks, as opposed to Italians, are culturally recognizable by Kurds), and on the different ways these experiences have been lived by them – e.g., Greeks who refuse to recognize a common history with Turks are usually those whose forefathers were killed by the enemy, whereas Greeks who do recognize it belong to those whose ancestors were "exchanged" with Muslim populations. Town-twinning reshuffles residents' common and different experiences and gives them the opportunity to decide what counts as history and what makes one history 'truer' than another.

Healing History: Encounter and Appropriation in Anglo-Protestant Self-Representation

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During the twentieth century, mainstream, North American Anglo-Protestants underwent a radical shift in self-understanding that was deeply tied to their conceptualizations of the role of Christianity in and for history. Especially as Protestants debated the relationship of healing, medicine, and Christianity, Anglo-Protestants moved from thinking of themselves as healers of the unsaved to Christians who themselves needed healing. Protestants often framed early debates about healing as attacks on “heathen” practices encountered by medical missionaries and on ‘heretical’ healing movements at home, such as Christian Science. Their shift from healers to healed occurred in part because of encountering alternative histories told by those they had sought to convert or defame, whether Indian yogi, Native American healer, or

Christian Scientist. Gradually, many mainstream Protestants embraced an open perspective on alternate histories of divine action in the world as evidenced by the adoption (or appropriation) of therapies such as yoga, Reiki, and healing circles. In a post-colonial era, these alternative histories provoked multiple responses in Anglo-Protestants, from humility and repentance, to appropriation and resentment. This focus on Protestant historical consciousness through the lens of healing, demonstrates how, especially in modern and post-colonial contexts, historical self-representation occurs in encounter with the histories of others.

Cunning Histories: Privileging Narratives in the Present

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In this paper I will consider the implications of the ways in which anthropologists negotiate historical knowledge and the problem of what counts as ‘context’. Since the ‘historical turn’ in anthropology, it has become commonplace to locate anthropological analysis within a relevant historical context. This privileges certain historical knowledge, which in turn informs analysis. My paper examines how far this seems to promote rather than to examine the notion of an objective and value free history.

My doctoral research examines the construction of witchcraft historiographies in Britain. Drawing on this I raise an issue which is highlighted through research which specifically addresses contested versions of historical knowledge: that of the history of the rural village wise woman. While some contemporary witches feel that this provides a primary root of historical knowledge, heritage and lineage, others suggest that that accurate rationalist historical research does not support this. This also reveals debates within the pagan movement as to what constitutes appropriate historical knowledge and accurate criteria for evidence. Questions about historicity necessarily invoke questions about the status of knowledge, and how some versions of events are privileged over others in order to initiate the presentation of the debates and analysis.

