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Anthropology and History

Jane K. Cowan

The Anthropology/History Interface

In 1980, Bernard Cohn, who had long been working at the interstices of anthropology and history, set out the 'state of play' between the two disciplines after three decades of intellectual and social exchange (Cohn 1980). Historians and anthropologists, he noted, both explored 'otherness': in time, for one group; in space, for the other. Both were concerned with text and context, and with grasping human meanings; both forms of knowledge entailed translation. Yet members of the two disciplines were divided into separate professional guilds, each of which produced its own distinct subject matter.

With delicious parody, Cohn described how anthropologists constructed Anthropologyland, a place 'where the natives are authentic, untouched and aboriginal' and where social change came from 'the missionary in a rowboat' (or the trader, the labour recruiter, the government official). Using their sacred method of 'fieldwork', anthropologists sought out elders with the richest memories of days gone by and put together a picture of native life. Historyland, by contrast, was a world of paper: unlike anthropologists, who wanted to know what was in native heads, historians cared only for 'what, purposely or accidentally, they had put down on paper'. Since poor and illiterate people generally did not write, and were rarely thought to be interesting enough for others to write about, all that paper described the lives of kings and queens, preachers and popes, and later presidents and prime ministers, congresses and courts; such figures were at the centre of the stories that historians told.

But something happened in the 1940s- or rather, various things. The Second World War, independence struggles of colonized peoples, and decolonization, followed by the Cold War, woke up historians to the existence of the 'non-Western world', while it forced anthropologists either completely out of that world, or into a different relationship with it. Then came the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. All of this, said Cohn, threw both disciplines into a state of 'epistemological anarchy'.

Cohn concluded his essay by proposing a new conjuncture between anthropology and history, arguing that 'history can become more historical in becoming more anthropological, and anthropology can become more

anthropological in becoming more historical'. Three decades hence, one sees abundant evidence of that conjuncture, though it takes quite different forms: this chapter explores some of them. But first, I set out the shared arenas of dialogue, where, in thousands of diverse conversations, anthropologists and historians first got acquainted.

Anthropology and History: Key Arenas of Dialogue Since the 1980S

If anthropologists and historians have occasionally exchanged ideas since the early twentieth century, by the 1980s a number of important arenas of dialogue were well established. By no means comprehensive, this section sketches out seven key arenas, many of which have continued to be fertile up to the present: British Marxist social history; the History Workshop Movement; feminism; Subaltern Studies; oral history; the new cultural history; and historical political economy approaches. Influenced by the political ferment of the 1960s, what most of those engaging in these arenas shared, notwithstanding their distinct genealogies and theoretical differences, was a preoccupation with 'the little and the lowly': with people positioned toward the bottom of the hierarchy and with humble things and mundane practices (Cohn slyly dubbed it 'proctological history'). Along with this came a commitment to explore what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) and others have recognized as the significance of 'the insignificant'. Whereas this stance represented, in many ways, business-as-usual for anthropologists, it signalled a new departure for historians.

The work of 'the historiographic Left' (Anderson 1992: 285), and particularly British Marxist social historians (many of them explicitly 'New Left'), stands out for its decisive impact on anthropological thinking. Influence did not flow only one way, of course: Eric Hobsbawm's involvement in Max Gluckman's anthropology seminar inspired him to write *Primitive Rebels* (1959), while E.P. Thompson, emblematic figure of this trend, saw much common ground between historians, folklorists and anthropologists. Challenging the elite focus and conservatism of their own discipline, leftist historians were using a critical, often Gramscian, lens that anthropologists were later to find immensely fruitful. Through articles published in the journal *Past and Present*, founded in 1952 by the nucleus of the Communist Party's Historians Group, and through extended monographs, like Thompson's groundbreaking *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), leftist social historians undertook a project of recuperation, rescuing 'from the enormous condescension of posterity' (Thompson 1963: 12) those whose voices and experiences had been excluded from conventional histories, and in the process, re-

thinking the notion of 'class' in terms of historical relationships 'embodied in real people and in a real context' (Thompson 1963: 9; see also Anderson 1992; Eley 2005).

Animated by similar political and intellectual convictions, the History Workshop Movement associated with Raphael Samuel, Sheila Rowbotham and the worker-students at the Oxford trades union college, Ruskin, commenced in 1967 as a series of one-day workshops celebrating history from a nonelite perspective, or what came to be known as 'history from below'. More than simply a history of the labour movement, however, workshops included explorations of popular protest and ordinary people's experience. Through workshops as well as through the *History Workshop Journal*, created in 1976, the movement aimed to democratize, deprofessionalize and politicize history: its radical pedagogical approach placed university faculty and knowledgeable lay persons on an equal footing.

Among the History Workshop activists were a number of women involved in the 1960s women's movement. Sally Alexander recalls the bewildering 'gust of masculine laughter' when, in the 1969 History Workshop, a group of women asked for expressions of interest in the theme of 'Women's History' (1994 [1983]: 271). Undeterred, Alexander and numerous feminist colleagues pushed the Marxist charge of working class exclusion from history a step further by criticizing the masculinist orientation of labour histories and highlighting the degree to which women were, in Sheila Rowbotham's words, *Hidden from History* (1973). They began to unearth evidence of women's lives that traditional historical biases had obscured and, simultaneously, to explore the theoretical implications of that exclusion. Whereas historical materialism posited class as the primary determinant of social being and relegated questions of sexual difference and division to the realm of nature, socialist-feminist historians insisted that the sexual relation was historical. Recognizing this required a rethink of basic categories that not only had been insufficiently historicized but also had been imagined as 'gender neutral': the individual, the citizen, the political, the common good, the distinction between public and private spheres.

As part of a larger feminist debate engaging activists and scholars across the academy globally, and from a variety of theoretical positions, feminist historians grappled with complex histories of women, femininity and feminist action, showing how class and gender shaped each other in actual historical practice (see, e.g., Campbell 1984; Steedman 1986; Hall and Davidoff 1987). Many feminist scholars have also drawn productively on psychoanalysis to give greater depth to their analyses of gendered lives, past and present. While by the late 1980s the feminist movement was forced to confront its own assumption of 'woman' and 'women' as coherent social and political categories and compelled to address the diversity within (e.g., Mohanty et

al. 1991; Frankenberg 1993), feminist scholarship has remained productively provocative in its willingness to frame historical investigations in terms that draw insights from other disciplines and transgress boundaries: for instance, by making questions of subjectivity central to histories of gender relations.

A number of feminist anthropologists dealing with historical issues have forged their approaches in the context of these debates: for instance, in feminist re-examinations of the lives and work of earlier generations of female anthropologists, explorers or journalists, such as Henrietta Moore and Megan Vaughan's (1994) study of gender, nutrition and agricultural change in Zambia, which re-engages with Audrey Richard's 1930s fieldwork, and Julie Marcus' (1992, 2001) account of the career of the flamboyant Australian anthropologist and aboriginal rights campaigner of the same era, Olive Pink. Anthropologists have also contributed significantly to the research area, largely created and constantly retheorized by feminist scholarship, of histories of race, gender and class under various forms of colonial rule (Callaway 1987; Stoler 1995). Finally, feminist scholarship has been instrumental in instigating reflection on anthropology's own disciplinary histories, institutionally and in the context of case studies of individual anthropologists.

New Left in orientation and sharing much common ground with feminist approaches to history, the Subaltern Studies Collective, a group of South Asian – largely Bengali – historians, undertook to recuperate the voice and experience of 'the subaltern' within Indian historiography by challenging not only colonialist and nationalist but also Marxist meta-narratives. Drawing on a Gramscian notion of 'the subaltern' (a person or group of inferior rank due to social categorization), as well as Foucauldian insights on power and knowledge, the Collective has attempted to read Indian historiography against the grain to reveal subaltern consciousness and the social conditions that produced it. In a signature article analysing the historiography of peasant revolts under the Raj, for instance, Ranajit Guha (1983) criticized both of the dominant approaches – that of the British colonial historians and of the nationalist (often Marxist) Indian historians – for refusing to grapple with the religious element in rebel consciousness, and thus failing to 'acknowledge the insurgent as the subject of his own history' (Guha 1983 [1994: 364]).

Subaltern Studies has generated a substantial body of historical work, with some of its members developing the intersection of history with postcolonial theory (see, e.g., Chatterjee 1986, 1993; Chakrabarty 2000), anthropology (Chatterjee 2002) and feminism (Mani 1998). A basic familiarity with its problematic and approach is by now *de rigueur* among anthropologists, and has been widely influential, inspiring critical interventions in other postcolonial contexts such as Latin America (Coronil 2004). Ironically, one of the most significant interventions that Subaltern Studies has provoked challenges the very possibility of the subaltern historical pro-

ject. Speaking from outside, although largely sympathetic to, Subaltern Studies, and informed by Derridean and Third World feminist perspectives, Gayatri Spivak's essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988) does not quite answer, 'No', but she insists that discerning subaltern voices requires deeper recognition of the ways that scholars – including critical, postcolonial scholars – remain implicated in the power relations of writing history.

Sometimes described as an international social movement rather than a method, oral history has brought together not only anthropologists and historians but also folklorists, journalists, teachers, students and political activists. Sharing many aims with the British-based History Workshop Movement and with feminist and Marxist social history, oral history has deeper and more varied roots. In the United States, it harked back to the Depression-era project of the Works Public Administration Federal Writers Project, where writers earned their bread recording ordinary people's stories, but also to the fictional trilogy, *USA*, by John Dos Passos and to the inspiring radio interviews since 1952 of the Chicago-based broadcaster and writer, Studs Terkel (1967, 1974). In Latin America, oral history had been an element of popular education projects and, in Europe, it was a method of both history collection and political consciousness raising, particularly in feminist groups.

If, for anthropologists whose discipline was shaped in engagement with non-literate societies, oral history methods did not seem especially strange, the same cannot be said for the historical profession. Historians using these methods met firm resistance from colleagues who contrasted the trustworthiness of written sources with the biased views and faulty memories of living subjects. Grounded in a positivist world-view that many would find problematic, this scepticism has nonetheless had the salutary effect of forcing historians, and others using oral history methods, to push further not just the methodological but also the political, theoretical and epistemological issues surrounding subjectivity, remembering and forgetting and multiple versions of the past. Now classic works by Italian scholars Luisa Passerini (1987) and Alessandro Portelli (1991), among others, have deepened the sophistication of oral history – and the similar life history – approaches; they have also contributed to a widening of oral history scholarship's scope from questions about representation of the past, to those of performance through narration, song and dance of historically situated selves and their pasts in the present (Tonkin 1992; McCall 1999).

While the historical interventions discussed so far evolved in the context of a critique of elite histories flavoured by Marxism of one sort or another, much of the work dubbed 'the new cultural history' by some of its proponents had somewhat different antecedents. One strand of cultural history represented a turning away from the structural explanations of social processes and '*mentalités*' characteristic of the Annales School to-

ward a 'reassertion of the particular and piecemeal, contingent and episodic' (Anderson 1992: 282). This has entailed an embrace of microhistory and a more 'ethnographic approach' to understanding the past. Sharing with other 'histories from below' an interest in ordinary people's lives, the new cultural histories have highlighted, as the name suggests, issues of culture, meaning and the 'feel' of everyday life in other times. Church records, particularly testimonies collected in inquisitorial investigations, have been key sources of ordinary people's world-views in classic works of this genre, such as Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* (1980) and Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms: The Cosmos of a Sixteenth Century Miller* (1980).

For many historians participating in the 'cultural turn', anthropology has been a source of theoretical inspiration. The Oxford-based historian Keith Thomas drew on Evans-Pritchard's study of witchcraft among the Azande for his analysis of witchcraft in early modern England (1971), while Natalie Zemon Davis, investigating early modern France, looked to Victor Turner's theories of ritual and Mary Douglas's work on classification. Clifford Geertz's interpretive approach and calls for 'thick description' stimulated a whole slew of historians, including, along with Davis, Greg Denning, Robert Darnton, William Sewell, Inga Clendinnen and Rhys Isaac, to attempt to reconstruct 'worlds of meaning'. Many of these accounts focus on the micro level: following an individual (as in Davis' [1983] *The Return of Martin Guerre*) or crafting a culturally coherent story out of a seemingly bizarre episode (as in Darnton's [1984] analysis of the 'Great Cat Massacre' in 18th-century Paris). These approaches take cultural particularity seriously, exemplifying Cohn's observation about the two disciplines' shared preoccupation with human and societal 'difference'.

In their enthusiasm, some cultural historians have succumbed to the sins of reifying, homogenizing and essentializing 'culture', over which so much anthropological ink has been spilled. Their focus, moreover, on the micro level, and on cultural meaning, has elicited strong criticism from some anthropologists, who accuse them of overemphasizing 'culture' as against other forms of difference, as well as of failing to contextualize their stories in wider political, economic and historical processes. But their project need not be seen as uncritical of wider hegemonies. The new cultural historians have pursued the critique of the Western conception of the 'human' parading as universal through their own disciplinary avenues. As against the dominant historiographical tendency to portray those of other eras as governed by the same interests and emotions as ourselves, they have been at pains to show – to borrow the words of the novelist L.P. Hartley (1953) – that 'the past is a foreign country' (see also Lowenthal 1985). Explored in a stimulating debate organized by the Group for Debates in Anthropological Theory (GDAT) at the University of Manchester in 1992 (Ingold 1996), this notion of the past's utter foreignness – and the implied analogy of any culture's incommensurability vis-à-vis another – was also an element in the exhilarating intellectual combat between two distinguished an-

thropologists, Marshall Sahlins and Gananath Obeyesekere, over how much the actions of the 18th-century Hawai'ian islanders who killed Captain Cook should be interpreted through the lens of culture (Obeyesekere 1992; Sahlins 1985, 1995; see also Borofsky 1997).

In stark contrast to the microscopic focus of the cultural historians and of some of the Marxist social historians, and oral historians' focus on individual experience, Eric Wolf in *Europe and the People without History* (1982) attempted an analytic history on a grand scale. Adding an anthropological perspective to Wallerstein's world systems theory (though rejecting its evolutionism), and arguing against the view of cultures or societies as 'islands', Wolf aimed to show the world to be a totality of interconnected processes, involving the conjoint participation of Western and non-Western people. Magisterial in its scope and capacity for synthesizing broad political and economic processes, it criticized the implicitly triumphalist history of 'European expansion' for failing to include the 'people without history' who were its victims and silent witnesses (for an even more historically far-reaching, yet differently grounded, critique of European triumphalism, see Goody 2006). Being primarily a story of the expansion of European capitalism, though, Wolf's book verges on conflating this history of contact with history itself, perhaps provoking Sherry Ortner's (1984: 143) observation that political economists often treat history as 'something that arrives, like a ship, from outside the society in question'. Moreover, while Wolf's account demonstrates the profound impact of global trade on seemingly remote sites, and the ways that non-Western people became actively and creatively drawn into exchanges and dependencies, we learn little of how such changes were actually perceived by those 'without history'. For this, the innovative approaches to constructing colonial histories out of fragmentary written records and contemporary material legacies developed by Michael Taussig (1980, 1986) have arguably been more evocative of – even if not directly articulating – indigenous experiences.

Wolf's ambitious effort to map the evolving political and economic relations between the West and the non-West since 1492 and, thus, to show the world as a totality or system, rather than 'a sum of self-contained societies and culture', has been influential. His work articulates a shared project among a number of Marxist anthropologists to define and develop a 'historical anthropology'. A number of these authors have built upon Wolf's approach to history as 'a material social process ... characterised by economic and political inequality and domination' (Roseberry 1989: 11) in explicit rejection of culturalist approaches (among the most vehement, see Kalb and Tak 2005). Roseberry characterizes the work of Geertz and Sahlins as epitomizing a view of the Other as 'different and separate, a product of its own history and carrying its own historicity', whereas the global and historical political economy approach championed by Wolf would see the Other as 'different but *connected*, a product of a particular history that is itself intertwined with a larger set of economic, political,

social and cultural processes to such an extent that analytical separation of “our” history and “their” history is impossible’ (Roseberry 1989: 13). Yet it could be argued that conflating the two histories involves subsuming one of them, which the phrase ‘people without history’ unfortunately suggests. Consequently, the manner of apprehending the encounter between local and external worlds becomes crucial. With much greater attention to local formulations, John and Jean Comaroff, for instance, maintain the analytical distinction but argue for a dynamic dialectical relation: ‘. all local worlds have their own *intrinsic* historicity, an internal dialectic of structure and practice that shapes, reproduces and transforms the character of everyday life within them – and. mediates their encounters with the universe beyond’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992: 97–98).

With the inverse problem of the cultural historians, political economy's focus on structural processes always holds a danger of erasing or underestimating local or ‘cultural’ difference. Yet, rather than rejecting the concern with meaning, the most compelling work in this tradition has been concerned to demonstrate intersections of meaning with power within historical processes, albeit within an overall framework of tracing the effects of capitalist penetrations. One could point to Sidney Mintz's (1985) *Sweetness and Power*, which followed connections between the transformation of the Caribbean into plantation economies and changing class relations, forms of sociability and consumption practices in England, or Gerald Sider's (1986) investigation of the cultural and psychological consequences of merchant-fisherman social relations in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Newfoundland. In the best work of this kind, one sees an attempt to combine structural explanations of class, race and gender relations with careful, ethnographically detailed attention to what Raymond Williams (1977) called ‘structures of feeling’ and to the consequences for subjectivity.

An exceptionally stimulating intervention in this vein is the edited collection by Gerald Sider and Gavin Smith (1997), which draws not only on Wolf but also on the British Marxist social historians to examine ‘the makings of silences and commemorations’. If historians sought to recuperate the voices that history had omitted or silenced, Sider and Smith identify the ambiguities of breaking such silences, and discern a more complex set of ethical and conceptual issues arising when intellectuals engage with subaltern peoples' histories. Outsiders' efforts to elicit oral accounts of past events may encounter a refusal to speak rooted in many kinds of reasons: in a reluctance to antagonize present relationships, or in protest to a ‘public’ history that trivializes their past suffering, or because they, themselves, have repressed the unspeakable. In his perceptive analysis of retellings among Peruvian peasants of a collective land invasion in 1948, Smith (1997) focuses not on the distinction between ‘official history’ and repressed histories but rather on the performative effects of rehearsing these accounts collectively in order ‘not to close the book on the past’ and to keep alive a memory of their own agency. Smith recalls E.P. Thompson's explicit vision of social history as part of a political project for the

present, and queries the facile assumption that efforts by intellectuals to break open silences 'for unrestricted and vicarious consumption' is necessarily a good thing. He nonetheless acknowledges that there may be moments when 'voicing repressed histories should be endorsed, sometimes even *against* the memory of those we study' (1997: 92).

New Directions

The key arenas of dialogue that I have mapped above, firmly established by the 1980s, have, as my summaries show, continued to evolve. Yet the past quarter century has also seen the emergence of new preoccupations. In the remainder of this essay, I explore four such areas of engagement which seem to me both significant and intellectually exciting.

Michel de Certeau's Approaches to History

An ongoing source of inspiration for scholars of anthropology's cognate disciplines since the 1970s, the work of Michel de Certeau is being rediscovered by anthropologists in recent years (Napolitano and Pratten 2007). Working at the interstices of history, philosophy, the social sciences, cultural studies and psychoanalysis, Michel de Certeau developed what Ben Highmore calls a 'metamethodology. dedicated to encouraging heterogeneity and allowing alterity to proliferate' (Highmore 2006: 8). In studies of the past, as of the present, he argued that there was no privileged access to the real. Against the historiographical positivism of Leopold von Ranke – that history writing should 'show the past as it once was' – de Certeau argued that the past was unrecoverable. Nonetheless, he advocated a 'critical historiography' which aimed toward "relatively" better practices, relatively more productive, more liberatory, ways of making and doing history' (Highmore 2006: 36).

De Certeau is important for anthropologists working at the interface of history because of his strikingly innovative approaches to this project. He conceived the present as composed of multiple temporalities. Whereas a 'scriptural economy' defines which accounts of the past are authoritative, filtering out disturbingly plural and disruptive knowledges, those repressed, sidelined stories can never be banned completely: they haunt as dreams, circulate as folklore or rumour, or erupt as possession, accusations of witchcraft or mystical speech (de Certeau 1984, 1988, 2000). Similarly concerned with the problems of discerning subjugated voices, de Certeau drew on psychoanalysis to inform his method, rather than his interpretation. Thus, de Certeau's en-

gagement with psychoanalysis as a founder member of Lacan's *École freudienne de Paris* since 1964 underpins his advocacy of a particular form of attention in both ethnography and historical analysis: 'a practice of listening, allowing voices to speak, of establishing a scene of communication that allows the unconscious to signify' (Highmore 2006: 20). Even in texts where subaltern voices are apparently absent, they may be present as a trace in the voice of the dominant: reading the sixteenth-century French Calvinist Jean Léry's tremulous description of 'being ravished' by the haunting beauty of the Tupi Indians' singing, de Certeau saw those Tupi voices as altering the hearer, 'opening a breach in the text and restoring a contact of body to body' (de Certeau 1988: 235). As well as calling attention to the ways that 'orality insinuates itself, as one of the threads of which it is composed, into the network – an endless tapestry – of a scriptural economy' (de Certeau 1984: 132), de Certeau's treatment of Léry's text also highlights the importance of grasping 'structures of feeling' when writing history.

While many anthropologists acknowledge a debt to de Certeau's ideas and methods, recent years have seen more extended and imaginative engagement with his approaches to history (see Napolitano and Pratten 2007). One notable example is *Delirio* (2002), in which Marie Theresa Hernandez presents her account of 'the buried history of Nuevo León' in northeast Mexico via a sustained dialogue with de Certeau's writings on history. Alongside those stories laboriously embedded into the nation's official history, 'illicit and hidden stories', she claims, 'join together in an underground economy of the fantastic. Denied legitimacy by textual history, they are embedded in walls, tunnels, and under the foundations of houses. Stories of people buried alive erupt repeatedly' (Hernandez 2002: 14). In verbal expressions, recipes, photographs, portraits and architecture, and in stories of incest, evil and madness, Hernandez finds the ambivalent figures of the wild *norteño*, the barbarian Indian and the clandestine, inbred, fabulously rich Jews animating 'occulted histories' that the official history resolutely denies. As she recounts these eerily resonant stories and snippets of material evidence in a disarmingly plain prose style, Hernandez conveys the feeling of 'delirium' elicited when official history seems inchoate, unsettled by 'the convoluted and opaque nature of the region's written, oral and occulted history' (Hernandez 2002: 260).

Historicities

Whereas de Certeau's work addresses a primarily Western and European historiography, including its accounts of encounter with non-Western others, and reveals the heterogeneity of memory, experience and rep-

resentation within any scriptural economy, another relatively recent move in the anthropology-history interface (re)invokes the notion of 'historicity'. If the Western concept of 'history' is grounded in the idea that the past and present are separated, this concept is inadequate for situations characterized by an entanglement of past and present. An old, but newly inflected, concept, 'historicity', allows scholars to focus 'on the complex temporal nexus of past-present-future; [it] concerns the ongoing social production of pasts and futures' (Hirsch and Stewart 2005: 262). Those arguing for a renewed attention to 'historicity' would disagree with Kirsten Hastrup's confident assertion that as a result of the historical anthropology of the 1970s and 1980s, 'we no longer need to speak of historical anthropology because social anthropology as a whole has become historicised' (Hastrup 1992:7). Eric Hirsch and Charles Stewart (2005: 263) insist, to the contrary, that anthropologists 'may have turned the corner too quickly, without stopping to consider closely enough what they consider "history" to be'.

Michael Lambek's (2002) subtle interpretation of the ways the spirits of human predecessors from multiple historical eras are called together through spirit possession in ritual contexts reveals one fundamentally different historicity, yet equally different senses of history can be found in less exotic locations. Listening to how the Greek islanders of Kalymnos debate 'tradition' and 'modernity', as they talk about the desirability of old styles of cooking versus fast food or whether throwing dynamite at Easter remains a 'tradition' worth keeping, David Sutton (1998) discerns a debate about the past as well as its significance and value in the present. Sutton's patient attention to the everyday contexts where issues of history crop up obliquely or implicitly allows for fresh insights into seemingly familiar discourses. Charles Stewart similarly troubles the obviousness of the everyday by grappling with unconscious modes of historicity in contemporary Greece. Dreams, he contends, 'are a mode in which people "feel" and apprehend history in a state of sleeping unconsciousness' and through this, participate in making history (Stewart 2003: 482). These and other studies which work from an assumption of historicity share a similar point of departure to David Scott's (1996) when he insists that histories of anthropological others must also be histories of the concepts through which such histories are constructed.

Embodying, Materializing, Remembering and Forgetting the Past

An early and enduring theme in the anthropology-history dialogue has been the coexistence, as Maurice Bloch (1977) phrased it, of 'the past and the present in the present'. Whereas Bloch was concerned with theorizing social change, a more prolific strand in this discussion focused on the self-conscious 'invention of

tradition' by national or colonial elites in moments of social or political transformation. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's (1983) influential edited volume featuring six eminent scholars, all but one a historian, generated a large anthropological literature of local examples, demonstrating that such invention was indeed widespread, particularly on the part of nation-states seeking to establish their antiquity, and hence their authenticity and authority. However, the debunking impulse underlying much of this literature was eventually challenged, not least for its implicit assumption that nation-states and recognition-seeking cultural communities 'invented' while scholars had access to 'true' histories (Hanson 1989). The point about the 'selective' character of any history – in its sense as a 'story about the past' – having been made, the debate was able to move to more interesting questions: including what exactly was transpiring when individuals or communities 'misrepresented' past events (Rose 1993; Shyrock 1997; Herzfeld 2001).

What the debate around 'the invention of tradition' highlighted – somewhat *against* the original thrust of its authors, ironically – was the inventiveness required in all forms of history-making, and not only on the part of elites but also among ordinary actors. This has been a prominent theme in Michael Herzfeld's compelling accounts of the contestations surrounding historical reconstruction and the monumentalization of venerated pasts in the cities of Rethymnos (Crete) and Rome (Herzfeld 1991, 2009). Urban inhabitants in myriad roles – citizens, property owners, neighbours, kin – engage actively and often vociferously with state authorities but also, in the case of Rome, property developers and organized crime over the meanings and value (in all senses) of a historically multilayered built environment. Diverging stories of past and present compete for authority in these encounters.

Alongside the 'invention' strand, anthropologists have taken up in diverse ways questions about the past in the present. This literature, moreover, overlaps significantly with, and draws from, the still burgeoning interdisciplinary literature on 'memory'. Within the wide-ranging discussions around memory, one recurring pre-occupation among anthropologists concerns the ways the past is embodied. Paul Connerton's (1989) *How Societies Remember*, which asks us to recognize memory as social and not merely individual, is a central reference point, though many attempting to explore bodily practices of memory ethnographically draw equally or more on Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) writings on habitus and on the work of de Certeau.

Nadia Seremetakis (1994), as exemplified in her vivid description on memories of eating the peaches of her childhood, now replaced in the Athenian markets by hardier, but tasteless, new varieties, conveys the sensuality of memory, as does Sutton (2001) in his treatise on food and memory. A fascinating discussion has

developed among some anthropologists of West Africa who discern memories of the slave trade embodied in practices of witchfinding, in ritual and dance, in modalities of exploitation and dependence in labour and parent-child relations and in forms of political violence (Ferme 2001, Shaw 2002, Argenti 2007). Coming out of anthropological investigations on trauma and memory, Veena Das has long grappled with the experiences of victims of political violence – notably, women who were abducted, sometimes raped and in many cases, separated from (though sometimes later reunited with) their families during the Partition of colonial India into the two religiously defined states of India and Pakistan in 1947. In a recent volume, she explores how ‘everyday life as a site of the ordinary buried in itself the violence that provided a force within which relationships moved’ (Das 2007: 11), revealing with immense tact how such women hold the past in their bodies and relationships even as they painfully craft new accommodations to their altered circumstances. With equal subtlety and compassion, Didier Fassin (2007) examines how the bodies of HIV-positive Black South Africans ‘remember’ (and carry) the privations, violence and humiliations of the colonial and apartheid past; he argues persuasively that AIDS transmission cannot be understood except by grasping this past and the current sexual and survival practices which are its legacy.

The flip side to remembering is forgetting; yet, as a social process, forgetting is not straightforward. In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson remarks on the bizarre ‘peremptory syntax’ in the French political philosopher Ernest Renan’s essay, ‘What is a Nation?’, when Renan notes that ‘each citizen is obliged to have forgotten’ facts inconvenient to the narrative of eternal national unity, like ‘Saint Barthelémy’, while paradoxically and at the same time, indicating these regrettably bloody religious conflicts between Catholics and Protestants as those dividing ‘fellow Frenchmen’ (Anderson 1983 [1991: 199–201]). That forgetting may be intertwined with remembering is also central to Jennifer Cole’s (2001) account of forgetting – then re-remembering – colonialism in Madagascar. These, and other works, emphasize the materiality of history which marks bodies, as well as the material forms and spaces that organize and carry memory (e.g., Bahloul 1996).

Archives

Anthropologists’ engagement with archives, although already claimed as a territory anthropologists could share with historians, is one of the areas of greatest expansion in the history/anthropology interface (for recent ‘state of play’ summaries, see Axel 2002; Papailias 2005; Platt this volume); it is also part of the more wide-ranging archival turn in the human sciences (Steedman 2001). Not only are more anthropologists than ever

working in archives but also they have become ever more thoughtful about what archives are and how they might be read and used.

The move into archives, historians' quintessential domain, gathered pace with anthropology's attempt to address histories of colonialism, spurred on by the events of 1968. In part, this reflected a moral critique of colonialism's continuing legacies, such as Kathleen Gough's (1968) insistence that as 'a child of imperialism', anthropology must study postwar imperialism's new forms. Revelations regarding 'Project Camelot', where the US military used anthropological knowledge for counterinsurgency in the Southeast Asian conflict, elicited disciplinary soul-searching and led to calls to 'reinvent' anthropology (Hymes 1972) in a more activist guise, including through 'studying up' (Nader 1972). Simultaneously, some natives began to 'write back' about anthropologists' historical participation in America's internal colonialism vis-à-vis its indigenous peoples (as in Vine Deloria's [1969] scathing account of 'anthropologists and other friends' in *Custer Died for Your Sins*). Yet how was one to reconcile these accusations of complicity with the fact that most anthropologist saw themselves as liberal or even radical critics of colonialism, many actively intervening with colonial or state authorities on behalf of the people they studied?

Nuancing these critiques required acknowledging broader structures. Talal Asad (1973) and colleagues, for instance, insisted that whatever the critical stances of individual anthropologists, colonialism provided the enabling conditions for anthropology to exist as a fieldwork-based practice. Moreover, leaving out the colonial context from anthropological accounts had not only ethical but also epistemological implications. Anthropologists' attempts, in the self-consciously positivist mode of structural-functionalist analyses, to depict native societies as internally coherent systems – although an implicit riposte to colonialist assumptions of native lack – reinforced a fiction of separate worlds, as did their use of the 'ethnographic present', which implied that native subjects inhabited an ahistorical present or at least, a different 'time' from themselves (Fabian 1983). Such interventions, along with Said's (1978) sweeping diagnosis of 'Orientalism' as an institutionalized Western practice of constructing its oriental Other, generated a cottage industry of critiques of anthropological representations of Otherness, eventually leading to the Writing Culture debate (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

Yet anthropologists were interested not only in anthropology's complicity with colonialism but also with wider questions concerning the colonial encounter and its ongoing effects, including the ways that colonial administrations produced new forms of knowledge about native peoples as they attempted to govern them. Although the formulation of this problematique owes much to Michel Foucault's conception of power/knowledge,

Bernard Cohn's (1987) work anticipated Foucauldian orientations in many ways. Trained in an American cultural anthropological tradition and influenced by the historicism of Albert Kroeber, Cohn rejected an approach to colonialism that traced 'culture contact' or 'European influence' on native societies. Rather, he insisted that colonizer and colonized needed to be placed in the same analytic frame: each produced representations of Self and Other for the Other; each was influenced by this process. Colonial categories might be guided by the interests of the more powerful party, but they were not simply imposed; rather, they were produced through complex interactions and contingent implementations (see, e.g., Dirks 1986).

In attending to their dynamic interplay, Cohn's work on the production of colonial categories as part of a wider sociology of colonial knowledge opened the way for anthropologists, but also historians, 'to trace the production and consumption of [colonial] facticities' (Stoler 2009: 33). Jean and John Comaroff set the bar high with their conceptually ambitious and methodologically innovative project to situate Christian missionization among the South African Tswana within a carefully delineated racially complex and multifaceted colonial encounter, while connecting this to global economies and dynamic relations between African localities and the metropole (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997): a project which also produced a stimulating theorization of *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). With a theoretical perspective informed by a powerful amalgam of feminism, critical race theory, political economy and Foucault, Ann Stoler, another leading thinker in anthropologists' archival engagement, has addressed Dutch Indonesian colonial archives through a series of substantive questions: from her early work on race and colonial sexualities (Stoler 1995) to her most recent tracing of the affective dimensions of imperial governance (Stoler 2009). Simultaneously, she has continually wrestled with epistemological and methodological issues: in a key article, she advocated reading archives not just 'extractively' but understanding them as 'cultural agents of "fact" production, of taxonomies in the making, and of state authority' (Stoler 2002: 87).

Although colonialism remains a privileged site for archival investigation, there has been some work on 'socially transformative endeavours' (Thomas 1994: 105) analogous to colonialism, competing or coexisting with it. Intrigued by conundrums in her ethnographic work in northern Greece, Jane Cowan turned to the League of Nations Archives to explore the ways a fledgling international institution 'supervised', yet also collaborated in, the nation-state's production of internal sameness and difference (Cowan 2008) and to rethink the history of human rights. Tracing encounters between petitioners, states, international civil servants and early humanitarian activists generated by the League's 'supervision' of Greece's and Yugoslavia's treaty obligations vis-à-vis the nationally ambiguous population classified in League files as 'Bulgarian Minorities', her work reveals the

fraught emergence of 'minority' as an international political-legal category in the decades following the First World War (Cowan 2003, 2007). Anthropologists reading in the archives of state or international institutions, as in colonial archives, often find themselves following elites, yet their questions and problematiques distinguish them from traditional historians. Most endeavour to place the dispossessed and ruling groups 'in the same contextual and analytical frame' (Cohn 1980: 215); as the Comaroffs have stressed, '... histories of the repressed, in themselves, [hold no] special key to revelation;... the discourses of the dominant also yield vital insights' (1992: 17).

The relation of ethnography to the archive remains a live issue. At the level of method, the creative synergies produced when combining ethnographic approaches with analysis of archives have certainly been demonstrated. Innovative examples include Anastasia Karakasidou's (1997) synthesis of oral histories, government records and media sources to reconstruct a century of Greek nationbuilding, Keith Brown's (2003) juxtapositions of fieldwork, oral histories and archival evidence to chart the changing meanings of the past in the Republic of Macedonia, Luise White's (2000) use of archives and extensive interviews to plumb rumours of bloodsucking Europeans in colonial East Africa as a trope of colonialist plunder, James Fairhead and Melissa Leach's (1996) analysis of colonial-era aerial photographs, their own field-work observations and historical narratives collected from their Guinean informants to 'reread' a West African landscape, and Ilana Feldman's (2008) work with retired Palestinian civil servants as well as Palestinian and British mandate archives to piece together the everyday practices of governing Gaza. In a particularly original investigation of archival poetics, Penelope Papailias (2005) goes beyond institutional archives to explore her fellow Greeks' personal archive-making: a response, in part, to living in a country burdened by 'too much history'.

Such studies bring to mind John Comaroff's riposte that 'there ought to be no "relation" between history and anthropology, since there should be no division to begin with' (1982: 143–144). Not only do multiple pasts coexist, albeit uncomfortably and with unequal audibility, in every present, in the sense argued by de Certeau and by advocates of the historicity perspective, but also the toolkits of both the historian and the anthropologist are needed to interpret any given social reality.

Whither anthropology and archives? Not all anthropologists have welcomed the archival turn. Some fear that underpinning the rush to archives by increasing numbers of anthropologists is a wish to evade the risks and anxieties of fieldwork with complicated flesh-and-blood research subjects (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009). Sceptics note, moreover, that since anthropologists are not fully trained in historical methods, they may end

up just producing bad history. These worries are not unjustified, although they seem to reinstate a picture of disciplinary distinctiveness that has not held for some time (Axel 2002). It is notable that virtually all of the anthropologists cited in this section turned to archives, and to historical questions, after – often as a result of – or simultaneous with an ethnographic engagement, usually of considerable duration, with a specific social ‘space’ or ‘scene’. The trick is probably to think of ethnography and archival work not as alternatives but as two sets of methods to be used in counterpoint. Raising similar interpretive and methodological issues, each is nonetheless distinctive in what it can, and cannot, reveal; yet scholars can elicit more, and more insightfully, if they use ethnography to think both *alongside* and *against* archival data, and vice versa.

Conclusion

In the final pages of her landmark 1984 article on ‘Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties’, Sherry Ortner admitted that while she chose ‘practice’ as the key symbol of 1980s anthropology, ‘many would have chosen ... history’ (1984: 158). But for her, the amalgamation of history with ‘virtually every kind of anthropological work’ offered merely ‘a pseudointegration of the field that fail[ed] to address some of the deeper problems’ (1984: 159). Those problems arose particularly from a tendency to see history, in its role as an answer to how and why societies change, as ‘an external chain of events to which people react’. Ortner insisted, paraphrasing Marx, that history must be understood rather as ‘something that [people] make – within, of course, the very powerful constraints of the system within which they are operating’ (1984: 159). While anthropologists’ engagement with history – both as the ‘actual’ past and as stories about the past – since 1984 continues to be very diverse, the practice approach delineated by Ortner has significantly informed that engagement. Few anthropologists remain unconverted to the importance of history: increasingly, they focus on how societies, now conceived as always situated ‘in time’, produce, reproduce and transform themselves.

At the same time, work at the anthropology-history interface varies widely, and there is little evidence of an emerging lingua franca. Even the sometimes used, though rarely defined, term, ‘historical anthropology’, is claimed by many different kinds of scholars, from Marxists to poststructuralists, who share little in the way of problematiques, objectives or methods. For Brian Axel (2002: 2), it ‘remains a marked field’ in as much as ‘its practitioners’. analytic procedures threaten to reveal the fragile epistemologies and contexts of present scholarship’s doxa, a quality ‘that positions historical anthropology on the margins of conventional academic

practice'. Yet that marginality vis-à-vis each discipline's centres is simultaneously the interface between them and, as in other border epistemologies, the positionality which enables creativity and insight.

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