

# Book Review: Knowledge and Ethics in Anthropology: Obligations and Requirements edited by Lisette Josephides

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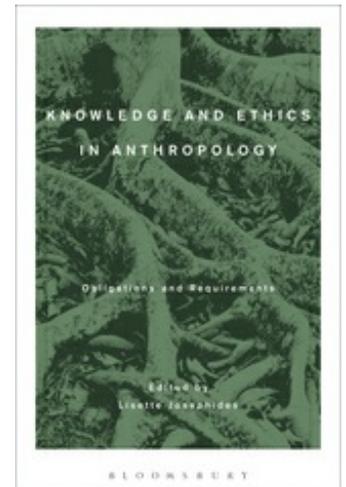
Inspired by the work of British anthropologist Marilyn Strathern, **Knowledge and Ethics in Anthropology: Obligations and Requirements**, edited by **Lisette Josephides**, presents a collection of essays that examines epistemological and ethical questions relevant to the field of anthropology today, including the ethics of being with others in the world and the relationship between the local and the global. This book is highly recommended by **Melany Cruz** in showing the relationship between epistemological thinking, the practice of anthropology and its interactions with individuals and society.

**Knowledge and Ethics in Anthropology: Obligations and Requirements**. Lisette Josephides (ed.). Bloomsbury. 2015.

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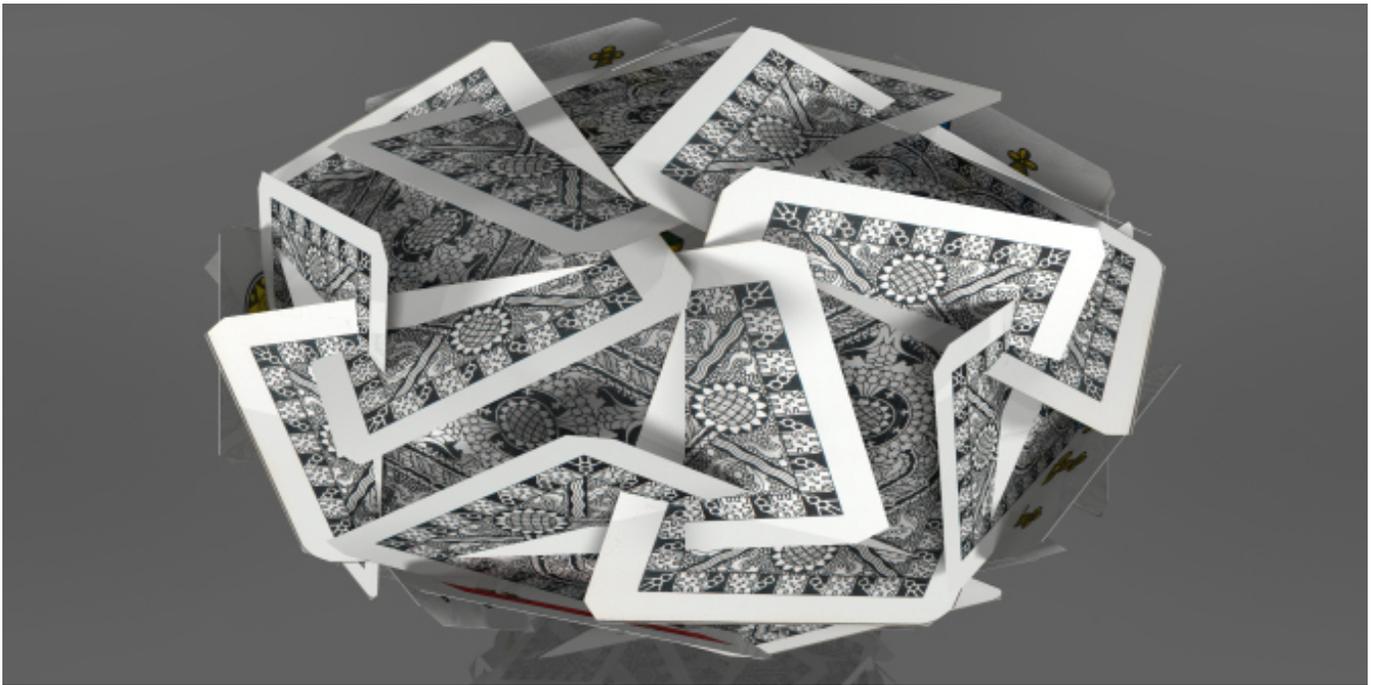
*Knowledge and Ethics in Anthropology: Obligations and Requirements*, edited by Lisette Josephides, broadly discusses the epistemological and ethical elements that are involved in the field of anthropology. The book is largely inspired by the work of the British feminist anthropologist [Marilyn Strathern](#), challenging and debating different aspects of her contribution to the field.

The book is divided into four parts and nine chapters: in the first section, it introduces 'Epistemology, Subjectivity and the Ethics of Knowing Others'; the second, in a more applicable approach, looks at 'Persons, Sociality, and Value: Partibility as Sacrifice, Consumption and Investment'; and the third considers one of the major discussions within anthropology by exploring 'Mobilizing Power and Belonging: The Local in a Global World'. Finally, the book concludes with a dialogue between Josephides, Nigel Rapport and Strathern that debates 'Knowledge Exchange and the Creativity of Relationships/Contextualizing and Recontextualizing Knowledge'.



All of these sections reflect on two main aspects: the 'requirements of the knowledge itself and the obligations which accrue in the course of its formation/development' (3). However, I will focus on three chapters of the book, which provide an interesting discussion that can be expanded into other fields of thought. This is the debate regarding subjects and the relationship to others. Josephides's chapter, entitled 'Together We Are Two: The Disjunctive Synthesis in Affirmative Mode', represents an excellent starting point for the general discussion of the book. She begins by questioning: 'Is there a form of "togetherness" possible that goes beyond folk models, local cultures and the "tragedies of the time"?' (32).

Confronting and applying the theories of Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur, Alain Badiou and Gilles Deleuze, Josephides argues that these philosophical approaches could contribute to anthropology by offering understandings of being with others in the world, its ethical considerations and how this affects the construction of 'togetherness' that it is constantly applied in anthropological thinking. She starts by examining Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*, which open up understandings of being-there and being-with-others (33) in the world. Through an exhaustive explanation of Heidegger's philosophical conceptualisations, Josephides argues that the idea that 'Being towards an Other is the same as its Being towards itself' (37) is unfounded, because it blurs the difference between 'us' and 'them', imposing on 'them' 'our' forms of living.



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However, and not in complete opposition to Heidegger, the author proposes that the notion of togetherness is built into what Deleuze conceptualised as ‘disjunctive synthesis’: that is, an anti-dialectic Two, in which the ‘we’ that is achieved ‘is not subject to the ideal of an “I”’; it is a “we” that does not pretend to a subject. It harbours alterity but contained separately, not fused into “I” (46). In other words, Josephides’s main contribution is to discuss how ‘togetherness’ appears as the possibility of differences and separations; instead of the fusion of ‘we’ that could produce oppression, it promises interactions between ‘us’.

In a similar vein, the chapter ‘Desire, Agency and Subjectivity: A Renewal of Theoretical Thinking’, by Henrietta L. Moore, explores Strathern’s book *The Gender of the Gift*, the relationship between gender and agency and how gender is constructed and understood. In this chapter, it expands the discussion of the self in relation to gender, arguing Strathern’s position that female and male are not only distinguished by objects and body parts, but are transformations of each other (63). This implies that persons are created through their relations to others, with gender being ‘something you do, rather than something you are’ (65).

In this sense, Moore challenges Strathern’s notion of a multiplicity of persons and gender, since it weakens understanding forms of otherness, failing to explore the ‘interconnections and over determinations of regulatory discourses and individual understandings, the relationship between the ideological and the personal, cultural and psyche’ (70). Instead, the chapter approaches Michel Foucault’s understanding of gendered subjects that are affected by power, regulatory discourses and cultural contexts. However, inspired by but also distanced from Foucault and Strathern, Moore proposes that gendered subjects emerge in a process of contradictions: ‘selves are dynamic matrices rather than entities or structures, they are not finished projects but an ongoing embodied way of relating to the world’ (74). This position aims to encourage the field of anthropology to develop a theory of the subject or subjecthood in order to explore the circulations and contradictions that subjects are entitled to live.

Finally, towards the end of the book, “‘Real Britons’”: Idiom and Injunctions of Belonging for a Cosmopolitan Society’, by Rapport, discusses the notion of cosmopolitan politeness as a form of subjective relation between individuals in the contemporary moment. He begins by basing the chapter on Strathern’s studies of kinship in Elmdon, a village in Essex in the south of England. In this case study, kinship is used to define the connection between people, to create a sense of belonging within the community: ‘In particular, kinship was used as a metaphor of the British system of

class and status' (172) that helped people from Elmdon to define a 'common being-in-the-world' (172).

Within this context, Rapport posits the figure of cosmopolitan politeness as a contemporary form of reconfigured social integration in a world that is constantly in movement. For him, politeness is the capability of the total, 'between the individual and the human, between the single case and the universal whole' (174). Therefore, the notion of cosmopolitan politeness is a mode of communication, 'a social glue' (175) between cultures that permits this level of integration. Even though it sounds an idealised picture of society, Rapport attempts to provide the possibility that in a culturally diverse world, individual voices are heard but 'beyond the personal preserve of their private consciousness' (187), as a whole form of communication where the local is integrated with the global.

*Knowledge and Ethics in Anthropology: Obligations and Requirements* is highly recommended for those interested in theoretical discussions around subjectivity, showing the necessary relationship between epistemological thinking and the practice of anthropology and its interactions with individuals and society.

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*Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.*

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