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Towards an anthropology of global inequalities and their local manifestations: social anthropology in 2017

At a time when political, social and environmental inequalities proliferate around the globe, anthropologists need to be equipped to diagnose, analyse and respond. This review of the anthropological research published in European journals in 2017 identifies three sets of tensions for an inquiry into global inequalities: first, between macro political economy processes and their localised workings/effects; second, between institutional processes of legitimisation and their everyday forms of resistance; and third, between future-oriented projects of change and the political demands of the present. Taken together, these sets of tensions not only offer a starting point for analysing how global inequalities are locally channelled, experienced and acted on from below, but also point to the political and methodological challenges that anthropologists face in today's neoliberal climate of higher education.

Key words ethnography, inequality, political economy, neoliberalism, temporality

Introduction

2017 was yet another year of uncertainty, crisis and proliferating tensions. As Keith Hart put it, 'the west is in the grip of a moral panic – or perhaps political breakdown would be nearer the mark' (2017: 1). Electoral shocks, like the 'Brexit' vote in the UK and the election of Donald Trump in the USA (Edwards *et al.* 2017), continued to be at the centre of political debate. Elsewhere in Europe, including in Italy (Cammelli 2017) and Hungary (Thorleifsson 2017), far-right movements have been on the rise. Meanwhile, living conditions have become ever more precarious for many. While those without citizenship status encounter hostile or irregular bureaucracies at the borders of Europe and the USA (Rozakou 2017; Schütze 2017), citizens everywhere are struggling in the aftermath of the economic crisis (Leinaweaver *et al.* 2017), austerity (Forbess and James 2017) and public-sector cuts (Bear and Knight 2017), and post-Fordist reforms (Susser 2017). Precarious living conditions are matched on a global scale by the ongoing effects of neoliberal reforms (Kar 2017), labour exploitation (Campbell 2017; Prentice 2017) and financialisation (Bear 2017). Add to this the global environmental crisis (Bhan and Trisal 2017; Pia 2017), earthquakes (Bock 2017; LaHatte 2017; Newberry 2017), ever-increasing waste production (Harvey 2017; Hylland Erikson and Schober 2017) and health epidemics, like Ebola (Lipton 2017) and HIV/AIDS (Powers 2017; Wardlow 2017), and you end up with a picture of multiple crises.

Many of these crises are, of course, not new. For example, historical and comparative ethnographic perspectives serve as an important reminder that neo-nationalisms

in Europe or North America have long-standing roots in the history of nation-state building and the 'late nationalisms' that those states have produced (Argenti 2017). And in the global south, processes of structural adjustment and 'austerity' politics have been ongoing for decades, creating heightened inequalities between rich and poor (Bhan and Trisal 2017; Lanzas and Whittle 2017; Prentice 2017). And yet, at a time when economic, political, social and environmental precarities are proliferating, the anthropological study of global inequalities becomes an ever-pressing agenda for research. Here, I wish to examine the state of social anthropology in 2017 with this research agenda in mind. Thus, I ask, how, exactly, can anthropologists engage with such an unequal world? What analytical tools do we have at our disposal to trace global inequalities and their local manifestations, as well as the various responses that these macro processes have activated and been confronted with from below? And what are the political and methodological challenges that anthropologists encounter at a time when processes of financialisation and marketisation are affecting the very craft and existence of anthropologists themselves?

I want to suggest that an anthropology that is committed to diagnosing, understanding and also responding to global inequalities can do so by focusing analytical attention on at least three sets of interlinking tensions: first, between macro-level processes in the political economy and their localised manifestations; second, between institutional processes of legitimisation and their various forms of resistance from below; and third, between utopian, often future-oriented processes of political change and the pressing demands of the present. Taken together, it is through the ethnographic study of these interlinking sets of tensions that anthropologists can diagnose how inequalities become authorised, implemented but also challenged along unexpected lines. In developing my points, I draw on anthropological work published in 2017, but there are continuities with research published in previous years. Thus, the themes presented will resonate with, and elaborate on, questions of politics, political economy and power already addressed in last year's review articles of anthropology in 2016, published in *Social Anthropology* (Coates 2017) and in *American Anthropologist* (Cantero 2017), respectively. I too foreground questions of politics, both as an ethnographic object and as a mode of doing anthropology in the contemporary world.

Let me hasten to add at the outset that the lens I am proposing to adopt in this article by no means reflects the totality of articles published in 2017 (or even a significant portion of them), nor necessarily the views adopted by the authors cited. Rather, my aim is to use what I consider to be some of the most exciting scholarship published in 2017 as a starting point to think through what a critical anthropology in times of global inequalities can look like. The proliferation of anthropology into ever-increasing sub-disciplines makes it impossible to do a comprehensive review. To give just one example, anthropologists have continued to identify and to argue against a variety of 'turns' in the last year. Debates around the ontological turn have continued to run strong (Bruun Jensen *et al.* 2017; Bruun Jensen and Morita 2017; Carey and Pedersen 2017; Green and Lavolette 2017; Laidlaw 2017; Lebner 2017; Pickering 2017). But other 'turns' have also featured, including the mobility turn (Salazar 2017), the media turn (Fader 2017), the earnest turn (Mayblin 2017), the punitive turn (Koch 2017a) and the infrastructural turn (Bruun Jensen and Morita 2017; Carey and Pedersen 2017). To the extent that this piece speaks to a particular turn, it engages perhaps most closely with what Ortner (2016) has called anthropology's 'dark turn': an anthropology that 'emphasizes the harsh and brutal dimensions of human experience, and the structural and historical

conditions that produce them', a shift that Ortner attributes to the 'increasingly problematic conditions of the real world under neoliberalism' (2016: 49–50).

This is first and foremost a review of English-speaking articles published in European anthropology journals. The following journals have been consulted: *Critique of Anthropology*, *Social Anthropology*, *Ethnos*, *Focaal*, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Anthropology Today* and *Cambridge Anthropology*. I have also looked for English publications in the following anthropological venues: *Suomen Antropologi*, *Anuac* and *Sociologus*. In addition, I have selectively drawn from 2017 publications in American anthropology journals as well as journals from related disciplines where these speak directly to research published in European anthropology journals. In what follows, I will outline what an anthropology of global inequalities can look like by taking each of the three sets of tensions identified above in turn. I conclude with a note on anthropology's methods and the political threats posed by the marketisation of the education sector in the UK and beyond.

Between the global and the local: political economy and daily life

Narratives of the current conjecture have often been laid with a sense of loss or pathos. Within the trajectory of many European nation states, the common threat invoked is a story of decline from the moment of post-war welfare democracy to a more exclusive, punitive and individualised present. According to this story, the decades following the Second World War were 'the golden years', during which social democracy was intact and a generalised consensus existed between labour, capital and the state. This consensus has become gradually dismantled, as neoliberalism has become the mantra of the day (Brown 2015), law and order policies have been rolled out (Wacquant 2009), and political debate has been increasingly monopolised by corporate lobbying and decision-making (Crouch 2004). It comes perhaps as no surprise that much social theory of 'late modernity' has focused on the dis-embedding and dark side of the contemporary era. For example, social theorists have spoken of the isolating effects of modern life (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Giddens 1998). Criminologists and criminal justice scholars have analysed the rise of a 'culture of control' (Garland 2001) with its attempt to 'govern through crime' (Simon 2007) and to 'punish the poor' (Wacquant 2009). And political theorists have seen the democratic disenchantment and growing levels of voter withdrawal as evidence of a 'post-democratic' state (Crouch 2004).

Meta-theories of modernity, whether they are analysed at the level of cultural and societal changes, policy interventions or political institutions, are compelling on first sight: they offer powerful narratives on what can otherwise seem like a messy, contradictory and non-transparent world. But in projecting narratives of linear decline, they also risk glossing over how macro processes in the economy, politics and society are always mediated through historical, institutional and cultural factors. For example, within the trajectory of the Euro-American nations, meta-accounts all too frequently ignore that the past was never a 'golden age' for those who failed to live up to dominant categories of citizenship, and its classed, gendered and racialised categories of inclusion. What is more, theories of 'late' or 'post'-modernity reflect the intellectual trajectories of Euro-American thought and may not bear much resemblance with the

realities and histories of countries with very different histories and intellectual genealogies (Cook *et al.* 2016). As Steinberg reminds us, ‘theory travels badly when what is transferred is not the hard work of genealogical method but the shiny concepts that are the product of somebody else’s labour ... Theory travels well when it transmits imaginative resources that inspire one’s own genealogical explorations, thus giving due weight to the historical antecedents of contemporary practices’ (2016: 515).

Scholarship published in 2017 shows how theory can be made to ‘travel well’ and, more importantly, how a comparative and ethnographic focus can be generative of new theory that breaks with the mould of dominant Euro-American thought. Thus, anthropologists have analysed how apparently homogenising macro-processes like financialisation (Bear 2017; Jiménez 2017), gentrification (Johansen and Jensen 2017; Mumm 2017), urban development (Tooley 2017) and green capitalism (Bhan and Trisal 2017; Pia 2017) produce their own dynamics depending on the contexts and histories from which they originate. Often, the analytical lens has been on how such processes are mediated through, and impact on, everyday processes of social reproduction. For example, Kar (2017) has shown that in India the growth of commercial microfinance and the inclusion of the poor into circuits of global finance has made the most intimate relations subject to market control. Microfinance institutions that require male kin to serve as guarantors also hedge on existing kinship bonds, even as they speculate on the bottom of the pyramid as a new market of accumulation. Similarly, in Bangladesh, market-driven enterprise among female information agents becomes an inescapable feature of development and produces ‘the social’ as a site of capital accumulation and organisational expansion for the development elite. In so doing, it also offloads the risks of manipulating social relations onto the poor (Qermezi Huang 2017). Other contributions deal with the effects of neoliberal reform on everyday processes of sociality (Neumark 2017), kinship relations (Diggins 2017; Stensrud 2017), gender and social reproduction (Challinor 2017; Rice 2017; Stark 2017).

But those who find that their daily lives are rendered fragile by the ongoing effects of global circuits of capital are not helpless victims of change. In her work on capitalist time and financialisation in India, Bear takes as her point of departure the processes of ‘disciplining through debt’ that have changed in India from the 1980s. Sovereign debt has been turned from a political debt that was under the control of political institutions into a financialised debt that is under the control of financial markets and a source of extreme rentier accumulation (Bear 2017). While this shift affected the most precarious workers in India the hardest, Bear also shows that its outcome has not been uniformly predictable. On the contrary, among shipyard workers on the Hooghly River, an alternative ethics of work continues to exist. Shipyard workers critique the current form of production on the river as ‘the burning of the stomach’ or selfish individualism, arguing instead for mutuality and recognition and invoking an idea of the *oikos* as the basis of the economy. Bear argues that ethnographic insights that centre on everyday processes of social reproduction invite the analyst to think through proposals for new forms of public financing that move beyond mainstream economics. Among them, the most radical proposal concerns the formation of a National Wealth fund in which the government would print its own money to spend on redistribution, education, health and green infrastructure, accompanied by the creation of democratically elected boards that open banks to public scrutiny.

The example of the Hooghly River shows how ethnographic insights can be generative of new theory and even normative proposals for change. But theory-generating

ethnography need not be confined to examples from the global south. In their introduction to a special issue on the anthropology of Britain, Degnen and Tyler (2017) argue that the anthropology of Britain (and hence an anthropology from within the global north) invites us to deconstruct taken-for-granted assumptions about the real world. For example, based on research in a cul-de-sac in Manchester, Smith (2017) has shown how welfare recipients in Britain negotiate the punitive effects of austerity cuts. While welfare recipients learn to perform being 'poor' in front of the state, everyday moral economies of informal borrowing and lending question the individualising notions of personhood projected in welfare policies. Similarly, on a disenfranchised council estate, withdrawal from electoral processes becomes a protective response in a situation where the world of daily community life is ideologically constructed as the antithesis of the world of politics (Koch 2017c). Against this backdrop, the 'Brexit vote' was different for many residents because it was perceived as a chance to transcend the political status quo and to construct alternative, if unknown, futures (Koch 2017b). My analysis cautions against narratives of individualisation and the 'end of theoretical collectivism' (Koch 2017c: 116) advocated by theorists of post-modernity by emphasising the affective and moral dimensions of electoral behaviour.

In sum, at a time when global processes of accumulation, dispossession and environmental crisis loom large, anthropologists cannot ignore the political, economic and social challenges that their informants confront. Kalb reminds us, 'the assaults take the form of enclosure, privatization, gentrification, financialization, precariatization, and other "izations" associated with the capitalist restoration of the last 40 years, including of course securitization in all its proliferating and interconnected meanings' (2017: 69). But the proliferation of 'izations' has not produced homogenous results. Anthropological contributions in 2017 demonstrate how global processes are mediated in locally specific and historically contingent ways. It is precisely at this intersection that everyday processes of social reproduction, understandings of personhood and alternative ethics of care come into focus and hence the potential for anthropological theorising emerges. But the anthropological inquiry into inequalities does not stop here. As I will show in the next section, a similar tension as the one identified here between the 'macro' and the 'local', or between the political economies and their locally specific representations, can also be observed with respect to another important question: how projects of neoliberal governmentality become institutionalised as well as contested by various actors at their receiving end.

Between governmentality and local resistance: institutions and their subversions

It is in the very nature of inequalities that they are unevenly distributed. Indeed, some of the most vulnerable people across the world have been affected the hardest by economic restructuring and political reforms, whether these be migrant factory workers in Thailand (Campbell 2017), micro-enterprise workers in Trinidad (Prentice 2017) or citizens in Spain (Jiménez 2017) and Greece (Knight 2017; see also Knight and Stuart 2016). Scholarship in 2017 has drawn attention to the role of the state in legitimising this unequal distribution of wealth and power, often through the expansion of the 'law and order' state (Koch 2017a). In Thailand, for example, Campbell (2017) shows

how migrant workers' protests in the face of bad working conditions are violently suppressed by the police and the power of the law. In other situations, state policies work through omission or wilful neglect. For example, Prentice (2017) argues that the introduction of micro-enterprises in Trinidad has significantly reduced and undone the labour protection and human rights of workers that were fought for under Fordist regimes of production. And Kalir and Van Schendel (2017) have shown that states often knowingly refrain from recording certain people and their activities to relieve state authorities of their duties: in an era of 'neo-liberalism as creative destruction' (Harvey 2006 in Kalir and Van Schendel 2017: 6), when the rule is retraction of the caring state and intensification of the coercive state, non-recording is an increasingly effective state policy for disowning populations that the state categorises, and treats, as undeserving, undesired and unproductive.

Between the opposite extremes of outright state coercion and non-recording sit the mundane bureaucratic processes central to the daily workings of neoliberal statecraft. A range of articles in 2017 have looked at the techniques of rules that are employed by government actors, institutions and state-like bodies in the pursuit of neoliberal policies, including 'screening' processes in transnational adoption applications (Leinaweaver *et al.* 2017; Roux 2017), the management of housing tenants in public housing projects (Johansen and Jensen 2017) and bureaucratic responses to asylum-seeker applications into the USA (Murray 2017). For example, based on his own experiences of an expert-witness in court for South American transgender refugees, Murray (2017) suggests that expert reports (including those by anthropologists) contribute to the formation of a bureaucratic archive of sexuality that enables a crucial feature of governmentality, namely the ideology and practice of 'rational' accountability. This bureaucratic regime of refugee care and its archives of sexuality, in turn, contribute to the production of 'homonationalism', a privileged discourse containing a highly delimited – neoliberal, classed and raced – understanding of gendered identity. This is being folded into the nation state's discourses of the good immigrant and proper citizen, and simultaneously creates its opposite, the bad immigrant and deviant citizen.

Importantly, it is not simply government bodies, be they court staff or local-level bureaucrats, who become conduits for authority-making, often in the name of particular kinds of ideological projects. Following a Foucauldian analysis, a number of contributions in 2017 have analysed how technologies of control are being implemented by a range of civil society and humanitarian actors, and blurring the lines between the 'formal' and 'informal' (Smart *et al.* 2017). Much of this work has drawn on how neoliberalism works through an ethos of interior selves and self-management. In his piece on early childhood education and care programmes, Newberry (2017) discusses how local institutions and charities responded to the aftermath of an earthquake in Indonesia by creating a particular idea of the traumatised child. This child had to be worked on to make it fit with the model of the idealised citizen who was empowered and engaging with Indonesia's globalised economy. Likewise, self-help programmes in China that draw on Confucian ethics inculcate a logic of self-reliance and independence in their participants that diverts from structural problems and the causes of poverty (Yang 2017). And among Muslim reformers in Yemen, Hughes (2017) has analysed how civilisational discourses are put to use in ways that mirror the rhetoric found in international human rights discourses. This language ultimately justifies men's role in saving women and hence contributes to a project of 'humanitarian rescue'.

So far, we have seen how state and non-state actors, including civic society movements, NGOs and activists engage in particular technologies of rule that produce particular kinds of classed, gendered or racialised citizens. But authority figures are not mere conduits for power. Thus, scholarship in 2017 also shows how those who are tasked to implement, enforce or enact particular technologies of rule do so on terms that do not fit dominant logics of control. Forbess and James (2017) have explored how local authorities and other advice providers in the UK counter the effects of the central government's austerity regime by piecing together new patchworks of funds. These initiatives, 'tempering fiscal prudence and "pragmatic decision-making" with utopian thinking (Bear and Mathur 2015) ... create new spaces where justice may be sought and found' (Forbess and James 2017: 1470). Similarly, in China, austerity politics and green capitalism have resulted in incomplete and unstable processes of accumulation that have hit rural households the hardest (Pia 2017). However, Pia also shows that local bureaucrats engage in 'ethical fixes' to balance conflicting priorities of state policies and the local provision of public goods. And in his analysis of the aftermath of l'Aquila earthquake, Bock (2017) discusses how the Italian state became a key actor responsible for emergency aid, restoration and urban redevelopment. The state was reconstructed as a repository of affect and hope, bringing citizens together and conjuring an idea of a collective that is not unlike the law imagined by Ingold, which is sustained through 'inner feeling-for-one-another or sympathy of correspondent lives' (2017: 24).

But local state actors and bureaucrats are not the only agents who contest the disciplinary effects of bureaucratic practices: citizens, too, engage with authority in unexpected ways. Even when on the face of it citizens lend their consent to those in power, they often do so for reasons that are not known to the officials they encounter and hence challenge any straightforward idea of popular support for state authority (Koch 2017a). Long (2017) investigates what leads Riau Islanders in Indonesia to defer to state authority against their better judgement. Dominant approaches have either emphasised the state's capacity to punish and hence induce compliance or, alternatively, citizens' affective attachments to the state. Going beyond these approaches, Long focuses on the nature of a distinctive modality of state power that arises when citizens envision the state and its personnel as Islamic authorities. By focusing on how Riau Islanders defer to the authority of the state to deal with morally complex situations, Long invites us to rethink conventional tropes that have seen mistrust and suspicion as the antithesis to state authority. Ellison (2017) has also explored how citizens mobilise or re-appropriate the state on their own terms. Marginalised citizens in Bolivia mobilise legal-like documents as avatars of coercive state authority. While few people trust the official system to bring them justice, they still marshal ambiguous bureaucratic documentary procedures to reorder untenable social relations and to give teeth to oral arrangements amid economic insecurity and dubious judicial prospects.

In short, the picture emerging here is one of contested spaces where claims to govern are always more fragmented, partial and contested than they might at first seem. Coercive state practices and disciplinary forms of power are important means of governing today, as they make particular world views, ideologies and market policies appear natural and legitimate. But both governors and those who are governed engage with policies and practices in ways that are never quite exhausted by a focus on official, secular rationalities alone. This, then, is the second tension that can be pinned down: a tension between governmental practices that lay claim to authority, often with the effect of cementing inequalities, and their contestations or processes of

re-appropriation from below. What, then, about the conditions of political action in the current climate? The next section will turn to questions of political agency, revealing a third set of tensions that can be put to use in the ethnographic study of inequality: tensions between a politics that is oriented into the future and that which addresses the conditions of the 'here and now'.

Between the future, past and present: temporalities and political change

Given the inequalities that mark the present conjuncture, how can we imagine alternative political futures (Bear and Knight 2017)? Questions about futures and future-making are often intimately known to our informants' lives. Sometimes, they are linked to processes of social reproduction. For example, future-making happens when grandmothers in China's countryside make claims to offspring through acts of care as a way of countering the punitive effects of patrilineal kinship ideologies and the one-child policy (Bruckermann 2017). It also happens when Amerindian children in Peru project themselves into a different future from their hunter-gathering parents through everyday play (Morelli 2017). Sometimes, futures are also imagined and created through capacity building. In their special issue on this topic, Douglas-Jones and Shaffner (2017) consider capacity building as something that is full of hope and potential, yet also operates from the perceptions of insufficiency or absence, summoned because the future it works towards is more desirable than the present. Infrastructures, such as roads in Kyrgyzstan, become the site of intense local anticipation, the object both of hope for a materially secure future and of anxieties of entrapment (Reeves 2017). Conversely, where conditions of future investment are absent, a sense of self can also be compromised, as shown by anthropological work on boredom (van den Berg and O'Neill 2017) and ambiguities (Berckmoes 2017).

The ability to project into the future and to imagine oneself-as-other is also central to the discussion of political agency and change. Drawing on the anthropology of ethics, Werbner (2017) suggests that ethics is not just the everyday process of subjectification in a Foucauldian sense but also an imaginary of the future and of future possibilities that go beyond the practices of the present. Among the Tswapong people in Botswana, wisdom divination appeals to imaginative moral reflection and ethical deliberation along with practical wisdom in the quest for well-being. In a similar vein, Schäfers (2017) focuses on the appeal that writing and authorship hold for Kurdish women singers in contemporary Turkey. At a time when the history of political silencing has come to intersect with the more recent commodification of Kurdish culture, authorship has emerged as an object of aspiration for the future. It constitutes an avenue for Kurdish women to insert themselves into struggles for political rights, discourses of history writing and even an emerging cultural market. The possibilities of new technologies for political identity making are also at the heart of internet-based practices among ultra-Orthodox Jews. They use the web as a counter-public to challenge the authority of the ultra-orthodox religious public sphere that is heavily constrained, particularly for young orthodox Jewish women (Fader 2017).

And yet, while the possibilities of investing into alternative future selves are central to the formation of political agency, other temporalities also shift into focus. In his piece on Western Thessaly, Knight (2017) reassesses notions of time and temporality in the Greek

economic crisis. There, people do not just focus on the future but also on the past to help them to make sense of a period of tumultuous social change. But multiple temporalities can sometimes come into conflict. Wilde's (2017) article investigates how the Venezuelan government's efforts to establish a 'communal state' through the eyes of working-class government supporters, or chavista activists, produced a series of 'utopian disjunctures' for the actors involved. These disjunctures stem from conflicting political temporalities within the chavista project, as long-term aspirations for radical democracy clash with more short-term demands to obtain state resources and consolidate the government's power. In a similar vein, Zharkevich (2017) explores how the people in the former Maoist heartland of Nepal adopted previously transgressive norms during the decade of the People's War (1996–2006). Acts, such as eating beef and cow slaughtering, previously considered transgressive, became acceptable during this period. While for activists these transgressions were acts of defiance animated by a prospect of a distant future, for ordinary villagers the choices often reflected necessary strategies of survival in the present moment.

At the heart of Zharkevich's study is a central question: how to define political agency and whether it makes any sense to say that there was any more agency in the actions of the Maoist cadres, who projected into an idea of a distant future, than in the acts of ordinary villagers, many of whom were confined to 'enforced presentism'. Indeed, a number of contributions in 2017 have emphasised precisely the importance of 'presentism' in social movements (Grisaffi 2017). In Sturtevant's (2017) account of local politics in Bolivia, political membership is bound up with everyday processes of 'community-making'. Similarly, across various South African cities, organisations that fight against poor living conditions often have lives outside the moments of political sphere. Moving away from traditional ideas of social movements, Tournadre (2017) shows how everyday neighbourhood life becomes a central arena for the negotiation of politics. A focus on daily practices is also shared in the special issue on 'commoning', edited by Susser (2017). She suggests 'commoning' as one way to understand the emergence of social movements in Europe and the USA. From housing movements to anti-antiblack insurgency, redefinitions of the tax code and the squares movement, commoning is seen as 'a grassroots project to build a new form of consensus that highlights the importance of sharing, economic sharing and horizontalism' (Susser 2017: 1–2). Commoning is not premised, however, on specific political goals as members see themselves 'transforming social relations from the bottom up' (2).

Susser argues that a focus on the transformative aspects of progressive grassroots movements is crucial in the face of the troubling turn to the right in elections in the United States and parts of Europe. And yet, as Kalb (2017) reminds us, 'commoning' is not the exclusive terrain of the left. On the contrary, European fascism and right-wing corporatism have a long history of claiming a particular sort of commons against the rights of transnational capital and against the practices of the liberal state. While we ought to be careful not to attribute singular explanations to votes like 'Brexit' or the victory of Donald Trump in the USA (Edwards *et al.* 2017), ethnographic work on far-right movements makes important contributions. Cammelli's (2017) work with the fascist movement CasaPound in Italy, for example, has shown that militants' perceptions of their belonging to the movement is not grounded in a particular political programme or public ideology. Rather, 'music, rituals and community appear to hold a more important place in structuring the reasons people become involved in the movement' (Cammelli 2017: 92). Visual affects also remain important. Thorleifsson (2017) argues that in Hungary the populist radical right reinforced the boundaries of the

nation in relation to migrants from Muslim majority lands through particular images of the polluting migrant that served to reinforce the boundaries of Hungarianness as the righteous protector of Christian European civilisation.

To sum up, anthropological contributions in 2017 have traced the existence of alternative political agencies and their manifestations. This section has suggested that a central tension emerges between political movements and actors who aspire to different utopian futures and those who remain caught in enforced presentism. While the former make the present subservient to the political ideas and visions for utopian futures, the latter are concerned to address the demands of the 'here and now'. Moreover, political movements and grassroots activism can both be situated on the far-left or the far-right. While 2017 has begun to make contributions, more work is expected in this area of research in the years to come.

Conclusions: challenges to the professional community?

Anthropologists have always strived to take seriously the experiences of the people they live and work with. But how this is best done, and what we should focus on, is by no means clear-cut. Astuti remarks that "taking seriously" the concepts, the analogies, the discourses of the people one studies ethnographically is a recurrent theme in the writings of the [so-called] ontological turn' (2017a: 106), where such an endeavour has been associated with the search for radical alterity. Her own work pleads for an alternative approach, inspired by developmental and cognitive psychology, which pays resolute attention to 'the multiplicity of ways in which people create and deploy their knowledge in different contexts, at different ages, fuelled by different kinds of experience' (2017a: 106). In this review, I have suggested yet another angle on what it means to take seriously our informants' lives: one that links people's daily struggles, frustrations and aspirations to global processes of accumulation and dispossession. My suggestion has been that this can be done by focusing on three sets of tensions: first, between political economy processes and everyday processes of social reproduction; second, between institutionalisation and their various acts of contestation; and third, between political aspirations for the future and the demands of the past and present. While this is not an exhaustive list, my hope is that it can provide a starting point for the diagnosis, analysis and ultimately also redress of inequalities.

But the pursuit of anthropological knowledge does not operate in a vacuum. For anthropology to be able to make the kinds of interventions that I have argued it should have, it needs to be methodologically grounded and institutionally supported. In 2017, several contributions have addressed the role of methodology and the importance of carrying out fieldwork, preferably through return visits, which has long been recognised as the bread and butter of anthropology. Debates have focused on, among other issues, the ontological turn as a 'methodological' encounter (Laidlaw 2017); the practical challenges raised by retrospective ethnography (Ferreira and de Almeida 2017); the use of experimental techniques (Astuti 2017b); the role of the anthropologist as a 'jester figure' (Beuving 2017); both the dangers (Tilce and Simpson 2017) and potentials (Willerslev *et al.* 2017) of creative self-reflexivity; and the ways in which anthropologists can morally and practically position themselves in the face of ethically troubling events, like extreme violence (Chitralkha 2017) and armed conflicts (Gerharz 2017), as well as address the

challenges they face in ethical review boards (Dilger 2017). Space prevents me from going into these debates in more depth; suffice it to say that, taken together, they have demonstrated how anthropologists take seriously the methodological and ethical challenges involved in carrying out in-depth and often long-term ethnographic fieldwork.

Yet, I would add that another debate to be had relates to the practical conditions under which anthropology can be realised: for the truth is that the same global processes of market expansion and ‘-izations’ that affect the lives of our informants are also encroaching onto and finding expression in the ‘neoliberal academy’ itself (Heatherington and Zerilli 2017). The challenges that anthropology as a professional discipline is facing are multiple, ranging from right-wing threats to academic freedom to the decline in funding opportunities to the ever-growing reliance on audit cultures and the commodification of education. In 2017, the Central European University was threatened with closure by the right-wing Orbán government in Hungary, causing anthropologists and other academics to speak up in solidarity with those affected by the threat.¹ Meanwhile, in the UK, anthropology has been scrapped as an A-level subject for high-school students under the Conservative government’s drive for efficiency in the education system. More broadly, the marketisation of the higher education sector has been visible in the rise in student fees, introduced by the same government, that means that students will be thousands of pounds in debt by the time they graduate with their degrees (Bear 2017). Funding cuts in the higher education sector have also resulted in shorter periods of fieldwork, as a result of anthropologists being unable to get teaching relief for longer periods of time (Beuving 2017).

These, and related, developments are extremely worrisome for our craft. And they pose a range of serious practical and political questions that need to be addressed: at a time when universities are coming under threat, when funding is cut and when the education sector is being made ever more subservient to the dictates of neoliberal rule, what can anthropologists do? How can they secure jobs, not just for those lucky enough to have positions now but also for future generations of young scholars? How, in short, can they intervene in and diminish inequalities in the education sector itself? While pockets of activism run strong, anthropologists have not always been good at addressing problems that are happening on their own doorstep. Some of this might well be down to different experiences across generations. Many of the problems that professional anthropologists are facing today – to do with funding cuts, the difficulties of securing long-term jobs and carving out space for long-term fieldwork – affect younger generations to a much greater extent than those who were initiated into the craft one or two decades ago. And yet, if anthropology is to engage meaningfully with global inequalities in the years to come, we need to strengthen our solidarities and develop united responses to the challenges we face – both with respect to our informants’ lives and with respect to our own professional community in higher education institutions and beyond.

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1 See for example <https://www.ceu.edu/category/support-letter?page=2>

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Vers une anthropologie des inégalités dans le monde et de leurs manifestations locales: l'anthropologie sociale en 2017

À une époque où les inégalités politiques, sociales et environnementales prolifèrent dans le monde entier, les anthropologues doivent être équipés d'outils conceptuels pour le diagnostic, l'analyse et l'action. Ce bilan de la recherche anthropologique publiée dans les revues européennes en 2017 identifie trois séries de tensions relatives à l'enquête sur les inégalités dans le monde: d'abord, entre les processus économiques macropolitiques et leurs mécanismes et leurs effets à l'échelle locale; ensuite, entre les processus institutionnels de légitimation et les formes quotidiennes de résistance qu'ils rencontrent; enfin, entre les projets de transformation, orientés vers l'avenir, et les exigences politiques du présent. Prises ensemble, ces séries de tensions non seulement offrent un point de départ pour analyser comment les inégalités mondiales se manifestent localement, comment elles sont vécues et comment on y réagit depuis la base, mais pointent aussi, dans le climat néolibéral actuel au sein de l'enseignement supérieur, les défis politiques et méthodologiques auxquels les anthropologues sont confrontés.

Mots-clés anthropologie, inégalités, économie politique, néolibéralisme, temporalité