

# WORLD ANTHROPOLOGY

## Article

### On (Social) Anthropology in Argentina Today

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At two recent international conferences (The International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences [IUAES] 2013 and 2014), two themes caught my attention. One was that of “crisis.” Partly animating this crisis were budget cuts to the institutions that fund research, which, as various colleagues argued, appeared to be the same all over the world. Young anthropologists, I heard, were having difficulties entering institutions permanently. Trained researchers were all the time counting on more obligations and lower budgets. The positions that remained vacant were not filled. But the Argentinean case, without a doubt, demonstrates a different reality, which I will discuss here.

The other theme that caught my attention, which is related to the previous, regards a debate that emerged in the panel “Brazilian Anthropology: Present and Future” at the 2014 IUAES coordinated by Carmen Rial and sponsored by the ABA (Associação Brasileira de Antropologia). At this debate, colleagues talked not only about certain issues and current directions in Brazilian anthropology but also discussed the situation (inclusion) of anthropologists in Brazil. This question was particularly relevant to an anthropology that finds its place in public debates and in which anthropologists have had the capacity to occupy important positions working for the state or in nonacademic areas (see Velho 2003).

This frame spurred comparisons between the ways anthropologists insert themselves into the labor force and relate themselves to the academy, have the ability to manage knowledge, or become part of that iron machine of the state. The debates that emerged in those days and continued later made me reflect on the centrality of institutions in knowledge production and, more specifically, the place of anthropologists as public employees.

These issues (crisis, inclusion, knowledge production), taken together, account for a restructuring of labor relations from which we as workers are not exempt. The different realities of researchers, researchers-professors, professors-researchers, and professors in the world are central to understanding how knowledge is produced. Thinking about the ways in which we work and reflecting on our relationship with institutions permits us to understand forms of knowledge production beyond those already-analyzed hegemonic

relations within anthropology (see Lins Ribeiro 2014; Lins Ribeiro and Escobar 2006).

These reflections make sense in a context in which university and research systems are very different from each other and in which state policies and hegemonic conceptions about the place of education are as well. The Argentinean case is notoriously different from, for example, that of the United States. So these questions not only take on relevance but also demand an “estrangement” or distancing from some and an understanding of others.

The differences are important in that they adhere to the ways in which we construct discourses of the possible and the imaginable in relation to the production of knowledge, the education and research systems, and relationships between researchers from different parts of the world.

In this article, therefore, I seek to contribute to the way in which anthropology is produced. I provide an account of how, in one country and in a given context, labor relations of researchers are established. I focus on some particularities in Argentina today because of its integration of researchers from the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones científicas y Técnicas, or CONICET), the most important institution for research in Argentina.

In my country, most of the researchers are public employees, our labor relations are union negotiated like public employees, and our healthcare coverage and benefits are those of national civilian government employees. The importance of the state in fostering the science and technology of the country can be seen, for example, in publications in indexed journals. Almost 99 percent of published articles are by authors who work in public entities (such as universities and CONICET).

CONICET, as will be appreciated, is not unique in the world. It is similar in terms of its design, for example, to the French CNRS (Le Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique). However, as we know, institutional frameworks can frame but not mold social processes. So, I believe, the implications of each system can only be understood as part of the society of which they form a part. Also, in many places researchers are state employees (as in the United States where many researchers are employees of public universities). But once again, this tells us little unless we understand the way in which labor relations are established. In this sense, it is advisable to say a few things about the processes relating to employment, education, and scientific production as a whole.

Being a public employee in my country is marked by a series of imaginaries relating to job security and certain benefits as regards the form of employment. Public employment has a strong connotation marked by job stability and security that are lacking in other occupations.

I should make some clarifications. Thinking about the conditions of an “Argentinean anthropology” ends up being difficult, if not impossible. On a smaller scale, but of some significance given the predominance of Buenos Aires, to account for what happens just in Buenos Aires, where I was born, studied, live, and work, is a task that would entail similar difficulty. That is so not only because it would be too complicated to encompass a series of professional practices under a single label but also because there are scarce studies and statistics on what we anthropologists do in my country. That is why I decided to trim this article to account for a group of anthropologists who are dedicated to research and, within them, to those who are researchers from CONICET. It is true that anthropologists who are dedicated to research are not the majority. But, lamentably, there is no data that permits me to reconstruct the current situation of all anthropologists in Argentina (what they do, how they work, etc.).<sup>1</sup>

The path I propose is certainly comparative and is the result of a series of reflections that have arisen in dialogue with colleagues from other latitudes. Thus, with this article, I aim not only to shed light on anthropological practice in a Southern country from a “nonhegemonic anthropology” perspective but also to demonstrate alternative forms of academic and professional organizations. In this sense, I hope to contribute to the debate on anthropological production from the perspective of a group of anthropologists nucleated around different organizations, including those of the world anthropologies, to give an account of the conditions of production of anthropologists in my country.

I do not intend to account for what is produced but, rather, for how current conditions, especially the organization of the scientific system, which has as pillars the national universities and CONICET, generate the field of possibility through a particular way of relating to the production of knowledge. This discussion takes on relevance in the current context of “crisis,” which supposes and proposes cuts to research budgets. However, in my country, with its large deficits, this diagnosis should, at least, be nuanced.

Anthropology as a science has given an increasingly important place to reflexivity as a necessary practice in the production of knowledge (for the Argentinean case, see Guber 2014). This work without a doubt is written along those lines in that it reflects on the conditions (as possible factors) of academic production based on the conditions that institutions offer or permit.

In what follows, the text is divided into four sections. In the first, a few precise details of anthropology in Argentina are given; next I describe the operation of CONICET; in the third section, I focus on an Argentinean professional association, the Association of Graduates in Anthropology;

and, finally, I highlight the implications of all of this on conducting research in the country.

### **SOME PRELIMINARY NOTES: FOCUSING ON ARGENTINEAN ANTHROPOLOGY**

To contextualize the current situation, it is necessary to note that in my country there are 47 public, secular national universities with unrestricted and free access.<sup>2</sup> This implies that in Argentina education from kindergarten to university is free to anyone. The first anthropology degree program was created in 1957, the major was offered in eight locations in 2007 (Bartolomé 2007), and in 2010 yet another a new degree program became offered (Boivin and Rosato 2011). Of these, eight are generically called “anthropology” or “anthropological sciences,” and they generally focus on two subfields: sociocultural anthropology and archaeology. The duration of study is around five years, culminating in a bachelor’s thesis (Boivin and Rosato 2011).

Argentinean anthropology, like all others, is marked by the context in which it operates. Political processes, bloody dictatorships, internal currents, and the hegemony of certain people leave their signatures on several decades of anthropological production. The terrible and bloody military dictatorships made the work of the anthropologist during several periods into a task for which many literally risked their lives. Anthropology was acquiring its “local style” in relation to national, social, political, and academic processes as well as to power relations within the discipline itself (cf. Briones and Guber 2008; Garbulsky 2003; Guber and Visacovsky 2002; Menéndez 1968; Perelman 2007; Ratier and Ringulet 1997).<sup>3</sup>

The Argentinean reality today is different. On the one hand, for over 30 years, we have lived in a democracy, which allows us to work in peace. On the other hand, as I will show below, the growth of the Argentinean system of research, especially since CONICET, has enabled better anthropological jobs to open to a field of new researchers, producing a more theoretical, thematic, and methodological openness and, to use the idea of Rosana Guber (2008), giving certain lineages<sup>4</sup> less weight when reviewing themes, problems, and research methodologies.<sup>5</sup> In this sense, despite the valid criticisms of the current system, the growth in numbers of researchers and research centers that my country has seen in recent years is undeniable, thanks to a policy (even one with large problems) of encouragement and stability for researchers across the country.<sup>6</sup>

Researchers can now be professor-researchers (if they have a full-time or part-time contract with a university), researcher-professors (with a full-time research contract and a partial appointment to teaching), or researchers (fully committed to research).

Besides CONICET, although to a much lesser extent, other state agencies (such as the National Agency for Scientific and Technical Promotion, dependent on the Ministry of Science and Technology) and universities provide resources for research via project financing.

### CONICET AND RESEARCH CONDITIONS TODAY

The National Council of Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET) is an autonomous body of the federal government under the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation. It is a national body that brings together researchers from all Argentinean provinces and all scientific disciplines. The disciplines are divided into four major areas (called *Grandes Áreas*, or Grand Areas) of knowledge: Agricultural Sciences, Engineering, and Materials; Biological and Health Sciences; Natural Sciences; and Social Sciences and Humanities. This last consists of the disciplines of Law, Political Science, and International Relations; Literature, Linguistics, and Semiotics; Philosophy; History, Geography, and Social and Cultural Anthropology; Sociology, Social Communication, and Demography; Economics, Management Science, and Public Administration; Psychology and Educational Sciences; and Archaeology and Biological Anthropology. Each counts on advisory committees for grants; for reports, promotions, and projects (of researchers); and for the entry of new researchers to the field. In all cases, members are trained researchers elected by the board of CONICET. The appointment has a maximum duration of two years, and members are renewed at the midpoint of every year.

In 2013 CONICET counted with 7,902 researchers from all the scientific disciplines.<sup>7</sup> Of these, 1,710 (a little over 21%) are researchers from the “Grand Area” of the Social Sciences and Humanities.<sup>8</sup> The growth of researchers has been remarkable over the past ten years. In 2003, the Grand Area had 705 researchers out of a total of 3,694 (about 19%). Thus, in one decade, growth has been greater than 100 percent.<sup>9</sup>

Entry into the research profession is made through a public competition. The dossiers are evaluated by other researchers as a single-blind review (the evaluator knows the name of the evaluated but not vice versa) and by the advisory committee for entrants (in the case of social anthropology, this committee is History, Geography, and Social Anthropology). Once the dossier receives a full review, the Board of Qualification and Promotion (formed by researchers from all disciplines) decides on the candidate. There are two possibilities: recommendation or no recommendation. Researchers receive a decision regarding their work along with the rationale. Once a dossier has made it past these two stages, the board of directors decides on the admission of the person to the research profession.

The hierarchy of the research profession has five categories: assistant (lowest), associate, independent, principal, and supervisor (the highest). According to the rules, researchers can enter into any category. Being a researcher in each category implies certain skills. Upon entry, there are some objective determinants, including age. Thus, save reasoned exceptions, the maximum age for entry as assistant is 35, 40 for associate, 45 for independent, and 50 for principal; “superiors” are not in the statute as a category to enter CONICET.

Researchers must inform CONICET of their activities. The assistant researchers, who have a director, must do so annually while the rest do biennially. The dossiers are evaluated by the advisory committees of each discipline and receive a judgment as being either satisfactory or unsatisfactory. If two consecutive reports are not approved as satisfactory, a process begins that may result in the dismissal of the investigator.

While in the research profession, CONICET obliges assistant researchers to get promoted a category (to associate) in a period not exceeding five years. To do this, the researcher must apply for promotion in one of the annual announcements the institution makes by submitting a statement of reasons justifying their promotion. The dossier is evaluated by the advisory committee for reports, projects, and developments; by an external evaluator (blinded to the investigator); and finally by the board of qualification and promotion and the board of directors. That said, only assistant researchers are required to ascend the ranks. The other researchers also have the possibility for promotion but not the obligation. The process is the same.

This policy has not only focused on the creation of a stable staff of researchers but has funded the training of thousands of PhDs in recent years. While it is not possible to assign the growth of PhDs only to the financing of CONICET (ignoring the changes in academic policies and business that have occurred in recent years), it is undeniable that the massive establishment of doctoral fellowships takes center stage in this process. For example, whereas until 2005 (and since 1983) the number of PhDs was around 200 per year, in 2006 it began to grow, and in 2012 the number was nearly 1,000. This was possible thanks to the growth of doctoral fellowships from 300 in 1997 and 30 in 2001—at the moment of the “Argentinean crisis”—to 3,900 in 2012. Something similar occurred with admissions to the research profession: 125 in 1997; 160 in 2001; 600 in 2012.<sup>10</sup>

### THE ASSOCIATION OF GRADUATES IN ANTHROPOLOGY

I find it necessary to make mention of the professional association that represents us, the Association of Graduates in Anthropology of the Republic of Argentina (Colegio de Graduados en Antropología, or CGA). In addition to the CGA, there exist other associations as well, such as the Argentinean Society of Anthropology (SAA).<sup>11</sup> However, the CGA is the one that requires that its members be anthropologists to join.

CGA associates are few in relation to the number of anthropologists in Argentina (about 400). However, I believe it is important to address some issues that will permit us to understand the way that research practices and partnerships are articulated.

The CGA was created in July 1972 with the objectives of hierarchizing the profession; defending rights that help the anthropologist in professional practice; the promotion

of research; the promotion of solidarity among anthropologists; and observance of the rules of professional ethics. Its beginnings were marked by the struggle and defense of its agenda, because, shortly after it was created, it had to fight to defend the disciplines that were about to be closed or subsumed to history. The association has published the periodicals *Publicar en Antropología y Ciencias Sociales* and *Gaceta de Antropología*. For several years, the association had little activity, which was reflected, for example, in that the journal *Publicar* was not distributed for more than ten years (volume 8 dates from 1999 and 9 from 2010). Thereafter, the journal—which would be something like an Argentinian *American Anthropologist*—has been gaining institutional recognition. The journal has been an interesting arena of discussion of Argentinean anthropology and its themes and its crises.<sup>12</sup> The new phase of the CGA that began in 2006 has found in this generation of anthropologists the interest to carry forward new initiatives and build relationships with other international institutions, including as a member of the World Council of Anthropological Associations (WCAA) network. However, the number of anthropologists who are associated with the CGA is dwindling.<sup>13</sup>

The CGA combines the defense of labor rights of anthropologists (especially spurring an intense debate on the creation of a code of professional practice for anthropologists) with the encouragement of academic activity in conjunction with universities that hold conferences (like the last Argentinean Conference of Anthropology held in Rosario).

The CGA coexists with other forms of associations within universities, institutes, and CONICET. These are the universities or research centers that organize events and that have academic journals of high quality.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

Having said all of this, I want to highlight some points. In Argentina the research system today is basically mounted on CONICET. Researchers are public employees that have their place of work in a research institute that can be both a university (public or private) as well as a research center of CONICET. Researchers have a negotiated salary—at least in 2015—with the rest of the civilian staff of the national state. However, not all researchers with the same scale and same seniority receive the same salary because there are additional factors depending on the area in which the researcher resides (so a researcher in Patagonia earns more than one in the city of Buenos Aires). CONICET researchers can request a change in their workplace without affecting their job security (this includes moving between institutes, universities, and provinces).

Also, as stated earlier, researchers may be teachers at universities, but they have no obligation to be. The autonomy of both institutions (CONICET and their universities) makes it possible to hold two unrelated jobs and for entry to each of the areas to be independent of one another. The work obligations that the two institutions impose also remain separate.

In general, researchers give classes either at the graduate or undergraduate level.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, CONICET requires its employees to devote their time (40 hours per week) exclusively to research, which can be combined with a part-time teaching position at a national university (ten hours per week). This does not mean that they cannot work additional hours, but if they do, CONICET would make salary deductions accordingly. Therefore, the greater amount of time (regardless of the researcher's category or rank) must be dedicated to research.

The topics that CONICET funds are varied in both thematic and methodological terms. The growth of teaching and research staff has generated greater plurality of those anthropological tribes. This has enabled a rise of knowledge production that has broadened the “classical” topics in anthropology. Of course, it would be reductionist to think that CONICET policy was what generated this change. Rather, I mean that it forms part of this process that has been unfolding since the end of the civil-military dictatorship.

This issue has been addressed by several researchers who note interpretative differences about the “history” of Argentina anthropology (among others, Garbulsky 2003; Guber and Visacovsky 2002; Perelman 2012; Ratier 2010; Soprano 2006). The growth in recent years of the activity and diversity of issues and problems encountered in research has been established in research teams with a solid career path, production, and training. The “new” problems refer to certain fashionable themes, new social problems, and current interests of anthropologists. Argentinean anthropology, in this sense, does not escape the changes occurring in the anthropological field in recent decades—albeit with local particularities. Thus, many researchers have sought to account for a kind (in many cases, anachronistic) of sub-subdisciplinary archaeology and new approaches in anthropology that have become possible thanks to the diversity of themes that emerged in recent years from the problematization of new problems and the strengthening of the research system in recent years.<sup>15</sup>

Also, the way the research system is configured means that universities organize conferences and seminars (sometimes with support and funding from CONICET or ANPCyT [Agencia Nacional de Promoción Científica y Tecnológica, or National Agency of Scientific and Technological Promotion] as well as with sponsorship from other institutions). For example, the Argentinean Conference of Anthropology is held every two years and is organized by a university that offers an anthropology major. This means not only that the venues of the conferences are national public universities but also that the organizers and authorities vary, which has an impact on the choice of presenters and acceptance of roundtables, panels, working groups, and other academic activities.

### SOME FINAL NOTES

I started this text concentrating on the debate that has been occurring at anthropology conferences in relation to a central

concern—the change in the modes of knowledge management, especially in a context of crisis.<sup>16</sup> It will remain for another moment to rethink the idea of “crisis” as a category that must be discussed. It was not my intention in this article to focus on this problem that, without a doubt, is permeating the debates of what happens today in relation to anthropological knowledge. The budget on which we count and the working conditions to which I alluded, based on the relationship of anthropologists with institutions, account for frameworks of possibility for research.

Of course, this does not exhaust the local dynamics of the discipline, which cannot be understood without the history of the local anthropology—in this case, of Argentina. But here I had a much more modest goal: to show the way in which the scientific system is functioning today in Argentina and how it is structured institutionally with universities and other associations.

Thus, researchers from CONICET are state employees. This implies job stability for young people entering into permanent positions. Also, job evaluations depend on the researchers themselves, who form the different advisory areas of the board of CONICET. The growth of the staff of researchers is a process that is far from negligible in my country, which has strengthened the scientific system in years that are considered in “crisis.” This has had an effect on knowledge production and differs from other systems in which labor precarity has extended for many years.

## NOTES

1. The Argentinean Association of Graduates in Anthropology (CGA) conducted a survey during July of 2008 of its members to better understand the profile of anthropologists. This survey does not have statistical significance and has been answered by few members (who do not make up the totality of anthropologists in Argentina; see Ferrero and Gazzotti 2008). In addition to these isolated data, there are few studies that examine what anthropologists do. In a conversation I had with her, Lía Ferrero, the president of CGA, spoke of the nonexistence of data on the situation of anthropologists in Argentina.
2. Universities are autonomous. They have bylaws and authorities who are elected as representatives of the faculties, graduates, and students (and in some cases, the nonteaching staff of the university as well).
3. Several anthropologists, especially in recent years, have explored the history of Argentinean anthropology. A reading of these works reveals an unending debate about our history, about relationships among anthropologists, the institutionalization of the discipline, and even the themes anthropologists address. Something similar happens with some attempts at the periodization of anthropology. Many stress, especially in light of social anthropology’s historical place in political contexts, “politics” and “the political” that contribute to certain ruptures, continuities, and divisions in anthropology.
4. Although, as I stated previously, I will not give an account of traditions and political and institutional processes that built the discipline in Argentina nor will I focus on the teaching of an-

thropology and its conditions (see Bartolomé 2007; Boivin and Rosato 2011), I believe it necessary to keep in mind that this is a particular historical moment that, like any other, is not exempt from struggles and interpretations.

5. It is necessary to note two things. In the first place, there exists a long tradition of research teams. Many of them have an important trajectory and recognition at the national and international levels. They are teams that, under direction or designated by a line of work, have worked with total freedom and creativity. Secondly and related to this, I do not mean to say that the creation of groups is bad. In fact, the work of these teams is not only valuable but necessary.
6. According to the World Bank, the GDP allocated to science and technology in the country was 0.65 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2011 (having been 0.6% of GDP in 2009 and 0.62% in 2010). See [http://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS?order=wbapi\\_data\\_value\\_2011+wbapi\\_data\\_value&sort=asc](http://datos.bancomundial.org/indicador/GB.XPD.RSDV.GD.ZS?order=wbapi_data_value_2011+wbapi_data_value&sort=asc) (accessed October 10, 2014). These data should be understood, however, in relation to the growth of the Argentinean GDP during the Kirchnerista decade (2003–2013) at an annual average of 7.3 percent. The percentage of this dedicated to education between 2003 and 2011 went from 3.77 percent to 6.47 percent. This was accompanied by the creation of 12 national universities (public and free). See <http://www.eldiplo.org/index.php/archivo/167-kirchnerismo-balance-de-una-decada/que-dicen-los-numeros/> (accessed December 20, 2014).
7. In 2014, 754 more researchers were selected, which represented a growth of 15 percent more positions than were awarded the previous year. In addition to working as career researchers, such scholars work on a permanent basis on CONICET staff to support researchers.
8. I know the limits of the data I present. In the way in which it is used, the data are not able to differentiate anthropologists from other social scientists. CONICET does not have a breakdown smaller than this. However, even though this division in committees exists, anthropologists are not obliged to serve on the committee for History, Geography, and Social Anthropology, because committees not only assess career path but also subject matter. Although the cases are few, an anthropologist dedicated to urban issues, for example, could be a researcher for the Grand Area of Agricultural Sciences, Engineering, and Materials.
9. At the time, CONICET awarded doctoral and postdoctoral scholarships annually in all disciplines. In 2013 it had 8,886 fellows (1,855 postdoctoral fellowships), of which 2,488, or 28 percent, belonged to the Grand Area (439 postdoctoral).
10. See CONICET’s “30 Years of Democracy” at <http://www.conicet.gov.ar/conicet-30-anos-de-democracia/> (accessed October 7, 2014). In 2014, 754 new researchers entered the field. This is striking given that, supposedly, we have been speaking for several years of economic crisis at home. For an interpretation of the different positions on inequality in recent years, see Kessler 2014.
11. See <http://www.cga.org.ar/> (accessed December 18, 2014) and <http://www.saanropologia.com.ar/> (accessed December 18, 2014).

12. The CGA has digitized all the volumes that are publicly accessible: <http://ppct.caicyt.gov.ar/index.php/publicar/issue/archive> (accessed December 18, 2014).
13. Only 80 anthropologists graduated from the University of Buenos Aires in 2013.
14. Boivin and Rosato (2011:100) note that 34 percent of teachers at national universities are lecturers-researchers, and 80 percent of CONICET researchers are researchers-lecturers.
15. See, for example, the recent files of *Cuadernos de Antropología Social*, the journal of the department of Social Anthropology of the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts. This growth can be seen in the emergence and strengthening of scientific publications both in anthropology and in social sciences. Among the first, for example: *Revista del Museo de Antropología* of the National University of Córdoba; *Etnografías Contemporáneas* of the National University of San Martín; *Intersecciones en Antropología* from the National University of the Center of the Province of Buenos Aires; *Estudios en Antropología Social* of the CAS-IDES; and the relaunch of *Publicar*, the journal of the CGA, among others.
16. See, for example, the special supplement to volume 55, number S9, of *Current Anthropology* (August 2014), entitled “Crisis, Value, and Hope: Rethinking the Economy.”

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## Comment

# More about Anthropology in Argentina

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Mariano Perelman (this issue) provides an interesting description of what happens to one portion of anthropology in Argentina: that which is practiced in universities and above all in CONICET.<sup>17</sup> Following his explanation, we could conclude that anthropology in Argentina finds itself in full, healthy development.

But if we enter into the spaces in the text that are left out, we find some different conditions.

As Perelman states, there is no data about the anthropology that is taking place outside the universities or CONICET. But we have information about these other areas, information that may be partial and unfinished but which nevertheless contributes to the assembly of a broader and more complex panorama of what goes on in Argentina.<sup>18</sup>

Anthropology, like most of the social sciences, is practiced in Argentina in three main areas: research, teaching, and policy making (including NGO-based advocacy and public administration). Research and teaching at the college or graduate (or, as much of the world says, post-graduate) levels tend to be complementary to a greater or lesser extent in the professional career of an anthropologist. Teaching in pre-university or tertiary levels and administration does not necessarily mesh with the academic career, although what tends to happen is that researchers, whether senior or junior, work intermittently in administrative areas.

Policy making is practiced mostly in public spheres (national or provincial) or the so-called third sector (NGOs of local, national, regional, or international scope). Work in private spheres is still largely in the minority in local anthropology but not nonexistent. The current anthropological endeavor is then characterized by the multiplicity and simultaneity of areas of employment.

A separation between two major areas of the discipline—that which is linked to the academy and that which is not—results from the way anthropology

is practiced in Argentina. Anthropologists linked to the academy meet and exchange knowledge and experiences in conferences, meetings symposia, workshops, and so forth. The rest of anthropology is more dispersed, with no formal spaces for exchange and only precarious or marginal inclusion in scientific meetings. A lack of communication is common between the two spaces, and considering the dispersion in the field of policy making, intradiscipline ignorance is a point to keep in mind.

Adding to that, anthropology carried out in areas of policy advocacy and public administration is characterized by a disadvantage in comparison with the other social sciences, as these have laws of professional practice regulating their professions and qualifying licenses, which is a condition required by the government to be able to practice a discipline professionally. This means that, for example, when there is a competition for permanent positions in the national public administration, anthropology does not fall within the eligible disciplines, or that for a colleague to present a report to a public entity, he or she needs the collaboration of a licensed professional to assume civil liability thereof.

Another feature of Argentinean anthropology in recent years is the increase in undergraduates in the country with a consequent increase of anthropologists with first-level university degrees. Graduate programs in anthropology have also multiplied, generating a large number of graduate students. In the last ten years, four new undergraduate degree programs have been created, bringing the number to 11 across the country. This has led to the growth in the number of anthropology graduates and therefore to the growth of concerns about professional opportunities that the discipline awards.

Throughout its 43 years of existence, the CGA—the only association of anthropologists with a national scope—has always worked toward recognition, rapprochement, and reciprocity between the diverse areas of our profession. Toward these ends, during much of its existence and through constant dialogue and exchange with colleagues, the CGA has argued continuously for the creation of a law of professional practice so that anthropology can stand on equal footing with other professions and thereby

strengthen and legitimize anthropologists' work before the state and society itself. A law of this type (plus the chance to grant professional licenses) would delimit and define anthropologists, keeping others (who are not trained in anthropology) from speaking or working in the name of anthropology.<sup>19</sup>

A law of professional practice would be the regulatory framework within which our profession would unfold. It would regulate our activity and would include anyone who practices the profession. Said law would distinguish and define the anthropologist, regulate her or his professional activity, and establish the jurisdiction within

which she or he could carry out anthropological activities. Also, as a corollary, it would establish penalties for poor performance, and the courts could handle such issues.

Ultimately, the aim is to strengthen and defend the specificity of anthropology, avoiding the dispersion and relative weakness that characterizes it today.

#### NOTES

1. For references on CONICET, refer to Perelman's text.
2. This information is the result of surveys, meetings, forums, conferences, and so forth, carried out by the CGA.
3. This situation occurs frequently in Argentina.

#### Comment

## The Survival and Resilience of Anthropology during Democratic and Dictatorial Times in Argentina

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The 50th anniversary of the Department of Anthropological Sciences at the University of Buenos Aires (UBA) was celebrated in October 2008 with a conference that examined the departmental history through "an overview of historical periods that were delimited as much by scientific milestones as by social and political events that have characterized the development of anthropology in our country" (UBA 2008). The timeline followed the pendulum of democracy and dictatorship. UBA's anthropology program began in 1958—the same year the national science foundation CONICET and the private social science research institutes Instituto Di Tella and Instituto de Desarrollo Económico y Social (IDES) were founded. Argentina had just climbed out of military rule following the coup d'état against President Juan Domingo Perón in 1955, and President-Elect Frondizi implemented economic and educational reforms to modernize the country. Sociology, psychology, anthropology, and the educational sciences emerged as UBA's new academic disciplines. Prehistory, ethnology, and folklore became the three disciplinary branches of anthropology in Argentina. Structuralism, structural functionalism, phenomenology, and historical materialism were the principal theoretical currents in social anthropology (Guber and Visacovsky 1998). In 1966, Argentinean universities lost their autonomy when General Onganía grabbed power. Hundreds of scholars abandoned Argentina or took intellectual refuge in private research institutes after the so-called Night of the Long Sticks in July 1966, when police violently repressed student protests at the UBA. Students and faculty embraced indigenism, psychoanalysis, and Marxist anthropology as revolutionary thought dominated the halls of science during the 1966–73 dictatorship. A confluence of street mobilizations and guerrilla insurgency

enforced the return to democracy in 1973 with Perón once again in the presidential seat but unable to control the resur-facing political violence. According to hearsay, several anthropologists with ties to guerrilla organizations even wanted to kidnap Ralph Beals in 1974 to finance the revolution, but Beals never showed. It was also a time when anthropologists turned to the study of popular culture, often combined with grassroots work that raised the suspicion of the military. The armed forces staged a coup d'état in March 1976, and Argentina entered the darkest period in its history. Students and faculty members disappeared or went into exile, and anthropology struggled to survive the administrative control by military overseers. The return to democracy in late 1983 marked the rebirth of anthropology. Tellingly, the 50th anniversary conference highlighted the founding of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team in 1986 as the discipline's symbolic victory. Social anthropologists and archaeologists joined hands to exhume anonymous graves and identify the disappeared, combining excavation techniques with ethnographic interview skills to acquire ante mortem data about the disappeared from their searching relatives (Fondebrider 2015). After 1983, a growing number of Argentinean anthropology students acquired PhD degrees abroad, notably in Brazil, Europe, and North America. Many graduates returned home and invigorated Argentina with valuable professional contacts, new theoretical insights, and ideas about curriculum development. Budget cuts began to trouble the UBA and CONICET because of the government's neoliberal policies in 1990 and a major financial crisis in 2001. Anthropology survived the onslaught, in part because the discipline had taken root in private research institutes.

The intertwinement of disciplinary and political developments is a constant in the production of anthropological knowledge in Argentina, as becomes clear from a comparison of the 30th and 50th anniversary conferences (Guber



and Visacovsky 1998). In his article in this issue, Mariano Perelman points out another dimension through an analysis of the relationship between the discipline and the state. Argentinean anthropology thrives thanks to the job security of many anthropologists as modestly paid public employees of CONICET. Perelman has concentrated on the relation between CONICET and the University of Buenos Aires (UBA), which is Argentina's largest public university with an enrollment of more than 300,000 students who do not pay tuition. I would like to add that much CONICET-funded anthropological research is conducted in private institutes, such as IDES and FLACSO (Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales), that house many foreign-trained Argentinean anthropologists. Thanks to the methodological and epistemological reflections on Argentinean anthropology by scholars who were trained abroad, the discipline was revitalized in the 1990s after postmodernism had made ethnographic fieldwork a suspect endeavor in Argentina (Guber 1991; Guber and Visacovsky 2002). Equally important has been the founding of *Editorial Antropofagia* by the British-trained anthropologist Santiago Álvarez, which has been publishing a steady supply of ethnographies. Argentina's post-dictatorship generation of anthropologists has secured the discipline's place in universities and institutes, and its fieldwork projects express Argentina's time-honored relationship between research interests and national issues, with topics such as warfare and civil-military relations (Badaró 2013; Frederic 2013; Guber 2012; Lorenz 2012); the disappeared, searching families, and memory politics (Garaño and Pertot 2007; Silva Catela 2009); ethnicity and first nations (Briones 2005; Silla 2011; Vargas 2005; Wright 2008); and identity, urban poverty, and the Argentinean middle class (Grimson 2012; Míguez 2008; Visacovsky and Garguin 2009).

Perelman's analysis of the stable research funding of Argentinean anthropologists as state employees of CONICET, and the abovementioned influence of political changes on academic institutions and research agendas, invites us to reflect on the relationship between anthropology and politics elsewhere in the world. To what extent are national disciplinary developments steered by contextual circumstances rather than new conceptual insights? How does tenure influence the direction of research topics toward engaged anthropology or theory-driven anthropology? Finally, how do shrinking research budgets and the proliferation of adjunct positions in Europe and North America affect disciplinary research and academic curricula?

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## Comment

# The Exhilarating, Ephemeral Conditions of Anthropological Knowledge Production

Lynn M. Morgan

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Mariano Perelman (this issue) is right to remind us that the crises affecting higher education and research are not evenly distributed. As an anthropologist of work, Perelman invites us to turn our gaze to the labor conditions that can facilitate (or impede) the production of intellectual knowledge as well as "crises" in higher education. He refutes the widespread mentality of crisis with the example of Argentina, where public higher education is free to all and anthropologists find stable public employment. In Argentina, it seems, the production of anthropological knowledge, subjectivities, and livelihoods is thriving. It wasn't always that way, of course. During the 1976–83 military dictatorship, the social sciences were attacked, many anthropology departments were dismantled, and hundreds of academics were disappeared or fled into exile (Trindade et al. 2007). The current efflorescence is at least in part a public expression of atonement for yesterday's wholesale destruction of the social sciences.

Sociologists of knowledge make a living by showing how intellectual work (including the politics of theory) is affected by historical and political landscapes. One such sociologist of knowledge was anthropology's own Eric Wolf, who showed nearly half a century ago—in another period of turmoil—that U.S. anthropology had been characterized by three major theoretical phases, each of which coincided with a particular social configuration. The period of "capitalism triumphant" was dominated by social Darwinism; the period of democratization and liberal reform was characterized by theories emphasizing relativism; and the pe-

riod of military-industrial expansionism during the Vietnam War revealed the need to theorize power and postcolonialism (Wolf 1969). Today we might point to the privatization of public services and the concentration of wealth, to which anthropologists have responded with critiques of disaster capitalism, neoliberalism, and predatory debt (Adams 2013; Comaroff and Comaroff 2001; Graeber 2012).

The winter of 2015 offered chilling examples of the crisis in U.S. higher education. President Obama used his State of the Union address to propose that all U.S. citizens receive free community college education, even though he knew the Republican-controlled Congress would never agree. In February, Wisconsin governor Scott Walker brazenly proposed to strike "the search for truth" from the state university's mission as he slashed the university's budget. In March, Sweet Briar College, a small and venerable women's liberal arts college (not unlike the one where I teach), announced that it would close its doors in May. Anyone contemplating graduate school in anthropology in the United States must weigh the prospect of graduating with crushing debt, not to mention a shrinking and precarious academic job market, stiff competition for fieldwork and research funding, and structures of higher education that exploit the labor of graduate students and adjuncts. Ryan Anderson (2014) wonders "how all of this debt is affecting the actual practice and meaning of anthropology. Think about this: if we're graduating a flood of students who are deep in debt, what kind of 'anthropology' are we really producing in the end?" No wonder we talk of crisis.

Argentina has its crises too, although they do not (currently) target the professoriate or the production of academic knowledge. I lived in Argentina and experienced firsthand its intellectual vitality, yet Perelman manages to throw into

stark relief the contrast between Argentina's academic labor conditions and those we face in the United States. U.S. readers may read his comments and wish, as I did, that my government would make a similar systemic commitment to advancing human rights and to a well-funded system of free public education funded by progressive taxation.

To appreciate the contours of Perelman's critique, it is important to consider not only the political contexts that make it possible to practice anthropology (or any other intellectual pursuit) but also what Perelman himself once described as "capitalist production, re-production, and consumption . . . together in one frame" (Perelman 2007:11). The prospects for academic employment, job security, public access to education, and academic freedom are contingent on the predilections of those in power, as we know. Franz Boas was censured by the American Anthropological Association in 1919 for alleging that some anthropologists were spying for the U.S. government, and in 1953 Gene Weltfish was blacklisted for communist sympathies and fired from Columbia University. Next door to Argentina right now, Chilean educators are struggling to reform a model of higher education that is lucrative for its private investors but underwrites a rigid system of class stratification. Public sector employment, too, has its dangers: Mexican anthropologists who benefited from public sector employment in the mid-20th century often found their job security contingent on ideological support for state projects. Chinese intellectuals were subject to persecution during the Cultural Revolution for their "bourgeois ideologies." Education is politics writ large, and conditions favorable to the production of anthropological knowledge can be distressingly ephemeral.

If we add feminist understandings of "re-production" to Perelman's analysis, we can understand the gendered dimensions of anthropological knowledge production. In 2010, Argentina became the first country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage without having first legalized the voluntary termination of pregnancy. Female academics in Argentina cannot take full advantage of employment opportunities if they (and their students) lack the right to control their own reproduction or determine their own life trajec-

tories. Members of the vibrant *Colectiva de Antropólogas Feministas* (Collective of Feminist Anthropologists of Argentina) invest their intellectual and political energies in the movement to achieve reproductive rights and justice because they recognize that the requirements for producing anthropological knowledge extend beyond the immediate conditions of employment and training to their freedom to control their own bodies and life trajectories. Surely these considerations must also factor into an understanding of the system of scientific knowledge production functioning today in Argentina.

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## Comment

# Anthropology and Post-Neoliberal Horizons in Argentina: Promises and Limits

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Mariano Perelman (this issue) has written a very good overview of the institutional conditions under which most anthropologists conduct research in Argentina. In highlighting the prominent role that the Argentinean federal government has had in funding the careers of research-oriented

anthropologists in the past decade, his essay puts into perspective and denaturalizes the growing conditions of precarity that characterize the job prospects of recent anthropology PhDs in North America. This counterpoint is certainly an expression of broader political contrasts between the so-called "left turn" that has redefined South America since the early 2000s and the ongoing expansion of neoliberal policies in the global north. Whereas public universities in the United

States, Canada, and the United Kingdom suffer cutbacks and are increasingly administered following for-profit business models, public universities in Argentina not only continue to be free but have also significantly expanded their presence in the public arena. As Perelman shows, CONICET (Consejo Nacional de Investigaciones Científicas y Técnicas)—an agency modeled after the French CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique)—has expanded its funding of full-time research careers for an important number of anthropologists. In short, this overview reveals how in the past decade Argentinean anthropology has benefited from strong federal support and how different this situation is in relation to the precarious job market in North America.

I would like to add a few temporal, spatial, and political dimensions to the main points made by Perelman, for the sake of complementing his main argument. When I graduated in anthropology from the Universidad de Buenos Aires in 1990, the situation in Argentina could not have been more different. The country was entering a decade of extreme neoliberal reforms that had a destructive impact on CONICET. Back then, research funding shrank dramatically; furthermore, discredited conservative academics who had controlled CONICET during the 1976–1983 military dictatorship were assigned to this agency's evaluation committee for anthropology. For several years, many young graduates interested in pursuing critical scholarship viewed CONICET as a conservative and underfunded institution that offered limited spaces for a research career. The current situation described by Perelman, in this regard, should be placed in this long-term temporal context, in which shifting political environments have had a profound impact on whether or not funding by CONICET supported anthropological research.

The spatial dimensions of the expansion of Argentinean social anthropology in the past few decades are also worth highlighting. Historically centralized in Buenos Aires and a few other cities such as La Plata, Posadas, Rosario, Salta, and Jujuy, anthropologists have gradually expanded their institutional presence at universities elsewhere in the country. The administrations of Néstor Kirchner (2003–07) and Cristina Kirchner (2007–15) also encouraged the creation

and expansion of several public universities in the greater Buenos Aires area, which have helped decentralize teaching and research opportunities for anthropologists. In the past, these opportunities were restricted, in this city, to the Universidad de Buenos Aires or private institutes.

There is a final observation I would like to make about social-cultural anthropology in Argentina today, which goes beyond Perelman's institutional focus but is worth mentioning to add a more critical perspective on the contradictory legacy of these past 12 years for the discipline. Since 2003, the administrations of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner have enthusiastically encouraged an agribusiness model of agrarian accumulation that had a destructive and violent impact on the people with which Argentinean anthropology historically forged its identity. As I have argued elsewhere (Gordillo 2006, 2008), the history of the discipline in Argentina cannot be understood without looking at the different ways in which generations of anthropologists have tried to account for the experience of the indigenous peoples of the Gran Chaco, the tropical lowlands in the north of the country. In the past decade, the same federal government that has expanded anthropological research has also supported, if often indirectly, evictions and violence against many of the people with whom ethnographers traditionally worked and who often live on land sought after by agribusiness. Many Argentinean anthropologists have been very active in articulating public forms of solidarity and organization in support for indigenous protests against the federal government and against provincial administration aligned with it. But these conflicts are a reminder that, while the last decade may have been good for Argentinean anthropology, it has not been necessarily good for its most traditional research subjects.

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#### Interview

## A Political Anthropologist's Journey from the Local to the Global: An Interview with Irène Bellier (CNRS-EHESS)

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**Margaret Buckner**

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Irène Bellier at home. (Photo courtesy of interviewee)

complex systems, studying the *École Nationale d'Administration (ENA)*, which trains the French power elite, and then the European Commission. In 2001, she began studying the Indigenous Peoples movement, using the United Nations as her field site. Since 2010, she has been leading a research project on "Scales of Governance: The UN, States and Indigenous Peoples" (SOGIP) funded by the European Research Council; this interdisciplinary project (anthropology, law, and public policy) involves comparative analyses at the global and local levels in ten countries on four continents. She has 115 publications, including books, articles, book chapters, and DVDs, in French, Spanish, and English. Among her books are the following: *El temblor y la luna. Ensayo sobre las relaciones entre las mujeres y los hombres mai huna* (1991); *L'ENA comme si vous y étiez* (1993); *An Anthropology of the European Union: Building, Imagining, Experiencing Europe* (2000, with coeditor Thomas Wilson); *Savoirs et politiques de développement: Questions en débat à l'aube du XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (2008, with four coeditors); *Peuples autochtones du monde: Les enjeux de la reconnaissance* (2013); *Rajasthan-Shekhawati: Puits et réservoirs* (2014, with three co-authors); and *Terres, Territoires, Ressources. Politiques, pratiques et droits des peuples autochtones* (2015). (For a full list of publications, see [www.ehess.fr](http://www.ehess.fr) and <http://www.iiaac.cnrs.fr/laios/spip.php?article250>.)

### ON BECOMING AN ANTHROPOLOGIST

**Susana Narotzky (SN):** I'd like to start by asking you how you became an anthropologist. Did it have anything to do with your background, with your parents? Did it begin with a passion, an idea?

**Irène Bellier (IB):** Yes, it was a passion [*laughs*]. When I was about two years old, just a baby, I would not eat any food unless I was told it came from far away, say, China or Africa. My parents realized that they could make me eat

ham or any other food just by telling me that it came from some exotic place. I had a strong interest in something that I couldn't yet name. That was the very early beginning of my interest in the Other.

**SN:** An early beginning!

**IB:** I would invent languages. When my mother asked me, "What are you going to do when you grow up?" I said, "I want to be a prehistoric woman. I want to make fire." Later I was able to put a name to what I wanted to become: an ethnologist.

Being interested in the Other ran in the family. My grandfather had lived in Africa and in Vietnam. And he was Basque. And my parents were involved in a form of Social Catholicism, and they invited many foreigners to our home, which was unusual at that time. We had a house full of culturally diverse people. So, early in my life I had this idea of reciprocity. If you want to be accepted, you have to be accepting, and that came to me through the embracing of others. I think for me this was the anthropological experience of being different.

I also had a father who had a really strong character [*laughs*]. For him, ethnology was nonsense, definitely not something I could make a living from. He pushed me to study political science, so I went to the Institut d'Études Politiques of Paris [Institute of Political Studies, a well-known institution of political science that prepares people for a career in politics or government, popularly called Sciences Po]. He would have loved to see me working at a senior level in the civil service.

**SN:** Is that why you did research on the institutions that train the French political elite [*L'ENA comme si vous y étiez*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1993]?

**IB:** My whole life is connected [*laughs*]. I sort of joined the rebellion [of May 1968]. I was very young then, but that was when I started to become active and develop a political consciousness. I didn't simply accept mainstream ideas. I was studying political science, and I was doing well. But then came the moment when I had to decide whether or not to take the entrance exam for the École Nationale d'Administration (ENA, School of National Administration). I decided not to, because if I had gone a step further in that direction, it would definitely have prevented me from becoming an ethnologist, which was always what I had in mind, even while I was studying political science.

There were two other things that influenced my career choice. Across the street from the Institut d'Études Politiques is the Institut des Hautes Études de l'Amérique Latine (IHEAL, Institute of Latin American Studies). I decided to go there first, before going to the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS, School for Advanced Studies in Social Sciences) for my PhD. I wanted to learn about the region that in the 1970s was suffering under several dictatorships. I was also a member of two Committees of Solidarity, for democratic Chile and Guatemala, respectively. When the time came to do my fieldwork, I had to choose where I wanted to go. I didn't want to go to Africa because I didn't

want to follow in the steps of colonial France; I didn't want that legacy. Also, I liked speaking Spanish; I liked the language itself. I chose Latin America because it was the legacy of another colonial power, and it offered many varieties of Spanish.

At the Institute of Latin American Studies, I met a couple of very interesting guys who were working in the Amazon forest with the Tukano people. These guys described a fantastic society full of interesting myths and rituals. At that time (1978), very little was known about these Amazonian societies, and they fascinated me. But I noticed a gap in the studies: there was nothing about women. What were Tukanoan women up to? There were references made to them, but because of the influence of Claude Lévi-Strauss's theory of the circulation of women, they were not considered seriously, especially by the dominant male anthropologists, who had little access to the women's world. I was reading descriptions of a society without genders. So I decided to delve into that.

When the time came to go to the field, in 1979, I wanted to go to Colombia. But at that time, Colombia required that foreign students who came to study Amazonian indigenous people hire and train a local researcher. I think this was an excellent policy, but I had no funds for it [laughs]. So I had to choose another site, and that is how I ended up in the Peruvian rainforest studying a Western Tukanoan group with a focus on gender.

### ON HER GOAL IN ANTHROPOLOGY

**SN:** Obviously you had some idea of what ethnology was because you were drawn to it as a child. But later on, when you really got into it, what did you imagine you were going to do as an ethnologist or as an anthropologist? What did you think it was going to be like? What was your goal in anthropology?

**IB:** Learning. For me, anthropology is an ongoing learning experience. I prefer this kind of learning to, say, putting knowledge into boxes. Very early on, I had the impression that cultures are not set in stone, that culture is a continuous process of transformation. And it was the process itself I liked, the dynamics of it. So when I arrived in the Amazon rainforest the first time, of course I pursued this idea, that things are never fixed.

For instance, I had imagined what "an Indian" would be like. I had envisioned a stereotypical Indian as he had been described, not a "savage" or a "primitive" but a man living in the rainforest, naked, and covered in body paint. Instead, I met a people who had been decimated by white people because they were living in the area of the Amazon where the rubber boom took place. The people I lived with, now known as the Maihuna, were definitely not what the media projected or what mainstream people expected them to be like.

I spent a total of four years in the Amazon. The first two times I returned to France from the rainforest, I met with journalists who always wanted a good story of "the poor little girl lost in the Amazon." I never delivered that

story [laughs], but that was what mainstream people wanted. Thirty years ago, I refused to let an interview be published because the journalist distorted the story I had given him. And I see that many persons continue to think of Indians in terms of "savageness."

For example, three years ago on a news program on France 2 [a public television channel], a journalist was talking about an Ashaninka community about to be expelled from their lands because a new dam would flood their territory. A campaign arose against the dam. A young activist I know invited the media to visit the community and a short documentary was made about the issue. But I was shocked by the way Ashaninka people were represented. What the newscaster said was: "These people in the far-off rainforest still eat roots." And the local reporter who was in the rainforest said that "they had never met a white person before; I am the first, you know." Such distorted representation is no longer acceptable.

**SN:** So people really want stories about difference.

**IB:** Yes, of otherness and difference. People don't see, for instance, that we French people, like many others, also eat roots, such as potatoes and carrots. Of course, what matters is not what food people eat but their right to live. I do not like this kind of show. However, I want to communicate my research. I have managed to say a lot in different arenas, from private circles to larger audiences (radio and TV), and through publications.

### ON HER STUDY OF THE ENA

**IB:** In order to pursue my goal of going off to the Amazon rainforest, I needed to be self-sufficient. So I took the administrative recruitment examination to join the French civil service in the senior category (category A), which would give me the possibility to come and go, because that status provides leaves for research and for personal reasons. I passed the exam and was hired by the Ministry of Finance and Budget. I would work there for a while and put money aside, and then I would go to the Amazon rainforest for several months at a time. That was how I got the money to go to the Amazon to do fieldwork with the Maihuna. In the French civil service, it is possible to take a leave of absence (unpaid), and they are obliged to take you back.

**SN:** Yes, we have the same thing in Spain.

**IB:** One of my personal victories is that I convinced the Minister of the Budget—the Minister himself—that researching the Indians of the Amazon rainforest was in the general interest of France. So they let me go [laughs] without asking anything in return. During that period, I was holding down an administrative job that I had no interest in. Yet it was really interesting to get to know our government and the control it exercises, which leads to the second part of my life. While at my administrative job, I spent a lot of time talking to people about my work in the Amazon. In a way, I was explaining to them that the world is not like what they think it is.

After I finished my PhD, I was offered a position at the ENA in charge of international cooperation. I worked there for maybe three or four months. But my mind was completely full of my Maihuna friends. As I observed the people at the ENA, I was struck by the hierarchy imposed on everyone. I thought it would be very interesting to study this world and analyze it using my anthropological skills. And that is what I did. I wrote a proposal to study the ENA, in particular the process that transforms an ordinary person into an elite leader, and I submitted the proposal to the ENA's director. Ethically, however, I could not be employed by the ENA while doing research on it. So I asked to be assigned to the CNRS (Centre National de Recherche Scientifique [National Center for Scientific Research]) in order to have researcher status.

My research at the ENA caused a minirevolution. For while sociologists had studied *Enarques* (people with a degree from the ENA), anthropologists never had. One reason is that, at that time, anthropologists in France did not study these segments of our own society. Another is that the ENA is a closed institution that opens its doors only to select people. But there was a gap in research that needed to be filled. Sociologists were interested mainly in the "product" of the ENA, meaning the *Enarques*. I wanted to study the ENA itself as a small society; I would study the newcomers, who would later occupy positions of power within the state, and also the faculty and staff. I put the ENA into a larger frame.

**SN:** So you looked at the ENA as an organization?

**IB:** Yes, but one made up of the totality of its components. Remember, the sociology of organizations was already developed by that time, but the people in the organizations were never really studied. I put the people in; I included the different types of people. And I think that my anthropological training in kinship was helpful. Knowing clan systems, fission processes [and so forth] helped me identify the various groups that, combined, constitute the ENA itself. In my fieldwork at the ENA, I shifted from being an ethnologist to being an anthropologist.

**SN:** And ethnology is associated with . . .

**IB:** . . . people who live far away in the rainforest. So I had been an ethnologist. But, very interestingly, when you are an anthropologist, your experience depends on the identities people give you. Every time I did fieldwork, I experienced the different ways people saw me. So, for the *Enarques*, as I was the "specialist of tribes," they tried to project themselves according to the categories that I was supposedly looking for. At the same time, they also saw me as an entomologist, which meant that they considered themselves to be like ants or other insects organized into social groups.

My research protocol and interview techniques were special. Because *Enarques* work on grand state projects, they don't make time or effort for petty activities. So I had to overcome two obstacles. The first was their time constraints. When they said, "Is five minutes OK? I could give you five

minutes," I replied, "No way. I can't do it in five minutes, but we can start if you want." That is how we started, but by the end, two or three people who had said "five minutes" eventually talked with me for nine or 12 hours. I also had to earn their trust. I was not using a tape recorder, but they still had to trust that what I was going to learn from them would not affect their position in the ENA ranks. So I decided to do the interviews in the cafeteria in view of everyone. I had a small table there so everybody could see what I was doing and would want to be interviewed. This is how I was able to interact personally and carry out interviews with about 500 people in the four years it took to do the research.

The second obstacle was the need to prove that I was intelligent enough to talk to them. They were testing my knowledge on Vernant, Dumont, Bourdieu, and so on [*laughs*].

**SN:** Very French Grande École . . . [The Grandes Écoles are elite institutes of higher learning, parallel to the university system, including, besides the ENA, the École Normale Supérieure, the École Polytechnique, the École des Mines, and the Institut d'Études Politiques, among others.]

#### ON ANTHROPOLOGICAL DISTANCING

**IB:** I had the Maihuna people in my head while I was talking to the *Enarques*, and I realized that the questions were not the same, the stakes were not the same. I had the feeling that I was there and yet not there, that I was nearby and yet far away. I experienced another form of anthropological distancing [or decentering]. That is the second thing I learned in anthropology. You are always at a distance from those you study. The important thing is to be neither too close nor too far.

In Maihuna mythology, there is a creation story that encapsulates their worldview. A man and his son are sitting and talking together; the father is the creator who becomes the moon, while the son is created and becomes the sun. It is a reversal of most Amerindian worldviews. But it is also said among all Amerindian groups that the sun and the moon should not get too close to each other. For the Maihuna, the father and son sit at opposite ends of either a table or a canoe, an image of how they follow each other in the sky. When the father tells the son how to behave in the sky, he means how to behave with other people. How one behaves with others depends on how others behave with him. Depending on whether people behave properly or not with the sun, the sun will either be too close and the earth will burn, or it will be too far away and the earth will freeze. That is a powerful image.

So I had all that in mind as I listened to the ENA people telling their stories. I told them Maihuna stories, as metaphors, and that was a base to build upon. I think the most important thing is to build confidence with the

researcher. The Maihuna, the Enarques, the European civil servants, they are the same.

### ON THE PRODUCTION OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

**SN:** The other topic that I want to ask you about is the production of anthropological knowledge. In particular, could you expand a little on what it was like in France when you went into anthropology? And how things have evolved since then? Also, where do you place yourself and your work not only in relation to anthropology in France but also to other anthropological traditions?

**IB:** French anthropology was dominated by Claude Lévi-Strauss. The study of politics was not developed. Of course you had George Balandier, but his political anthropology dealt mainly with colonization and decolonization in Africa. There was plenty of room for us to structure other areas of study. As I said earlier, among Americanists no one was looking at gender. And when I carried out my own research in the Amazon, I found that there was also not much interest in political organization. Where those societies were with regard to state formation was not addressed, except by Pierre Clastres, who died too soon. It is being addressed now, 30 years later. While I thought I would be just another Americanist ethnologist, I carried out anthropological research on the French elite, which later developed into research on the European Commission and on international indigenous peoples' movements. That is how Marc Abélès and I founded the Laboratory of the Anthropology of Institutions and Organizations (LAIOS) to mark the turn in anthropology that took place in the early 1990s.

When it comes to producing anthropological knowledge, I emphasize distancing, feeling out of place, being an outsider, and learning from within. It was important for me, and it is important for anthropology as a whole. At one time, anthropology seemed to me to be a science of conservation—[that is, one] made up of people who try to conserve the societies they work with. Sometimes you don't feel anthropologists are conservative, but they are, or at least some of the ones I met are. And there are reasons for that. We are taught to interact with a society, but we are not supposed to change it. As a student, I had an analytical model and training that said not to interfere with the societies you study. What does that mean in terms of practice? I also met Marxist anthropologists (such as Godelier) who were trying to develop another kind of anthropology. They wanted to change things, even if, as anthropologists, they advised against engaging with the society one was studying. So there are contradictory reasons for why anthropologists are not engaged in social transformation. The position of being linguistically and culturally competent yet not an insider, and being a scientist but not too much of one, is something that makes anthropology, or French anthropology, a bit special. I don't know if it's only French anthropology, but French anthropology is definitely like this.

**SN:** I think it is pretty general. There is a fear of interfering too much, even, as you say, among anthropologists who are very political in other ways.

**IB:** But maybe that is also a reason for the split that we have in France, as in other parts of the world, between applied anthropology and research anthropology. Research anthropology is valued, while applied anthropology is not. And we train more and more research anthropologists who have fewer and fewer jobs opportunities . . .

### ON ENGAGED ANTHROPOLOGY

**SN:** So would you place yourself in the field of applied anthropology, or would you say you are an engaged anthropologist?

**IB:** An engaged anthropologist. Now I am developing a politically engaged and collaborative anthropology. I have no difficulties in explaining why and how.

**SN:** What do you mean by engaged anthropology? What is engaged anthropology for you?

**IB:** Engaged anthropology—especially with indigenous peoples—means that you are interested in the future of a society and in the conditions under which that society can have a future. That is different from applied anthropology. I have no interest in developing a particular project that would allow some village to get clean water, for instance. I don't look down on applied anthropology, but I don't have those skills. "Engaged" for me means awareness. I'm more into raising awareness and having discussions with people—people who are not merely objects of study—working with eyes wide open. Engaged anthropology can bring me to personally sign petitions and become active in campaigns, as a citizen. I'm currently working on a research project called SOGIP (Scales of Governance, the UN, States, and Indigenous Peoples). Though I will not commit the collective SOGIP team to an activist or militant position, we all make efforts to include indigenous peoples in our research and in discussions.

That might seem banal, but now, because I'm developing such a project [on indigenous peoples' rights], some colleagues label me as an activist. That kind of judgment shows that mainstream French anthropology is republican, in the sense of *Res Publica* (literally "of the public" not the U.S. political party), meaning there should be no differentiation among citizens. Hence, the fact that we are identifying indigenous peoples as categories of people who deserve attention and respect for their rights bothers some republican-minded people, who mistakenly think we are creating something other than genuine, universal citizens—in other words, one people, one territory, one language. For me, engaged anthropology allows us to pursue universalism through the recognition of diversity.

### ON TWO LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

**IB:** This SOGIP project is allowing me to address at least two different levels of local knowledge practices. One is that of social scientists, including anthropologists and some political scientists—because in some areas there are no



anthropologists working on these issues—and how they construct and communicate their knowledge. At this “scientific” level, we look at the local conditions that affect how social scientists produce scientific knowledge and how knowledge production is affected by historical factors. For instance, the fact that India was colonized by Great Britain is not unrelated to how “tribes” or indigenous peoples in India are perceived. And, of course, India’s history differs from the history of Latin America, Africa, and other regions.

Also, the conditions of knowledge production among the different national academies vary. My hypothesis was that there were different platforms for discussing indigenous issues depending on the dominant language. This has been verified, and it has opened more avenues for comparison that were not foreseen initially. For instance, why do Canada and Australia have similar policies?

**SN:** So you think there is a commonality that is driven by language?

**IB:** Yes, a common language based on past empires; it is not just the language. For instance, Taiwan’s policy on indigenous peoples was informed by a period of Japanese colonization and also by the role that the U.S. played there, though the U.S. never colonized Taiwan. The equivalent of the Bureau of Indian Affairs exists in several countries. So the same models circulate, but they operate differently in different countries.

Interactions within communities of scientists are informed both by the national and linguistic situation and by the openness—or close-mindedness—of the scientists. All scientists are not alike; some are open to broad comparisons, while others focus on narrower topics. Sometimes it takes time to understand what people are talking about. At the roundtable in India, at first I did not understand a single word of what they were saying. It was not a question of language; it was a question of how thought is encapsulated into certain lexical categories, which makes the meanings of some words clearer than others. And because you are in a scientific community, you speak with a lot of allusions. But the fact is you don’t share all of the knowledge background and conditions with your interlocutors.

On a totally different level is knowledge production among indigenous peoples, which varies greatly depending on the regional and local situations. There may be indigenous people who go to the university and who can interact with you at a colleague-to-colleague level. Or they may be outside of the university, or not trained at all, but nevertheless have an input. For example, last year I was in Namibia with the San (Bushmen) peoples. They are hunter-gatherers, or they used to be hunter-gatherers, because they have now been confined to a conservation area where they can no longer hunt. Part of their knowledge, as well as the conditions under which it was produced, made sense to me immediately because of my experience with the Maihuna, who were also hunter-gatherers, although there are differences between living in the bush and living in the rainforest. Experience is what allows you to distinguish between what is comparable and

what is not, between things you can engage with and things you can’t.

**SN:** But do you think there can be a dialogue, a creative dialogue, between these two different levels, between local, indigenous bodies of knowledge and academic knowledge? Or do you think they are like two separate worlds that don’t really feed off each other? Because sometimes I have the impression that some of the anthropological production of knowledge is really for academic consumption.

**IB:** Yes, you are right.

**SN:** I wonder if it is like this because academics think that the knowledge they produce is of no interest to the local people, or because they are protecting themselves from the critique that might come from the local people.

**IB:** There is a certain sense of self-sufficiency among scientists, who think that their work should only be discussed by their peers. They don’t accept local critique and they don’t want it. For critique to be accepted, there has to be a shared language and a recognition of equivalent levels. In France it is certainly like this and in America, also.

Among indigenous peoples, of course, the critique is there. They are asking, “What do you anthropologists do for us?” We are confronted by that question, and it is difficult to answer. On the one hand, you can say, “I am not responsible for those who used anthropology to colonize you or who are using anthropology to control your territory, because you, unfortunately, are sitting on a bauxite mine.” You have to be prepared for that. On the other hand, you have to be prepared to resist local demands, which can be excessive. I am really very interested in working with indigenous peoples because some of them have been working in different areas of political dialogue, for instance, the UN. Indigenous delegates are practical, pragmatic, and clever, and they know what to do and how to engage at different levels. Then the question is whether or not anthropology can give them the tools they need, and that’s more complicated. I also analyze indigenous conditions not as conditions per se but as defined by a relational category, which calls into question the idea of subalternity. Indigenous peoples are now forming their own consciousness, speaking in their own voice, initiating their own political projects, and affirming their right to their own language. This is an important issue, but it is impossible to discuss it with many of my colleagues.

## **ON ANTHROPOLOGY IN FRANCE**

**SN:** You cannot discuss this with colleagues in France?

**IB:** There are a few people with whom I can share these ideas, for example, those I am collaborating with, the students and researchers who come to the monthly seminar, and those who are involved with the same issues in places other than France.

**SN:** But it is not very common among anthropologists here, you would say, this view of subaltern empowerment, so to speak?

**IB:** It is not so common, although there is now a rediscovery of Foucault, Gramsci, and others. Older and younger

colleagues are rediscovering them after their ideas travelled to America. Twenty years ago, I invited Partha Chatterjee (a leading figure in subaltern studies) to lecture at the EHESS. (It was in 1998—I remember that it coincided with the Soccer World Cup, because Chatterjee was a soccer fan.) He gave a very interesting talk. But apart from the Indianists who knew a little bit about him, no prominent French anthropologists attended.

**SN:** So that tradition was not very widespread in France? It was very strong in the UK and in the United States. I remember, when I was in the States in the 1980s and 1990s, that was what people were really reading, subaltern studies.

**IB:** It came to France 20 years later [*laughs*].

**SN:** That's interesting. So, in France there is much more of a closed tradition of anthropology in a way. They are into their own anthropology?

**IB:** I don't want to make a general statement, but I think the way the French teach anthropology has been structured in such a way that it has caused divisions. Most anthropologists work in the CNRS; they are researchers more than teachers. Anthropology was not part of the university, at least not at the undergraduate level. For instance, I went directly into the doctoral program in anthropology, while others were coming in from philosophy or history. You can also get to anthropology through training in sociology; then you get a combination of sociology and anthropology. There are very few departments of anthropology in France, and there are too few positions for anthropologists in humanities and social science departments. So there is a constant fight to define boundaries. Also, at the time when I was trained, there was no standard anthropology manual or knowledge to be taught. So, depending on where you were studying or where your professor went for fieldwork, the way you were trained was very different. That led to the development of clusters.

**SN:** So there were factions?

**IB:** Yes. And we tried to overcome the effects of these divisions by founding (in 2009) the Association Française d'Ethnologie et d'Anthropologie (AFEA, French Association of Ethnology and Anthropology). The intention was to bring together the two associations for general anthropology in France, the AFA (French Association of Anthropologists, founded in 1979) and the APRAS (Association for Research in Social Anthropology, founded in 1989) and to close the gap between specialized associations focused on medical anthropology, legal anthropology, and teaching anthropology, among others. We still have to work at it. I've been involved in this effort.

### ON THE CHALLENGE FOR ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY

**SN:** So what do you think is the main challenge for anthropology at this moment?

**IB:** Anthropology should resist the management mindset [*laughs*]. In anthropology and the humanities, we cannot measure the value of our research by the number of patents we apply for, for example. Anthropologists in France, in Eu-

rope, and in the rest of the world should resist these metrics and what is being done in their name. We cannot survive the schizophrenic approach that privatizes humans and rejects the social sciences and humanities as mere models of thought and critique. Policymakers see research as a moneymaking venture, something that will create employment. That is not enough. Emphasis should be on how we can improve people's lives through a better understanding of our human and cultural condition in this time of globalization. We cannot do research just for the sake of research. We can no longer get by without addressing how our research affects others (besides the market). We make an impact—I hope it is positive. We have to build bridges with different audiences. We have to bring the university closer to what people are interested in. We used to have that in the 1970s. But now we are supposed to be "efficient," which for business-driven people means we should be source of profitability, not of knowledge.

Presently we are confronted with the commodification of knowledge, the financial crisis, the weakening of the state, and a neoliberal model for the university—all those things at once. Still, there are some moments, some places where you can have a relationship with "ordinary people," and the EHESS is one of those places.

### ON COMMUNICATING FINDINGS

**SN:** What about communicating your findings? With regard to your own work, what audiences have you reached with your different books and publications? Or have you used other means of communication?

**IB:** Are you asking for my impact factor [*laughs*]?

**SN:** No, on the contrary, I'm more interested in what is left out of the citation index.

**IB:** I have several answers, depending on whether I was communicating knowledge on indigenous peoples, the Enarques, or the European Commission. I've been on media such as radio and TV. When I talk to the media, it's because there is a larger audience. What attracts the media is the event, so if you organize an event, such as an exhibit, then you can access TV. You can also make films. I made two DVDs because I wanted to link research, teaching, and anthropology-friendly media; one was on European research and the other on the indigenous francophone people of the world.

**SN:** Your first book was in Spanish, so that allowed the people it was about to really read it.

**IB:** I'd had that idea since I came back from the Amazon. I sent my book to the Maihuna several times, but I doubted that the book had reached them then. Last year, a student visited the Maihuna and personally gave them yet another copy. That led to my communicating with them via Skype, and I could check that they'd gotten the book and the letters I'd written to them. We had a face-to-face conversation, which was a fantastic reunion.

**SN:** It must have been very interesting to see what they thought about the book.

**IB:** Absolutely. I have always been interested in what they would say about my research. Before I wrote the book, I had discussed the final outcome of my dissertation with them. That kind of relationship was completely new in 1985.

**SN:** So you had gone back and discussed it with them?

**IB:** Yes, my whole PhD dissertation, including historical aspects, the names of different fauna and flora, taxonomies [and so on]—I discussed it all with them. It's not that I wanted to have an exact blueprint of the society, but I didn't want to make a mess of it. Because once the findings are submitted for academic publication, then ideas can be propagated. So yes, I published my first book in Spanish and I was really proud of it. I published my second book in French, because . . .

**SN:** . . . because it was about the French?

**IB:** Yes. And I published the third in English, because it was about Europe.

**SN:** The one you published in French about the ENA, what reaction did it provoke among the Enarques, the people who had been studied?

**IB:** I wanted to have a discussion about it at the ENA, but that never happened. They all read it, though. It sold out very, very quickly.

**SN:** I've seen it on the Internet.

**IB:** Yes, after the publisher gave me back the copyright, I posted it on the Internet with open access. A lot of people bought the print version, perhaps thinking that if they read the book they would get into the ENA. There is such intense competition to access the elite institutes! I had no debate with the Enarques collectively about it, but I discussed the ideas in the book before many other audiences. I think we never have enough opportunities to discuss our projects or our ideas. Of course we have seminars, but I have finally realized that the only time you really discuss your research in depth is at your dissertation defense. Anyway, I could see that there were people who liked the book, while others did not.

**SN:** Did you get any very clear critical comments on the book—for example, someone who would say to you, “well, we don't think this interpretation is the right one,” or “have you thought of looking at it this way?” Did you get any feedback in this sense? Or did people just read it and say whether they liked it or not?

**IB:** Some wanted me to be more critical of the Grands Corps de l'État [the highest state administrative institutions, including the Conseil d'État, the Cour des Comptes, and the Inspection Générale des Finances, among others], which are very influential in French politics and administration. They were disappointed that my book, which explained the role of the Grands Corps, did not evaluate the elite as being “good” or “bad.” As an anthropologist, I demonstrated how the Grands Corps interacted and what their impact was without passing judgment. But at the time, the crucial issue was whether or not to get rid of the Grands Corps altogether and completely reform the state. And that's still a concern.

## ON COLLABORATION

**SN:** You said collaboration is very important for you, and you are now in this big collaborative project. Can you speak a little bit more about that, about how it maybe enhances creativity? How can you produce synergy among people working in different fields? Also, what is your experience in collaborating with junior and senior colleagues?

**IB:** My two main experiences in collaboration have been with an NGO and with a European Research Council (ERC) project. In both situations, I think we are in a world of equals, but in the ERC project I am the principal investigator [*laughs*], and I make the final decisions. I like to share ideas and let them evolve collectively. I would say that we are a collective brain, and that's important for me, but I am the one who pulls the various threads together. I have also had other collaborative experiences in the research lab [LAIOS] where I have organized activities that incorporated other members of the lab. Sometimes it worked well and sometimes not so well. I also had another very interesting collaborative experience, maybe ten years ago, with a team of European sociolinguists from whom I learned a lot. It was a very beneficial experience.

**SN:** What was it about?

**IB:** I was part of a research project on critical discourse analysis on the politics of identity led by Ruth Wodak, a well-known Austrian sociolinguist who was working on the European Union's policies on unemployment. She called me because of my experience with the European Commission and anthropology. So I brought my anthropological experience to critical discourse analysis. And I liked the way the group was working. I've also been collaborating with a lot of different scientists from the globalization study group I led, which included economists and geographers (GEMDEV [Groupe d'Étude de la Mondialisation et du Développement]). In general, I find it is easier to work with colleagues in other disciplines, through interdisciplinary frameworks and in collaboration, than with anthropologists.

**SN:** You think it is easier [*laughs*]?

**IB:** Much easier. It's amazing. There is more competition among anthropologists. The personal relationship between the anthropologist and his or her particular field affects their ability to share experiences.

There is something in the way anthropologists identify with their field site and with their theories that makes debating issues complicated in France. So I asked myself, is this particular to France? I visited a field site in Namibia with an American anthropologist who strongly identifies with the San people and knows them very well. But it has been very easy to collaborate with her. So, is it a French barrier? I don't know. Do you have experience working with colleagues?

**SN:** I have done collaborative work with anthropologists but not so much with European anthropologists. Yes, there is a problem with sharing. In fact, I've had that problem with a project for which I was the coordinator, and some of the people who had been doing the fieldwork for the project

acted a bit like they didn't want to share. And I said, "Well, listen, this is part of the project, it has to go toward the project, it's not your property."

**IB:** You don't have access to individual researchers' findings. I realized that the only one who was posting information on all sorts of things on the intranet was me.

**SN:** Well, in fact, in another collaborative project, the only team that was putting everything in the drop box, all the interviews, the material, was our team. The others were more cautious [*laughs*]. It's true; there is sort of a sense of personal ownership, a feeling that your field is your property.

**IB:** I think also that in anthropology we are less organized or less technology oriented than researchers in other disciplines. Our field notes and notebooks are personal; we are not going to share them with our colleagues. Often we don't have standard protocols; we're not producing standardized files. I myself don't put everything out for general access. Some things are personal; it is mixed. I think it's this level of informality that makes us very creative. It's also true that we do not make knowledge accessible to everyone. This is one of our problems. We are attached to precise definitions. We produce knowledge rather than information. And to avoid distortion, we stay outside the main channels of communication. Communication happens too fast. People capture what they want and send it to the rest of the world. We anthropologists need to work hard to turn our data into communicable findings.

**SN:** Yes, that's a real problem we have. But also, as you say, I think we are very personally attached to our fields and our informants. When you have worked for a long time in a field, particularly with informants with whom you have formed very good relationships, and then another person comes into that field and uses the same informants, there is a kind of jealousy.

**IB:** I have experienced that. The [French] student who recently went to the Amazon to work also with the Maihuna sent a proposal to an American ethnobiologist who has been deeply involved in creating a regional conservation area for these people. She sent him her proposal, and he sent back a letter saying: "You cannot work in this field. This is what I am going to publish on, so please switch fields." She came to me because I was the senior researcher in the field, I was the first person who'd gone to that field site. The American ethnobiologist, who went to the field site later, is now trying to control who does what. When I went back to the Maihuna (summer 2013 and summer 2014), I met with the American ethnobiologist, who repeated, "Hey, this is my field, she cannot work on this." The issue was making life difficult for this student. We eventually worked out a solution.

I have also had the experience of carrying out fieldwork with Marc Abélès for the research project on the European Commission, another time of intense collaboration. For that project, we collected data together and talked about it every day, which stimulated ideas. Collaboration worked really well, and it was a very good experience.

**SN:** I had the same experience with Gavin Smith, and it was fantastic. We went and collected data, and then we discussed it at the end of the day.

**IB:** Ideas fly fast, but there comes a point when there is a fusion of ideas. Then you have to accept that an idea is not just yours or hers or his. So the best way to solve this issue is to say, "I did the work with so-and-so."

**SN:** Yes, exactly. It's difficult to know who said what.

**IB:** And this is when you have to ask: "Am I the real owner of that idea? Do I have to stamp my name on it?"

**SN:** It's true that there is a sort of fusion when you work so closely with someone.

**IB:** So I think the only possible point of friction is when you have divergent ideas and the other person says something that contradicts you. You may be right or you may be wrong, but then the question is, what is the source of the contradiction? That is something that has to be solved. But if all the collaborators agree on the common ownership of ideas, there's no problem, unless you're thinking of your career . . . Anthropologists are not detached from such realities [*laughs*].

#### ON HER TRAJECTORY

**SN:** Finally, how do you see your trajectory? How do you see the connections and disconnections between your starting out in the Amazon rainforest and the project you are working on now, and the ENA and other projects in between?

**IB:** Everything I've done is related. I've done local, national, European, and international.

**SN:** You've worked at different levels, but the overall theme is, in fact, power, isn't it?

**IB:** It is a power issue, on different scales. Indigenous peoples are what interest me because they are dealing both with Otherness and with the state. My question is, how do indigenous peoples produce knowledge and contribute to creating broader norms, and how do global norms come back to the local level? I observe something that happens in Africa, something similar that happens in Asia or in Australia, and I make comparisons. After studying globally, I go back to the very local; I move among various scales and levels.

Over the last 30 years, I have seen fantastic change in the world, which is called globalization, or modernization, or whatever. But what has happened is that, over the same period indigenous peoples have lost their autonomy, they have lost their knowledge because of formal education, and they have entered these organizational processes because the rest of the world has entered their territories. I am going to study that in the very place where I started out, in the Amazon.

**SN:** These people you first studied, they are organizing? They are joining other organizations?

**IB:** Yes, they started in 2004. They had not organized earlier because, as they used to say, "Why should we organize with people who were our traditional enemies?" But now they are part of larger communities. On a larger scale, how

do they overcome linguistic and other kinds of boundaries? What makes each people unique? I knew that I would go back one day, but I waited for the right moment to come. And I'm very lucky that it came.

**SN:** It's perfect.

**IB:** I've been comparing, and I've learned a lot. But I also wanted to work with people more specialized than I could ever be on each region of the world. Together, in the SOGIP research team, we are working to help answer the question of what it means to create universal norms and how universal norms can be.

**SN:** And then these universal norms are reconfigured locally; in other words, they're reappropriated.

**IB:** Yes, reappropriated, and at different levels.

### ON TÉLESCOPAGE

**IB:** In March 2013, someone told me, "We are organizing a Congress of the Federation of Maihuna people from June 18 to June 21." I said, "My goodness, it's not possible! I'm organizing an international workshop in Paris on land resources with Arturo Escobar and 30 international guests on exactly the same dates." Then the person said, "OK, no problem. We are going to reschedule the meeting so you will be able to come." This discussion—after 27 years of no communication with the Maihuna—made me realize that the way the Maihuna measure and relate to time had not changed. I wrote a paper on this in the 1980s. Among the Maihuna, you have cosmological time, you have seasonal time, you have natural time, you have women's time, you have all kinds of time. Also, they don't measure age exactly like we do. So age, schedules, dates, all that is completely different. But interestingly, things are always done on time—on their time, which I think is fantastic. In contrast, I am always on time because I have all these things (agendas, schedules, calendars), but I am also always out of time, because there are too many things to do at the same time. I think I want to write on this, and on what I call *télescopage*.

**SN:** So this is *télescopage*, but it's interesting that for you it's about time. You are talking about being on time or out of time, and how the Maihuna are always on time, even if they are not on "our" time, whereas we are not on time, even if we are on time. But *télescopage* is also about space, which is another dimension.

**IB:** Let me explain about Skype and the Maihuna. The student who set up Skype with the Maihuna in Iquitos is 25 years old, the same age I was when I first went to the Maihuna. She told me, "Walter wants to talk to you." Fine, but I'm thinking, who is this Walter? Then I realized that he looked exactly like his father, who had died while I was there.

My good relations with the Maihuna began in 1980 when Hetu, who became my Maihuna sister, was extremely kind to me. She was 15 years old and was about to give birth. The baby girl was born, but three days later the placenta still had not come out, and bats were flying around. After three days of listening to shamans and midwives talking with no

results, I said, "She should go to the hospital because she is not going to survive long as things stand." But they all said, "No, no, she can't, it's not possible," for whatever reason. I was desperate, because I knew she could die. Then I said I would put my hand in and pull the placenta out, though I'd had no experience with childbirth at the time. I still don't know how I could even have thought of doing such a thing. I cut my fingernails, I took off all my rings, I washed my hands in alcohol, and I took the umbilical cord in my left hand. But she did not lift up her skirt. I knew how intimate this was, but I had to see what I was going to do, so I said, "I have to see." Without any anesthetic for her, I put my right hand in up to here [*points at mid arm*], and then slowly, slowly, slowly . . . It took three hours, slowly, slowly, slowly, because I didn't know what I was doing. (I still have the sensation in my hands, 30 years later.) Finally, I pulled out the placenta. I was lucky that the whole placenta came out in one piece. Later I learned from doctors that it was a very delicate procedure and that I could have caused two terrible things, leaving a piece of placenta inside or extensive bleeding.

**SN:** That sounds horrible! You were lucky.

**IB:** Then I gave her an injection of antibiotics, and eight days later she was fine. So Hetu and I shared that experience, and we became really, really close. I became part of her family, I am her *comadre*, and I am also her mother's and father's *comadre*, on both sides of the family, and it's a large family. That's the story. She could not go to the hospital because it was too far away. She was suffering from this problem because she had refused to marry a man from the Bat clan, *oyo baji*. That man, who was from a community on another river, had said, "You will die of the first baby I am not the father of." So, that was why there were bats flying around. I learned all that much later. She survived, the baby survived, everything was fine. However, this man Walter, who later married her, comes from that same community; he's an *oyo baji*.

**SN:** He is the husband of the young woman you saved—ah!

**IB:** Is this not *télescopage*? You can say this was a chance encounter, but it really makes you think. This young man, via Skype, told me that he is now Hetu's husband. When I replied, "Then you are my *compadre*," he was so happy I had addressed him in that way. Something else happened at that moment, too: the manipulation of kinship through a virtual encounter. So it's about space, it's about time, it's about people, it's about an encounter. It was really something. It's fantastic, isn't it?

**SN:** It's great!

**IB:** It makes me understand things a lot better, after 30 years, about what happens when certain leaders get together, about how you create the same with the other and the other with the same, about kinds of endogamy, things like that.

**SN:** So, in fact, *télescopage* is like a moment when things in many different dimensions crystallize, isn't it?

**IB:** Yes, yes. It can be small, but it can be explosive.

**SN:** It's a very interesting concept, *télescope*.

**IB:** What is very interesting is how things happen and why they happen. I had sent my book several times previously but nothing happened. And this time something happened. Why?

**SN:** Maybe because it was somebody who took it there personally?

**IB:** In the other cases, it was also individuals who took it, at least as far as Iquitos. It could have happened, you know, but it never did. Then this young female student was able to reestablish communication between me and the Maihuna. And what is fantastic is that I had only seen this student for half an hour, yet she made it possible for me to reconnect with the Maihuna. How are things decided? How do you realize you are experiencing such a moment?

You know, though the role of chance is very well described for important scientific discoveries such as electricity and gravity, it is less described in our field.

**SN:** Yes, because I think we are always trying to do the opposite, trying to say we are very scientific. But in fact . . .

**IB:** Absolutely . . . But I do think that I could not have gone from the local to the international without experiencing distancing and proximity. At one point, it was like learning different languages. I knew that I was following theoretical avenues and perspectives that were important for me and also for anthropology. I think that founding the LAIOS was important. It was experimental at first, though I didn't realize it at the time. It crystallized as more and more colleagues joined, and we were able to do research from the national level to the European Union. We exchanged ideas as a group;

I was not isolated. Anthropology develops theories because of community; we need this exchange.

Thanks to personal interactions, there has been a kind of a short circuit between the local and the international. When indigenous people like the Maihuna go to the United Nations—though the Maihuna themselves have never gone—they go directly from the local to the global stage. Also what is interesting is how anthropologists have arrived at the UN: they have often been brought there by indigenous people. Studying the UN used to be outside the scope of anthropology. That changed (at least in my case) because of indigenous peoples and because transnational organizations invaded local areas where anthropologists carry out fieldwork. Indigenous peoples brought the UN to anthropology; anthropology did not bring indigenous peoples to the UN. That's very important, you know. And when I had the chance to design the SOGIP project for the European Research Council, I realized that I could bring together related theories and work on more complex scales.

**SN:** Well, is there anything else you'd like to say that we haven't talked about? We've been talking for over two hours . . .

**IB:** No, but even though we talked a lot, there's still more we could say . . .

**SN:** Bueno, muchas gracias.

**IB:** De nada.

## NOTES

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