

Marilyn Strathern: Outline plan of research  
Balzan Prize for Social Anthropology

Short title: **Ethnographic horizons**

**Time and the ethnographic horizon in moments of crisis**

The Foundation's award for a Balzan Research Project is taken as an exceptional opportunity to explore a conundrum at the heart of Social Anthropology as it is practised. First hand research is central to the fashioning of ethnography through fieldwork, yet always brings with it a specific temporal horizon. The ethnographer's present is not always the best vantage point from which to apprehend the nature of contemporary issues, notably with respect to perceptions of life in crisis. Capitalizing on current anthropological debate over notions of time and the future, it will turn the conundrum into a set of research questions about the diverse relationships among the temporal frameworks being deployed at moments of perceived crisis, the ethnographer's time horizon included.

This will afford space for young anthropologists to advance their discipline's contribution to current concerns. The questions may be explored with respect to gender (old and new inequalities), embodiment (agents of transformation), environment (including climate change / horticultural futures) or governance (the future of the social contract / legal innovation), with the stipulation that in the first instance the investigators address materials from either Melanesia or Amazonia. The other half of this exceptional opportunity lies in the possibility of enabling promising scholars from the Pacific (for Melanesia) or from Brazil (for Amazonia), or in either case with cross-cutting expertise, to undertake first hand research on these issues.

The project will run for three years, administered by the Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of St Andrews, the only one of its kind in the UK and one of only a few in Europe. Its Director, Dr Tony Crook, will be Strathern's deputy; apart from his own intellectual contributions, he will manage day-to-day operations. As well as general oversight, Strathern has provisional plans for a small subproject of her own to feed into the main research.

Funds will be directed in the first place towards the support of in-training or early-career anthropologists who meet the criteria; they will be part of a wider intellectual community of scholars, some of whom will receive funding through the Balzan project in terms of visiting fellowships or of bursaries, e.g. for the international conference. A preliminary budget is presented here. Initial and very promising talks with the Director suggest that the scope of the project, and thus the impact of the funding, could well be enhanced by in-house support from the University of St Andrews; this would be detailed if and when the final budget is presented.

## Outline Budget

		GBPk
Balzan PhD Scholarship:	Maintenance, Tuition & Travel	90
Balzan Postdoctoral Fellowships:		
1. Papua New Guinea (held in PNG)	One year Fellowship (inc. Travel, Workshop & Conference)	15
2. Papua New Guinea (held in UK)	One year Fellowship (inc. Travel, Workshop & Conference)	53
3. Brazil (held in Brazil)	One year Fellowship (inc. Travel, Workshop & Conference)	13
4. Brazil (held in Brazil)	One year Fellowship (inc. Travel, Workshop & Conference)	13
Strathern subproject:	Mt. Hagen / Papua New Guinea	25
Balzan Visiting Fellowship:	Providing Teaching Replacement costs	13
Strathern, St Andrews visits:	6 Visits. Travel and Accommodation	3
Balzan Project Workshop:	Mid-point Workshop for all Balzan Project Researchers	18
Balzan International Conference:	Final Conference, including Balzan Bursaries	36
Balzan Project Administration:		9
Grand Total		288

Budget costed in GBP Sterling equivalent to CHF375k, assuming 1 CHF = 0.767864 GBP.  
Budget figures depending on final exchange rate.

## **Annex: Background materials and justification of elements of the project**

### **1. The concept of ethnographic horizon**

One might think that the more the world changes, the more remote previous epochs become, not least those of seemingly distant cultures and societies that initially figured in what is now a century-long anthropological record of first hand ‘ethnographic’ accounts. Indeed, anthropologists are acutely aware that their studies engage specific time horizons. Yet it is not necessarily the case that the particular present that researchers bring with them furnishes the most appropriate tools for understanding the materials they work with. Usually this is expressed in terms of developing paradigms or modes of analysis, so that what appears to be changing are scholarly conventions and theories.

However, there is another factor altogether, which is to do with kind of time in which ethnographers live, or at least the kind of time or epoch that they imagine, and which influences their sensibilities. This we may call an ‘ethnographic horizon’. As the researcher moves through time, he or she may find new sources of comprehension. Here is an example from legal anthropology, and one that bears on changing gender relations. Mid twentieth century debates about dispute settlement in societies indigenously lacking centralized administration had to deal with mechanisms that seemed alien to western judicial systems (or at least to the latter’s distinction between criminal and civil law): examples were forms of mediation between disputing parties, or attention to -- even compensation of -- injured parties in cases involving assault or death. By the late twentieth century, something analogous to these practices had become formalized in certain Western procedures, namely the importance of mediation in domestic matters, and an increasing visibility of and attention to victims in criminal cases. In turn, those indigenous practices now start looking far less alien. Today, as a consequence, they would require a different kind of approach from an ethnographer. In short, the immediate present of an ethnographer may be a less illuminating horizon than one still in the future.

There is a provocation here to reflect upon the correspondence, or slippage, between the epoch of the researcher and of what is being researched, and a century of ethnographic work provides ample food for thought. That said, there is a similar provocation in one set of present-day circumstances: perceptions of environmental crisis along with the emergence of new inequalities, and the inadequacy of current forms of governance to deal with either. This everyday sensibility invites new understandings of the kinds of crises – and moments of transformation -- people have dealt with at other times and places.

The Balzan project in Social Anthropology seizes the chance to explore the kinds of temporal horizons that inform people’s perceptions of crisis. It can do so most effectively by focusing on specific regions, and proposes that these be Melanesia and Amazonia.

### **2. Time and the future in Melanesia and Amazonia**

Writing about current scenarios of catastrophe in their book, *The ends of the world*, Danowski and Viveiros de Castro (2017) observe that, for the indigenous people of the Americas, including the Amazon, the end of the world has already happened. They refer to the Spanish conquest, but also make pertinent comments about people’s desire for a future that includes going ‘back’ to being indigenous again. That the future may include recovery of the past echoes

arguments made of European pasts and futures (e.g. Berdahl 1999, 2010; Ringel 2014, 2016), and the apparent paradox would be familiar to the many anthropologists who have written generally about concepts of time (such as Munn 1992). It is against a background of extensive anthropological interest in time that this project brings into focus perceptions of crisis. A famous Melanesianist (Wagner 1986) long ago commented, that the present is invariably imagined as a moment of crisis. In exploring the kinds of temporal horizons that inform people's perceptions, this Balzan research venture will keep in play the 'times' of the researcher and the researched, which may or may not coincide.

People's sense of the epoch in which they live is a precondition for how a future, for better or for worse, might in turn be imagined. This research venture will be experimental, insofar as it will try to put the changing 'times' of both researcher and researched under the spotlight. In this it may be possible to show for social knowledge-making (Camic et al 2011) what is all too true for our grasp of ecological and environmental realities, that we live simultaneously in different epochs (e.g. Crook n.d).

While there is a tradition of regional comparison, albeit nascent (e.g. Gregor and Tuzin 2001), between Melanesia and Amazonia, the focus of the Balzan project is rather on traditions of anthropological reasoning. Melanesia and Amazonia suggest themselves because of some of the anthropologists whom the people of these regions have inspired. This includes an intellectual lineage that has been traced (e.g. by Holbraad and Pedersen 2017) between Wagner and Viveiros de Castro. While it is the long standing consensus of ethnographic enquiry that value is to be put on learning from one's subjects of study, involving attention to indigenous concepts, these pioneering anthropologists have insisted that it further entails a radical re-thinking of the anthropologist's concepts of analysis. An important assumption for the Balzan venture will be that, where people are included as subjects of study, they will have an intellectual contribution to make to general theorizing and analysis. Indications are at hand in many contemporary works, not least those of Melanesianists Crook (2007) and Moutu (2013), and Amazonianist Vilaça (2010, 2016) [see also Kopenawa and Albert 2013].

The main means will be twofold. A small number of Balzan scholars will be given the opportunity to pursue their own interests though the overall framework of the project, while the wider project will bring together older and younger generations of anthropologists who have worked in Melanesia or Amazonia on themes relevant to time and crisis.

### **3. The Centre for Pacific Studies**

The Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of St Andrews would administer the grant and co-ordinate the project; the Director, Dr Tony Crook, would act as Strathern's deputy. Founded in 2008, it is the only such centre in the UK, and in 2010 hosted the European Society for Oceanists conference that initiated the EU-funded European Consortium for Pacific Studies research-policy project (ECOPAS). This set up partnerships across Europe and the Pacific involving the following institutions: the Papua New Guinea National Research Institute, the University of the South Pacific, as well as the Universities of Bergen, Nijmegen and Aix-Marseille. This enhanced Europe-Pacific network continues to develop through collaborations and the pacific-studies.net database of 1000+ researchers. ECOPAS focused primarily on the environmental crisis in the Pacific, leading to the recent publication of *Pacific Climate Cultures* (Crook and Rudiak-Gould, de Gruyter 2018), and also to *Understanding Gender Inequality Actions in the Pacific* (Crook, Farran and Roëll, EU Publications 2016).

The Centre for Pacific Studies has a fine record of fostering Pacific Island research, pre-doctoral and post-doctoral, in association with the Department of Anthropology at St Andrews to which it belongs and which also includes the Centre for Amerindian Studies, celebrating its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2019. Departmental staff (in addition to Dr Crook), who might be interested in mentoring or otherwise engaging with the Balzan Fellows and Scholar, include Melanesianists Prof Christina Toren (ret'd), Dr Melissa Demian and Dr Adam Reed, and Amazonianists Prof Peter Gow (ret'd), and Professor Mark Harris. More widely, the Department sustains an interest in anthropological approaches to time and history; a conference entitled "Orientations: The Anthropology of the Future" was held earlier this year, and 2019 will see the publication of *Anthropology of the Future* (Bryant and Knight, CUP).

#### 4. Research personnel

The research agenda springs from the Strathern's (in press) current interest in ways of conceptualizing epochs, presented at a conference organized by Professor Aparecida Vilaça and colleagues in 2017, which was inspired in part by Dr Andrew Moutu's writings on the constitutional future of PNG 'customary law'. Both will have a role in the project. More generally, the Balzan research award enables Strathern to acknowledge in academic terms the substantial contribution of Papua New Guinean scholars and others to her own career.

The Balzan Studentship for the full three year PhD training of a junior scholar from Papua New Guinea would be planting seeds for the future. The student would spend time both in PNG (including fieldwork) and in the UK, in PNG under the general oversight of Dr Moutu, the Director of the Papua New Guinea National Museum. *Output*: PhD thesis, to be submitted for degree at St Andrews

Four Balzan Post-doctoral Fellowships, either one year or part time for two years, would help launch the careers of recently qualified anthropologists. Two would be recruited through the Centre for Pacific Studies; two would be recruited through the Graduate Programme at Rio de Janeiro, under the direction of Professor Vilaça. *Output* per scholar: two articles and / or book in pipeline

A workshop would bring together the Balzan researchers, including senior affiliates on Visiting Fellowship or shared cost basis. The Balzan International Conference would be open to a broad spectrum of those interested in crisis and time; in addition to project members, the principal paper-givers would be younger scholars from diverse institutions whose travel and participation would be subsidized by Balzan Bursaries. *Output*: conference volume(s); (for Visiting Fellow(s)) one article in pipeline

Finally, a strand in the Balzan Research Project that Strathern would pursue for herself concerns the 'crisis' generated by the introduction of the colonial rule of law in the Papua New Guinea Highlands, her ethnographic horizon being a generation after first contact. Tape-recordings made in the 1970s of indigenous 'court cases' are available for a retrospective analysis of perceptions of institutional crisis at the time. The discs are already digitized and copiable; translation and transcription would be carried out in PNG, under the supervision of Dr Moutu. This subproject includes expenses for Strathern's 6 week field visit to Mt. Hagen. *Output*: two papers plus.

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