

*Ethnographic Horizons:
Time and the Ethnographic Horizon
in Moments of Crisis*

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Emeritus Professor of Social Anthropology and Life Fellow of Girton College, University of Cambridge, Dame Marilyn Strathern is also Honorary Life President of the Association of Social Anthropologists of UK and Commonwealth (ASA).

Strathern's Balzan Research Project will explore a conundrum at the heart of the practice of social anthropology. 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, Strathern's project will turn this 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 – thus creating 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 project envisions enabling promising scholars from the Pacific or from Brazil to undertake firsthand research on these issues.

This three-year project, commencing in April 2019, will be administered by the Centre for Pacific Studies at the University of St Andrews. Director Tony Crook will be Marilyn Strathern's deputy, and will make his own intellectual contributions as well as managing day-to-day operations. In addition to general oversight, Strathern has provisional plans for a small sub-project of her own to feed into the main research. Funds will mainly be directed towards the support of in-training or early-career anthropologists, who will be part of a wider intellectual community of scholars, some of whom will also receive funding through the Balzan project in terms of visiting fellowships or bursaries (e.g., for an international conference).

Background

1. The Concept of 'Ethnographic Horizon'

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. The need to refine tools is usually expressed in terms of developing paradigms or modes of analysis, yet an important factor has to do with the kind of time in which ethnographers live and which influences their sensibilities, namely the 'ethnographic horizon'. As the researcher moves through time, he or she may find new sources of comprehension, which make indigenous practices appear in fresh light and eventually require different kinds of approaches from future ethnographers. In short, the immediate present of an ethnographer may be a less illuminating horizon than one still in the future.

The project offers an opportunity, among other things, to reflect upon the epoch of the researcher and of what is being researched in light of a century of ethnographic work, and by the same token, upon perceptions of environmental crisis along with the emergence of new inequalities, and what is often 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 thus explore the temporal horizons that inform people's perceptions of crisis by focusing on the specific regions of Melanesia and Amazonia.

2. Time and the Future in Melanesia and Amazonia

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. Against a background of extensive anthropological interest in time, Strathern's project brings into focus perceptions of crisis. In exploring the kinds of temporal horizons that inform people's perceptions, this experimental research venture will keep in play the 'times' of the researcher and the researched (which may or may not coincide), thus possibly showing 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.).

Although born in the context of regional comparison between Melanesia and Amazonia, a significant focus of the Balzan project is on traditions of anthropological reasoning. 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), as well as Kopenawa and Albert (2013).

The main means for carrying out the project 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 enquiry 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 will administer the grant and coordinate the project. Director Tony Crook will take on the role of 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. An enhanced Europe-Pacific network continues to develop through collaborations and the Pacific-studies.net database of over 1,000 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). With its fine record of fostering Pacific Island research, the Centre for Pacific Studies is part of the Department of Anthropology at St Andrews, which also includes the 50-year-old Centre for Amerindian Studies.

Research Personnel

The research agenda springs from Strathern's current interest in ways of conceptualizing epochs, as presented at a conference organized by Professor Aparecida Vilaça and colleagues in 2017; the presentation was inspired in part by Dr. Andrew Moutu's writings on the constitutional future of PNG 'customary law'. Both these senior scholars will have a role in the project.

A Balzan Studentship for the full three-year PhD training of a junior scholar from Papua New Guinea will be instituted, thus planting seeds for the future of such studies. The student would spend time both in PNG (including fieldwork, and under the general oversight of Dr. Moutu, the Director of Papua New Guinea's National Museum and Art Gallery) and in the UK. Expected student output includes a PhD thesis, to be submitted for a degree at St Andrews.

Four Balzan Postdoctoral Fellowships, either one year or part-time for two years, will 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. Each scholar will aim to produce two articles and/or have a book in progress.

One or more workshops to bring together the Balzan researchers, including senior affiliates on a Visiting Fellowship or shared cost basis, are also planned. A Balzan International Conference will be held subsequently; in addition to project members, it will be open to a broad spectrum of those interested in crisis and time, the principal paper-givers being younger scholars from diverse institutions whose travel and participation would be subsidized by Balzan Bursaries. Conference volume(s) will be prepared for publication, and Visiting Fellow(s) should envisage having one article in progress.

Finally, Marilyn Strathern will pursue her own sub-project on 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. Provisionally, a retrospective analysis of perceptions of institutional upheaval during the 1970s will be based on digitized discs of tape recordings from indigenous court cases. Any necessary translation and transcription of this material would be carried out in PNG. Two or more papers are planned.

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