

# Editorial

## Anthropologist as Nomad Introducing a New Co-Editor

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My anthropological journey has consisted in movement not only between different disciplines, but also between languages, countries and continents. This has involved stories of identity (imagined, constructed, or both), changes of place (teaching in six countries on three continents, and in four languages), searches for a safe haven, and belief in understanding the motives that govern human beings. In this wonderful journey, my coming to the *Anthropological Journal of European Cultures* seems almost an inevitable event. Or perhaps it is just a product of ‘chance and serendipity’.<sup>1</sup> In retrospect, I look at my anthropological journey so far as a voyage of discovery – to different places, under different circumstances and in very different parts of the world.

### Finding Anthropology

I ‘discovered’ anthropology almost by accident. After reading excerpts from *Works and Lives* (Geertz 1988), I thought that *that* was the way to understand the contemporary world.<sup>2</sup> The world of my youth, mostly in socialist Yugoslavia, will soon begin to explode in a vicious cycle of violence, but at the time I was convinced that nationalist madness could not solve any problems. Even in a country with an ‘excess of history’ (Bošković 2017a), the turn to violence and destruction did not make any sense to me. I spent part of the 1980s working in the field of ‘pro-democracy’ journalism in Belgrade. Just like many of my friends, I thought people could be rationally convinced that co-operation is better than destruction. But I was (and remained) in a tiny minority. As I took off for my postgraduate studies at Tulane University and the war exploded, I found myself allied with several human rights groups, at first with The Belgrade Circle and later with the Humanitarian Law Centre and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia. This involvement continued ever since. On the other hand, I was interested in anthropology as a study of ‘distant others’.



For me, ‘distant others’ were the ancient Mayans as well as other Mesoamerican peoples. I started reading about Amerindian myths and religions, and these early readings resulted in my first publications (Bošković 1989, 1992). I was fortunate to get in touch with some great scholars, both in the United States and in France, as well as to be supervised by Munro S. Edmonson. However, as I became disillusioned with what I perceived as unprofessional research practices,<sup>3</sup> I left Mesoamerican studies and defended my MA thesis focussing on William Robertson Smith. For the Ph.D. in social anthropology, I moved to the oldest university in Scotland, the University of St Andrews.

Postmodernism was all the rage in early 1990s, and I wanted to study something related to it.<sup>4</sup> I believed that the field of gender studies was the area where postmodernism and anthropology interacted in the most meaningful way, so that became the topic of my research. I focussed on feminist groups in Slovenia. I also wanted to focus on feminist groups in Macedonia,<sup>5</sup> but, as it turned out, there really were not any. My dissertation was a combination of fieldwork and library research, and I drew heavily upon the work of Marilyn Strathern and Henrietta L. Moore (who was also the external examiner at my viva) – both remain important influences on my work.

I was again very fortunate to be supervised by a brilliant anthropologist, Ladislav Holý, whose knowledge and erudition were simply amazing. I could relate to his use of philosophical concepts and ideas, coming from a non-anthropological background (as I graduated in philosophy in Belgrade), as well as to a certain way of not taking things at their face value – something very common for people of my generation who grew up in socialist countries. Czeslaw Milosz’s (1953) book *The Captive Mind* was so influential, that I actually opened my Ph.D. dissertation with a quote from this work; it was about the perils of someone claiming to be absolutely right. Milosz’s description of how things were functioning in totalitarian systems was both coherent and factual – and this further strengthened my ideas about the liberating potential of anthropology. This ‘liberal’ approach was typical of Nigel Rapport, who was my supervisor after Holý became too ill, as well as by Joanna Overing.

## **Finding Europe in Brazil**

For a very short time after defending my Ph.D. dissertation, I was in Belgrade (serving also as Associate Editor of *The Belgrade Circle Journal*), and from 1998 I began teaching in Slovenia. My research

there inspired in me a certain interest and curiosity (I was the first non-Slovenian to study feminism in Slovenia), and eventually, with the support of my colleague Vesna V. Godina, I became a Visiting Professor in the postgraduate (MA) programme in anthropology at the University of Ljubljana's Faculty of Social Sciences. The 'Slovenian connection' was significant for my teaching, and it also brought me experience in supervising (including my first Ph.D. student, Jana Urh), as well as some fantastic colleagues and friends. I was teaching contemporary theory and the anthropology of gender.

At the same time, one of the best Brazilian universities, Universidade de Brasília (UnB), was looking for someone to teach 'European ethnology'. I never considered myself to be a Europeanist – for me, coming from the former Yugoslavia, 'Europe' was synonymous with wars, hatred and intolerance and not a kind of world where one would want to be. I regarded my interest in 'things European' to begin and end with the issues related to documenting human rights violations and violence – not as something that merited an academic approach. But I applied to UnB all the same, and my application was supported by the head of the department (and one of the most brilliant scholars I had ever met), Mariza G. S. Peirano. So, I ended up in Brasília in 1999 as Visiting Professor of European Ethnology. Later, I learnt that my coming to UnB was also in tune with the ideas of one of the founding fathers of Brazilian anthropology (as well as the founder of the department that hired me), Roberto Cardoso de Oliveira, and his idea of a 'horizontally structured anthropology'.

I was teaching myth, religion and theory, but, when it came to Europe, I introduced my students to what Milosz (1964) called 'another Europe' – countries of the former Yugoslavia, and Greece but also Norway, Sweden and Ireland. My courses/guest lectures were well received, and my students could easily understand and appreciate various universalising concepts (such as Balkanism but also Orientalism). Some of my best students were (and are) from Brazil. Brazil was instrumental in my learning how to teach and how to prepare my courses.

From Brazil, I went to South Africa in 2001 for a post-doctoral fellowship at the University of the Witwatersrand. At Wits, I started teaching about nationalism, but my 'proper' anthropological experience came in 2003 as Senior Lecturer at Rhodes University in Grahamstown. I was again teaching students about Europe (Anthropology of the Balkans), trying to combine anthropology with archaeology and history. The department at Rhodes was inspiring, both in terms of the people

I worked with and in terms of the fantastic students I had the pleasure of teaching. I continued teaching the anthropology of gender. Some of my research related to this topic was later published (Bošković 2016).

### **Finding Exotic Others**

Coming back to Europe in late 2005 was both interesting and exotic. There was a lingering question of identity in the air. Not only did my country (Yugoslavia) disappear, but my 'Europeanness' was not something that was accepted in Europe. There was a clear division between the European Union (as more former socialist countries were slowly joining it) and the non-EU peoples from the former Yugoslav countries. While I was accepted (and referred to) as a 'European' in the United States, Brazil and South Africa, my 'Europeanness' was very much in doubt on the European continent. Furthermore, at this time of great generalisations, coming from a place that was (geographically) in Europe but also (culturally and politically) excluded from it, a place that was not known for its colonies (actually, most former Yugoslav countries were under foreign rule from the fourteenth century until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), did not help at all. I did not fit in culturally, and my political identities also shifted (I had a Yugoslav passport until 1993, a Macedonian passport since then, and an ex-Yugoslav/Serbian passport since 2002).

To make matters more interesting, this was the time when I was formulating my interest in 'other people's anthropologies' (Bošković 2008), the concept which was becoming obvious for someone with experience in different cultural, social and academic environments. Of crucial importance was meeting Thomas Hylland Eriksen in Grahamstown in April 2003: while we were walking on a very windy Sunday afternoon, he suggested that I should propose a panel on 'other anthropologies' for the 2004 European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) Annual Conference in Vienna. So I did, and the two of us became panel organisers. This project would also put me in contact with some other great people like Han Vermeulen, whom I joined some years later to establish the History of Anthropology Network (HOAN) within EASA.

Following an invitation from Chris Hann, I spent several months as Visiting Researcher at the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle in 2006. Together with Chris, I organised a conference on some East European anthropological traditions (Bošković and Hann

2013), and the association with the Max Planck Institute has been essential for my research ever since. I was also fortunate enough to receive an invitation from another founding director, Günther Schlee, with whom I organised a conference commemorating seventy-five years since the publication of the 1940 Meyer Fortes and E. E. Evans-Pritchard edited volume *African Political Systems* (Bošković and Schlee 2022). Through my collaboration with both founding directors and through my research at the Max Planck Institute, I became especially interested in issues related to human behaviour. One question that I tried to answer was ‘why do people do what they do?’, as formulated by Ladislav Holý and Milan Stuchlik (1983: 3). This was reflected in my project on rationality, which I developed further during the fellowship I received from the Institute for Advanced Studies at the Collegium de Lyon in 2018 (Bošković 2020). This was also combined with my interest in psychoanalysis. After reading studies inspired by psychoanalysis, I was surprised by anthropologists’ general reluctance to use some psychoanalytic insights – which was very different from the situation before the Second World War (as exemplified by the work of W. H. R. Rivers and Cora Du Bois, amongst others).

Between 2013 and 2018, I was Deputy Chair of the Commission for Theoretical Anthropology (COTA) of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES). And between 2016 and 2020, I served as EASA Book Series editor – as the series editor, I was especially well positioned to see the vitality and strength of contemporary anthropology in Europe.

### **Being Here**

With my interest in the history and theory of anthropology, I hope to bring an even more global perspective to this journal. I am very grateful to Patrick and to the Advisory Board for inviting me as someone who is ‘other’ in more ways than one. For me, this also comes at the time when I am looking at anthropology in broader terms, and that includes questions of what constitutes our basic humanity. This issue is inseparable from the use of interdisciplinary approaches, as the development of human social institutions has a long history and can also be traced in our cognitive abilities (Tomasello 1999, 2019). This has important consequences for using anthropology as a tool for opposing all forms of discrimination, including racism (Štrkalj et al. 2019). This is reflected in my teaching at the University of Belgrade and the University of

Donja Gorica in Montenegro, as well as in my Visiting Professorship at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Bošković 2021).

On the theoretical level, the concept of ‘world anthropologies’ that I subscribe to (with Eriksen and others) is about the plurality of discourses and practices, and it would be beneficial if there would be more communication between different approaches within this perspective (for details, see Bošković 2019: 925). On the practical level, it is interesting to note that, despite the unprecedented growth and development of anthropology in Europe in recent decades, out of sixty-eight members of the EASA Executive, only six were based in academic institutions outside Western Europe.

I see *AJEC* as representing another, more inclusive platform. From its very beginnings, in accordance with the broad perspectives held by its founders, and with the important inclusion of a focus on ‘European ethnology’, it has provided an important platform for anthropologists and ethnologists to present their research – regardless of their institutional or cultural backgrounds. I see this as extremely important, as the current crises show the extent to which anthropology is relevant for understanding the world we live in – especially considering ‘how cultural assets, such as common identity, community traditions, and conceptions of hope, can be a source of creative response and resilience’ (Napier and Fischer 2021: 1). And only by understanding our world can we learn how to make it a better place.

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## Notes

1. I heard this expression from Ulf Hannerz during his plenary lecture at the 2004 ASA Annual Conference in Durham, when he was referring to his own fieldwork experiences.

2. I contacted Geertz after arriving in the United States in 1990, and he remained an important influence on my work. Amongst other things, he was consulted during the preparation of a special issue of the Belgrade journal *Kultura* dedicated to his work (Bošković 2007).
3. Or, as nicely summarised by archaeologist R. E. W. Adams, ‘scholarship founded on sand’ (quoted in Bošković 2017b: 3).
4. Shortly after defending my dissertation, I concluded that postmodernism did not exist outside architecture, so I never published it.
5. The Republic of North Macedonia: at the time, the country was called ‘the Republic of Macedonia’.

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