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# Ethical Endeavours

## A Review of European Social Anthropology 2022

**Abstract:** This article provides an overview of the articles published in the main English-speaking European Anthropology journals in 2022. One of the key themes running through these publications is ethics and people's desires and struggles to 'do good' – despite, or perhaps because of, the protracted crises the world is currently facing. Attempting to move beyond simple critique, many of the authors empathetically engage with their interlocutors' 'ethical endeavours', which seem to revolve around three main objectives: people want to build better futures, create moral economies and establish ethical relationships. The article summarises a plethora of contributions to these three themes, thereby revealing the many paradoxes, complexities and unexpected outcomes of doing good, and the seemingly inevitable dynamics between people's moral ambitions and their derailments.

**Keywords:** anthropology of the future, care, ethics, experimentation, good relations, moral economy

We always do our best, but it is never enough.  
(*BARDO, False Chronicle of a Handful of Truths* 2022)

If there is one theme that runs through the articles published in the main English-speaking<sup>1</sup> journals in Europe in 2022, it is ethics. Anthropologists are studying how people everywhere and in all fields of life are struggling to do right amidst, and despite, harmful conditions. While it is evident that the state of the world and the planet give rise to much concern – to interlocutors and anthropologists alike – and analyses are full of frustrated stories of neoliberalism, capitalist exploitation, environmental destruction, and so on, this is not the dark anthropology that, according to Sherry Ortner (2016), dominated much of anthropology in the period between 1980 and 2010. And even though hardship, marginalisation, abuse and inequality are recurring themes, those affected by them are not primarily portrayed as victims or 'suffering subjects'. In fact, many articles and special issues deal with hope, utopias and experimentation, and depict people's creative attempts to build better futures and live moral lives. Nevertheless, European Anthropology in 2022 is not simply an 'anthropology of the good', as called for by Robbins (2013) to counter anthropology's preoccupation with suffering. Rather, the 'good' itself – what it is, how to achieve it – is called into question. Many articles suggest that doing good is hard and that, despite having laudable intentions, people and governments are struggling, if not futilely, often without achieving the desired results. As one would expect, the focus is on the paradoxes, complexities



and the unexpected outcomes of trying to do good – like when unconditional cash transfers are rejected (Schmidt 2022), welfare is privatised (McKowen 2022), NGOs perpetuate the stigmas they had set out to fight (Qureshi 2022) or activists' mistrust of government and industry become directed inward and reveal the 'darker side' of popular struggle (Szolucha 2022). Perhaps, one could call this an anthropology of ethical endeavours, or even of desperate experimentation; an anthropology that is focused on the 'struggling moral subject' who wants to get it right, but does not know how; an anthropology of 'the good' as an unreachable, somewhat enigmatic, ideal.

Reading through the 2022 articles, one gets the sense that – across the world – people are dissatisfied with the present. Even though opinions diverge widely on the what and the how, there seems to be a widespread agreement that things need to change and that the future needs to be different, or better. The articles depict a plethora of political, economic and/or environmental projects and attempts to move beyond crisis, thereby portraying a range of very different actors: governments and activists, the marginalised and the powerful, indigenous communities, technocrats, bureaucrats, other-than-human beings, and so on. This is an anthropology that 'studies up' as well as 'down', one that is dedicated to representing diverse perspectives, even if this means engaging with interlocutors (like conspiracy theorists; see Rakopoulos 2022b) who might have been considered previously unworthy of anthropological attention. I found this to be a refreshingly sober anthropology, which takes seriously people's attempts to be moral while showing how they are often derailed in their ethical endeavours. Rather than simply critiquing the powerful, celebrating 'underdog' resistance, or advocating for the marginalised, many texts take a more nuanced and less normative position on what/who is good or bad. There seems to be an inexplicit, humble acknowledgement that no one, including the anthropologist, really knows how to fix the problems the world is currently facing, and that experimentation deserves credit or at least recognition, even if it does not achieve the desired results.

Temporality continues to be an important lens. Thereby, as has been the trend for some years now, anthropologists seem interested in the future and people's future-making projects more than they are in the past. When anthropologists do turn to the past – for instance in studies of memories or past injustices – their analyses mostly tend to focus on how the past affects the present, or future, something that is nicely captured in Guntars Ermansons' (2022) notion of 'remembering the future'.<sup>2</sup> A pervasive question, posed by the anthropologists as much as by their interlocutors, is what we can learn from the past to build better – or 'less bad' (Harms 2022) – futures. This is widely perceived as an urgent matter; fundamental threats (e.g. climate change) to our being on the planet are imagined as affecting the 'very near' rather than a distant future and call for immediate action (Bandak and Anderson 2022). Many studies well capture people's and governments' desperate sense of needing, or wanting, to do *something*, but not quite knowing what (as, for instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic; see Bille and Thelle 2022). While some are driven to develop new ideas and technologies, find new ways of caring and relating, and/or engage in hopeful experiments, others feel simply paralysed.

Beyond the overarching interest in the temporal, *European Anthropology 2022* does not reveal any clearly discernible theoretical trends. Authors engage with clas-

sic authors like Marshall Sahlins and Marcel Mauss (e.g. Hann 2022; Schmidt 2022) or classic debates (e.g. on ritual theory, see Remme and Martin 2022) as well as with newer approaches like multispecies ethnography (Arceño 2022; Arregui 2022; Giraldo Herrera 2022; Mamontova and Thornton 2022; Opande et al 2022; Smith 2022; Suzuki 2022; Westman et al 2022). Phenomenology, which has recently gained some prominence in US anthropology, also seems to be becoming more popular among European anthropologists (e.g. Cooper 2022; Eisenlohr 2022; Graf 2022). The field of economic anthropology, in particular, was well represented in 2022, with two concepts – moral economy (see below) and social reproduction (e.g. Hobbis and Hobbis 2022; Trémon 2022; Weiss 2022) – experiencing a, to me unexpected, revival.

The regional focus in European Anthropology is equally diverse and covers all major regions of the globe.<sup>3</sup> While especially Africa and Asia continue to be important areas of study, European Anthropology seems to be increasingly concentrated on Europe, key topics being migration (e.g. the special issues on ‘IDentities and Identity’, edited by Grünenberg et al 2022, and ‘Vulnerable Homes on the Move’, edited by Bonfanti et al 2022) and the welfare system (e.g. Koch and James 2022).

Overall, I encountered an interesting mix of themes, areas and methodologies showing that European Anthropology is thriving. Two big themes of recent debate – the COVID-19 pandemic and decolonisation – were surprisingly underrepresented.<sup>4</sup> Especially the lack of publications on decolonisation, a topic that dominated much of US anthropology in 2022, shows that European Anthropology is pursuing its own agendas and research foci that are distinct from, though of course related to, those across the Atlantic. One could speculate about how broader political trends and discourses shape what is, or can be, published at different times and in different places. While the strong focus on decolonisation in US anthropology can be seen, at least in part, as a reaction to the Trump years as well as the Black Lives Matter movement, in Europe it is harder to establish a clear link between political events and debates and what is published in anthropological journals. Nevertheless, the 2022 articles capture a particular mood. Most of them would have been written in 2020 or 2021, during, or shortly after, the height of the pandemic. And while COVID-19 itself is not a key topic, the mix of despair and optimism and the longing for good (enough) solutions to pressing problems that runs through the articles echoes certain political discourses of the time.<sup>5</sup>

The following overview is by no means comprehensive, but is clustered around three prominent sub-themes, which ran through many of the articles: better futures, moral economies and ethical relationships. The publications I present in the three respective sections (as well as others that I could not mention) all contribute to a larger debate on ethics and the question of how to find (new) solutions to contemporary problems and crises.

## **Better Futures**

Despite, or maybe because of, the omnipresence of ‘doomful’ discourses about climate change, the pandemic, environmental destruction, inequality and political conflict, people across the world engage in hopeful projects. These range from grand utopian

visions to small-scale ideas for improving relationships with fellow citizens and fellow beings. Several of the articles in *European Anthropology 2022* engaged with attempts to build better futures. In this section, I present an overview of six special issues that approach this theme from two different angles: the first three analyse imaginations of, or concrete attempts to bring about, better futures; the second three study how the past affects, helps to envisage or curtails the possibilities for a better future.

### ***Urgent Desires for Radical Change***

As noted above, there seems to be widespread agreement – among anthropologists and interlocutors and across political and economic divides – that the present is bad and we cannot simply go on as we were. Many see the need for radical change, although opinions on what exactly this would entail greatly diverge depending on a person's socio-economic and geographical positioning, political conviction and psycho-physiological constitution. The search for solutions is as varied as the sentiments with which people approach the future: some are hopeful and curious, some are angry or sad, some are desperate and feel paralysed. These different modes of anticipating the future are well captured in three special issues I present here: 'Curious Utopias' (edited by Prince and Neumark 2022), 'Egalitarian Life and Life-forms' (edited by Rio et al 2022) and 'Urgency and Imminence' (edited by Bandak and Anderson 2022). Whereas the authors in the first issue follow people's 'curious optimism' (Rao 2022) with which they approach the future, and the contributors in the second issue focus on people's often ambivalent lived experiences of experimental, non-hegemonic forms of social organisation, the authors in the third special issue take a more cautious or pessimistic approach, and warn of the dangers of 'urgency rhetoric', which often has paralyzing or even anti-democratic effects.

The special issue on 'Curious Utopias' deals with:

ambitious, even self-asserted utopian imaginations and schemes of economic, political and societal transformation [which] . . . explicitly invoke a 'global' and 'universal' scale and are driven partly by frustration at the petty 'realism' of recent decades, as well as the urgency generated by economic, environmental and health crises. (Prince and Neumark 2022: 2)

These schemes or projects – for instance to set up inclusive public health care regimes or to provide self-reliant energy to marginalised communities through solar electrification – are attempts to 'dream big'. They often rely on ongoing experimentation and tinkering with new technologies and are driven by the optimistic idea that social justice is possible, even within the contemporary framework of market logics. Rather than primarily focusing on the many problems, shortcomings and failures that are an elementary (and expected!) part of these missions, the contributors to the special issue try to take seriously their interlocutors' intentions and to move beyond simple critique.<sup>6</sup> The individual articles reveal the enthusiasm, creativity and techno-optimism that drives these attempts to 'do good' within, and despite, unfavourable circumstances. Nevertheless, neither the anthropologists nor their interlocutors are ignorant of the fact that the utopian projects often run up against or even reproduce existing inequalities.

The issue is comprised of eight, mostly ethnographic, case studies. Peter Redfield (2022) analyses a solar electrification project for shack dwellers in an informal settlement in South Africa, which is envisioned as a ‘bridge solution’ while people wait for better housing and services. He draws attention to the complex techno-politics of hope that sit alongside people’s critical anxieties about unequal futures. More historical in nature, Noémi Tousignant’s (2022) article studies ‘utopian’ development ideologies in post-colonial Senegal by analysing three health and social science research projects that were conducted between 1962 and 1974. Kevin Donovan and Emma Park trace the ‘curious merger of public good and private gain’ (2022: 120) in Kenya’s booming financial technology sector, which is rooted in ethical relationships and anxious attachments between borrowers and lenders. Also focusing on Kenya, Ruth Prince (2022) follows civil servants in their attempts to translate an ambitious experimental policy to deliver free public health care into practice. Despite long experiences with such policies, and related expectations of failure, these officials took on the task with hopeful engagement, thereby finding spaces to deliver some form of public good. In a similar vein, Ursula Rao (2022) analyses the, for her, puzzling optimism among a new generation of policy-makers in India who try to implement digitally managed and publicly funded health insurance for poor people. She argues that hope for transformation emerges less from immediate success than from the determination to keep ‘tinkering’ and trying. Jamie Cross and Alice Street (2022) focus on the utopian expectations that are built into products developed by humanitarian entrepreneurs designed to address the world’s most intractable problems, using the examples of a point-of-care diagnostic device and a solar-powered lantern. Tom Neumark (2022) deploys the notion of ‘leap-frogging’ to analyse the potentials of, and the tensions around, individually owned off-grid solar infrastructures that are becoming popular in Tanzania. Finally, taking a ‘utopia-critical’ perspective, the last article in the issue focuses on ‘golden passport programmes’ that enable Russians to acquire a Cypriot passport (Rakopoulos 2022a). The author argues that such programmes, which often evoke utopian imaginations of global citizenship, are in practice only accessible to elites and often exacerbate local and global inequalities.

As this brief summary shows, many of these ‘curious utopias’ are state-led and entail large-scale infrastructure projects, which often rely heavily on new technologies. By contrast, the contributors to the special issue on ‘Egalitarian Life and Life-forms’ (edited by Rio et al 2022) focus on small-scale attempts to create alternative political systems and life forms (see also Benussi 2022). Starting from the assumption that ‘the debates surrounding the egalitarian idea – so closely connected with a grand vision of equality and liberation from constraint, enslavement and oppression – have made great contributions to better futures for humanity, but rarely without their inherent contradictions’ (Rio et al 2022: 2), the editors set out to reveal the struggles and paradoxes that come with establishing and maintaining egalitarian systems. All contributing authors identify such paradoxes and tease out the dynamic tensions between egalitarianism and hierarchy in their respective case studies: Mari Korsbrekke (2022) studies the organisation of labour and related challenges of balancing individual and collective needs as well as playfulness and rule-bound structures in the egalitarian intentional community of Twin Oaks. Anna Szolucha (2022), drawing on

research with UK anti-fracking activists, analyses how the challenges that come with forming a non-hierarchical social movement can foster division, resentment and conflict, which cause much personal suffering for those involved. Matan Shapiro's (2022) article explores ideational and pragmatic engagements with Bitcoin, which reveal two different contemporary visions of egalitarian life. Axel Rudi (2022) studies the peculiar relationship between the egalitarian structure and struggle of the Kurdish movement and their undisputed king-like leader Öcalan. Bjørn Bertelsen uses the notion of 'predatory-protective security assemblage' (2022b: 104) to study the egalitarian potentials, as well as the dangers, of evolving forms of community policing in Mozambique. Mohammad Hasan (2022) analyses discourses on 'model citizens' and gender equality in Bangladesh, focusing in particular on the contradictory and multi-layered demands placed on 'new' (i.e. independent, prosperous and entrepreneurial) women. And Knut Rio (2022) examines the uses of, and exclusions from, urban commons in Paris, revealing the manifestations and limits of egalitarian life in the French Republic.

The special issue 'Urgency and Imminence' seeks to develop the notion of urgency for ethnographic analysis. The editors argue that the notion of urgency is never self-evident but is often used for political mobilisations or to legitimate the (temporary) suspension of political rights (Bandak and Anderson 2022; see also McFalls and Pandolfi 2022; Roitman 2022). People believe, or are made to believe, that the future is doomed unless they 'do something' and/or accept radical interventions into their personal lives. The case studies included in the issue analyse the manifestations and effects of urgency across a range of different contexts: Joseph Webster (2022) looks at the acute sense of political crisis experienced by members of the Orange Order (an ultra-British, ultra-Protestant fraternity) in relationship to the referendums on independence and on Brexit in Scotland. Daniel Knight (2022) explores feelings of vertigo in crisis-ridden Greece. Jan Jensen (2022) traces conceptualisations of heaven, hell and salvation in a Pentecostal church on the Faroe Islands. Charlotte Al-Khalili (2022) discusses competing ideas of martyrdom in the context of the Syrian uprising in 2011. Three articles – on scenario technologies (Samimian-Darash 2022), on lockdown experiences (Bille and Thelle 2022) and on the logic of 'permanent emergency' (McFalls and Pandolfi 2022) – study urgency in relationship to the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Dealing with the Past***

While the publications in the previous section focus on people's – hopeful, stubborn or anxious – ways of anticipating and bringing into being (different) futures, the publications in this section analyse how the past shapes what people consider possible (or not) for the future. Thereby, the three special issues deal with very different kinds of 'pasts', or 'present-pasts'. The first two – 'On Irreconciliation' and on 'Forensic Expertise in Mass Grave Exhumations' – deal with unresolved and/or recently (re) discovered injustices that people need to reckon with, whether they want to or not, because they fundamentally affect their everyday lives and futures. The third issue – on the 'Anthropology of Post-Socialism' – reflects on the ways socialist and post-socialist experiences shape contemporary life worlds and enable, or foreclose, particular futures.

How can societies move on after happenings of mass violence? This question is engaged in the special issue ‘On Irreconciliation’ (edited by Mookherjee 2022a). Against the current trend of fostering ‘transitional justice’, for instance by setting up Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, the authors in the issue take a cautious approach to the possibilities – or even the desirability – of overcoming endemic impunities. Rather than accepting the idea that forgetting and/or forgiving past acts of violence is essential for creating peaceful futures, they argue that irreconciliation – which they view as an act of boundary-making based on the refusal to forgive – should be taken seriously as a position in its own right. Thereby, as Nayanika Mookherjee explains in the introduction, ‘irreconciliation is not violent and vengeful and not against the aspirations of peace and reconciliation’, but needs to be examined in the context of ‘unacknowledged injustices, and more specifically in the aftermath of selective, staged, compromised, failed processes claiming to address injustice’ (2022a: 14).

Using a range of case studies, the contributors analyse juridical and aesthetic manifestations of irreconciliation in three different instances. First, Bertelsen (2022a, discussing ‘politics of irreconciliation’ related to Mozambique’s civil wars), Jacco Visser (2022, exploring irreconciliation among Bangladeshi human right activists in London) and Mookherjee (2022b, reflecting on contemporary struggles, like Black Lives Matter, which draw attention to histories of slavery and continuing forms of discrimination) explore situations in which past historical injustices have not been addressed. The authors contest the imagined linearity of reconciliation (as a process that enables the transition from violent past to peaceful futures) and show how irreconciliation is not simply a response to the past, but also a way of dealing with past-related absences of productive futures. A second group of articles – using examples from Northern Ireland (Josephides 2022), Canada (Niezen 2022), Sri Lanka (Buthpitiya 2022), Colombia (Clarke 2022) and the United Kingdom (Mookherjee 2022b) – focuses on cases in which historical injustices have been symbolically addressed, for instance through Truth and Reconciliation Commissions or popular attempts to make victims visible, but without or with insufficient structural changes. Lastly, all contributions highlight forms of continual protests against performative reconciliation, which in some cases – like in Argentina (Vaisman 2022) – have, over the course of time, actually led to positive structural changes.

The question of how to deal with past violence is also engaged in a special section on ‘Evidencing Mass Crimes’. In her introduction, Zahira Aragüete-Toribio (2022) reflects on the recent proliferation of forensic work in settings across the globe that has enabled new understandings and acknowledgements of mass crimes but also created new challenges for dealing with the past. Drawing on ethnographic case studies of forensic investigations in Colombia (Olarde-Sierra 2022), the USA (Wagner 2022), Rwanda and Burundi (Jamar and Major 2022) and Mexico (Robledo Silvestre and Ramirez Gonzalez 2022), the issue examines

the epistemic complexity that surrounds the production of knowledge in contexts profoundly influenced by contested political dynamics, diverse historical experiences of extreme violence and socioculturally situated understandings of death and collective and familial bereavement. (Aragüete-Toribio 2022: 2)

The authors analyse different motivations (like national commemoration, mourning or justice) that drive different social actors (e.g. governments, surviving kin, legal workers) to request, support or contest forensic investigations. And they show how – despite its presumed objectivity – forensic knowledge is always partial, situated and performative and thus offers only one particular window into the past, albeit one that can have powerful effects on people's presents and futures. As Élisabeth Anstett writes in her afterwords: 'Unearthed materiality is revealed to be highly problematic. It represents a very powerful source for counter narrative, able to raise as many unanswered and uneasy questions as forgotten memories, and is also able to shed light on long-silenced tensions' (2022: 99).

The third special issue – 'The Anthropology of Post-Socialism' (edited by Gallinat 2022a) – looks at the past, and its relevance for present and future, through the conceptual lens of 'post-socialism' (see also Brković 2022). The authors engage with the 'anthropology of post-socialism', a once thriving sub-discipline, and ask whether and how its inherent spatial and temporal binaries and boundaries (East–West, before–after/'post', etc.) are still useful today. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, the individual contributions show how socialist ideas and practices continue to be positively and negatively engaged in different contexts and – as emic constructs – affect people (both those living in former socialist countries and those who migrate out) in different ways.

Gabriela Deakin and Robert Nicolescu (2022) compare what they call 'socialist fragments' in Romania and the UK. Aet Annist (2022) analyses how 'Soviet mentalities' are ascribed to those who failed to succeed under neoliberalism in Estonia, and how those who migrate to escape this situation are then viewed as 'Eastern' subjects in translocal settings. Anselma Gallinat (2022b) demonstrates how ideological othering and post-socialist stigma are used in political discourses about eastern Germany. All the articles in the volume engage with the complex temporality of post-socialism, showing how 'past, present and future interweave, as beliefs about the past impact on perceptions in the present and suggest, open or close options for the future' (Gallinat 2022a: 108) – for instance in relationship to large socialist-era agrarian infrastructure that damages groundwater in Romania today (Dorondel and Posner 2022) or in the ways notions of socialism and post-socialism are deployed in Eastern Germany to make sense of current problems or envision future solutions (Ringel 2022).

## **Moral Economies**

Several of the 2022 articles deployed the concept of moral economy to discuss whether or to what extent it is possible, and ethical, to combine profit-making with doing good. A pervasive theme is how, despite goodwill and effort on behalf of those involved, attempts to create more just (or less immoral) economic systems often run into irresolvable tensions between the logics of capitalism and altruistic ideals. While the idea that those claiming to do good (like NGOs, charities or welfare institutions) often (also) act out of economic or political self-interest, follow bureaucratic rather than empathic rationales and sometimes perpetuate the stigmas or inequalities they seek to



overcome is already well established, especially in the anthropology of development and humanitarianism, the reverse idea – namely, that profit-seeking actors like investment bankers (Souleles 2022), finance professionals (Tripathy 2022) or organisers of illiberal investment schemes (Hayden and Muir 2022) pursue moral objectives – has to date been less explored by anthropologists. This seems to be changing, however. A special issue by Giulia Dal Maso et al (2022), for instance, discusses whether there has been a ‘moral turn in finance’ and demonstrates how moral ambitions among finance professionals can have tangible effects (e.g. in the field of social or green finance), even if they do not fundamentally challenge the capitalist social order.

While critiques of ‘moral failure’ (O’Neill 2022b) or harmful unintended side-effects still loom large in many of the analyses, there is also a genuine acknowledgement of the complexity – and to some extent irresolvability – of contemporary problems and a shared conviction that good intentions and the willingness to experiment should not be simply dismissed. Some, like Kelly Alexander (2022), even identify successful convergences between profit-making, state welfare and care. In her analysis of a ‘social restaurant’ that is repurposing food waste and provides job trainings in Brussels, she finds ‘a unique form of morality that connects citizens’ efforts to improve access to food, reduce food waste and provide access to the labour market within the capitalist workings and machinations of the social welfare state’ (Alexander 2022: 112).

### ***Caring and Spiritual Economies***

Many articles engage with the difficult positionalities of caring or advising professionals, who – despite their best efforts – cannot overcome the structural inequalities faced by their ‘clients’ and end up shifting around precarity more than resolving it. A special issue by Insa Koch and Deborah James (2022) on ‘The State of the Welfare State’ focuses on the work that advisers perform in settings of austerity across Europe and the tensions they face between moral endeavours and political and economic imperatives. The issue includes ethnographic case studies on, for instance, debt advisers in the UK (Davey 2022; James 2022), legal advisers who seek to support refugees in Switzerland (Eule 2022), a social movement organisation supporting people affected by mortgages in Spain (Gutiérrez Garza 2022) and Caritas volunteers in Italy (Pusceddu 2022). The authors reveal the uneasy relationship between state, economy and third-sector actors who are entangled in a complex web of governance and care, and demonstrate that, as Alice Forbess puts it, ‘advice is an interface that can convert economic value into moral legitimacy and vice versa’ (2022: 42). The moral dilemmas faced by caring professionals are also discussed by Malavika Reddy (2022) in her study of a legal aid clinic for migrants in Thailand and in the articles on aid workers by Ayaz Qureshi (2022) and Caitlin Scott (2022).

A slightly different approach to the theme of ‘moral economy’ is taken in two articles that focus on the overlaps or contradictions between spiritualism/religion and profit-making. Alex Gearin (2022) studies the local moral economy of sorcery in the context of ayahuasca tourism in Peru, analysing the paradoxical ways in which healers capitalise on their guests’ primitivist rejections of modern life and capitalism. Susannah Crockford (2022) focuses on the spiritual practice of ‘manifestation’, tensions

between money-based exchanges and barter, and the intertwining of economy and religion in everyday life in Arizona.

### ***Profitable Social Goods***

Several publications engage with state-driven attempts to combine capitalist growth with moral projects like delivering social goods. The special issue on ‘Urban Commons and Public Goods under Capitalist Urbanization in Southern Africa and Southeast Asia’ (edited by Trémon 2022) investigates contradictory tendencies between ‘a strong commitment by the state to deliver social goods equally to all and the subordination of state provisioning to capitalist logics of value creation and profit-making’ (Trémon 2022: 1). The case studies focus on four countries – South Africa, Namibia, China and Vietnam – where these tensions, or paradoxes, are particularly pronounced. A big focus of the special issue, but also in *European Anthropology* 2022 more generally, is the moral economy of (public) infrastructure. How is the ‘public good’ negotiated between the state, private investors and citizens or community groups in fields like (social) housing (on Vietnam, see Schwenkel 2022; Fujita 2022; on Namibia, Metsola 2022; on Romania, O’Neill 2022a), electricity (on Ghana, see Destrée 2022; on Nepal, Vindegg 2022; on South Africa, Mögenburg 2022) or internet provision (on the Solomon Islands, see Hobbis and Hobbis 2022). Themes that run through all the articles are people’s attempts to hold the state accountable, their struggles and improvisations to access basic forms of infrastructure when state care is absent or insufficient, and the ways social inequalities are reproduced through infrastructural interventions, even through those aspiring to be egalitarian.

Also focusing on state-centred moral projects, however in the field of social (rather than civil) engineering, is the special issue on ‘Engineering the Middle Classes’ (edited by Bolt and Schubert 2022; see also İpek 2022). The editors conceptualise middle classes as ‘morally loaded projects of demarcation, distinction and recognition’ that are desired and made by modern states (because they are seen as positive agents of social and economic transformation), and that ‘make’ and legitimate states and state institutions in return. As Maxim Bolt and Jon Schubert write:

They are intended to ‘lift up’ national economies and societies through their aspirations for social betterment, act as mediators between state and citizenry, stand as bearers of publicly recognised morality, and generally contribute to the advance of modern statehood and the free market. (2022: 348)

The contributors to the volume analyse how different states attempt to craft middle-classes as a ‘good’ way of being or becoming competitive in the global economy and the various contradictions, challenges and problems that emerge along the way.

### ***Ecological Economies***

Lastly, and not surprisingly, many of the 2022 articles discuss the complex challenges of reconciling economic and ecological objectives and needs. Deborah Gewertz and Frederick Errington (2022), for instance, examine how farmers and townfolk in East-

ern Montana probe fundamental questions of what is ‘moral’ and what is ‘economy’ in their attempts to build satisfying, yet seemingly irreconcilable, futures for both humans and endangered fish. In a similar vein, Chakad Ojani (2022) shows how ethics of conservation (e.g. to protect particular species) become enmeshed with processes of informal urbanisation in Lima, Peru. Kari Dahlgren (2022, focusing on Australia) and Cecilie Ødegaard (2022, on Norway) both deal with the contested leftovers of coal mines in discourses on ruins, hope and (post-carbon) futures.

## **Ethical Relationships**

Some aspects of the debates on how to build moral economies overlap with the third big theme of *European Anthropology 2022*: ethical relationships. Two themes, in particular, figured prominently: interspecies/more-than-human entanglements and the relationship between state and society. Three other key foci were forms of inter-religious and/or interethnic coexistence; intimate and personal relationships; and relationships between researchers and their ‘subjects’. Across all themes, authors engaged empathetically with their interlocutors’ (and their own) desire to have meaningful, equitable and sustainable relations. But, again, they also revealed the tensions between ideal and practice, well-intended engagements and unforeseen side-effects, and – above all – the many challenges people face in their attempts to create ethical relationships. While many of the human-centred analyses seemed to highlight (moral) ambivalences, incommensurability of goals or the paradoxes inherent in social relationships, the articles on more-than-human interrelations often foregrounded positive examples, best practices and possible synergies of living together.

### ***More-Than-Human Interrelations***

The still fairly young field of multispecies ethnography (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010) is thriving in Europe. Unlike the often dark and doomful analyses that are common in some of the Anthropocene literature, the 2022 publications I found on more-than-human interrelations all presented matter-of-fact but hopeful scenarios of interspecies connections. Maan Barua (2022), for instance, proposes that ‘feral’ parakeets in London, through their affective alignments with people, carry the (often recognised) potential to imagine more just, ‘post-colonial’ politics of dwelling.

Two articles discuss human relations with ‘agentive matter’ like stem cells, which are captured through carefully created traps by Japanese scientists (Suzuki 2022), or blood, which defines the essence and dimensions of life in a Luo community in western Kenya (Opande et al 2022). Most of the articles, however, focus on human–animal relations and many draw on ethnographic research with indigenous communities, who – so a common trope – have well-established, respectful and sustainable ways of living with non-human others.

Based on fieldwork with Afroindigenous horticulturalists, Aníbal Arregui (2022) examines how Amazonian Dark Earths, celebrated for their fertility and climate change-mitigation properties, are mediated and activated through specific human ges-

tures. Building on Amerindian epistemologies, César Giraldo Herrera (2022) analyses the gutting of monkfish as carried out by Shetland fishers. He shows how through this intimate process, fishers develop an empathetic awareness of fish suffering and ‘fishiness’ that helps them to establish less violent relations between fisher and fish that are trustful and enduring. Clinton Westman et al (2022), in their ethnography of indigenous (Cree and Métis) hunters, discuss situated and intentional relationships that have developed between humans and moose in a shared landscape as an example of mutualistic interspecies connections. Using an ecosemiotic approach and drawing on fieldwork with the Okhotsk Ewenki indigenous community in Siberia, Nadezhda Mamontova and Thomas Thornton (2022) examine how place names – and related responsibilities and knowledge – are generated and transformed through empathetic contact between humans and other beings. Will Smith (2022) takes a more critical approach to romantic imaginations of a universal moral ecology centred on interspecies care, love and kinship. Drawing on fieldwork with indigenous Pala’wan in the Philippines, and using the example of an endemic pig species that is the target of conservation efforts but also extensively hunted by indigenous people, he explores how in Pala’wan’s relationship with the non-human world reciprocity and respect are held in tension with fear, violence and death.

### ***State–Society Relations***

How to develop ethical state–society relations is the core question of a special issue entitled ‘An Anthropology of the Social Contract’ (edited by Burnyeat and Sheild Johansson 2022). According to the editors,

[t]he social contract has become a convenient vessel, often filled with notions of political legitimacy and consensus. Both the use of this vessel and its shape require attention, as they embed assumptions regarding the nature of states, consenting individuals, freedom, and common goods – which all structure political thought and possibilities. (Burnyeat and Sheild Johansson 2022: 222)

The issue studies how the social contract – as an emic concept and normative ideal – shapes people’s expectations, experiences and imaginations of futures of state–society relations in different settings. Sara Lenehan (2022), for instance, analyses Afghan refugees’ imagination of the German state as more ‘caring’, and the confusion they experienced after arriving in Germany when they realised that state–society relations fundamentally diverged from their expectations. Similarly, Gwen Burnyeat (2022), in her analysis of the Colombian peace accord, shows how the government and the public had fundamentally different assumptions of what a peace accord should entail and especially about how it should be voiced and communicated (the government deployed rational and contractarian language while the public longed for emotional engagement), which in the end led to the public’s rejection of the deal. Benjamin Bowles (2022) draws attention to the way the UK government is undermining core ideas of a social contract by trying to create ‘resilient’ neoliberal citizens who are responsible for the provision and maintenance of their own infrastructure (and therefore no longer dependent on state services). Dave Cook (2022), by contrast, analyses

how ‘digital nomads’ opt out of a social contract and try to become untethered from their nationalities and related state–society relations. Two further contributions discuss how ethics of care are negotiated between governments and local communities in the post-liberalisation Indian state (McLaughlin 2022) and in two post-disaster contexts: Mindanao and the Andaman Islands (Siddiqi and Blackburn 2022).

### ***Ethno-Religious Coexistence***

A classic anthropological theme – the chances and challenges of interethnic and/or interreligious coexistence – was taken up in a number of articles, including in a series of interdisciplinary dialogues between anthropologists and theologians published in *JRAI* (Havea et al 2022). Analyses focused on practices and experiences of boundary-making (e.g. how Christian and Muslim youth in Indonesia navigate inter-religious encounters, see Larson 2022; how Muslim converts negotiate racialised paradoxes of belonging in Spain, see Rogozen-Soltar 2022), but also on overlaps and similarities between seemingly different belief systems (e.g. secular and evangelical ethics of marriage in the USA, see Brenner 2022). Many authors outlined strategies or affective attitudes aimed at managing, or mediating, ethnic and/or religious difference such as indifference (on Pentecostal attempts to evangelise to Buddhists in Myanmar, see Edwards 2022), humour (on attempts to navigate uncertain relationships in Belfast, see Sakai 2022) or concealment (on interreligious conflict and coexistence in Ethiopia, see Dulin 2022). The last article was part of a special issue that studied ‘ethics of discernment’ – defined by the editors as ‘those political and moral ambiguities involved in the uncovering, translation and circulation of secrets’ (Coleman and Dulin 2022: 411) – in a variety of (inter)religious contexts. The contributors engaged with the complex interplay of authority, hierarchy and knowledge, and analysed how obligations/decisions to reveal or conceal variously enabled or foreclosed ethical engagements within and between religious communities.

### ***Intimate and Personal Relationships***

Also popular was another classic theme of anthropological analysis: people’s desires and struggles to create good, ethical and/or ‘healthy’ intimate and personal relationships. Articles discussed, for instance, (im)possibilities of intimacy in friendships (e.g. on Facebook friendships in India, see Advani 2022; on the failures of friendship between care-givers and patients with intellectual disability in the UK, see McKearney 2022), tensions within intergenerational relations and possibilities for their resolution (e.g. on the social benefits of grandparenting in Ireland, see Miller and Garvey 2022; on adults’ attempts to ‘normalise’ young anti-capitalists in Spain, see Ballesté 2022) or new forms of kinship generated through ‘datasociality’ (e.g. on the forging of relatedness between children with rare diseases in precision medicine, see Navne and Svendsen 2022). Contributing to the ever-growing literature on care, authors analysed the complex interplay of support and control, love and hate in personal relationships as well as changes in ways of relating imposed or enabled by digital technologies (see Navne and Svendsen 2022; on online retail platforms in China, see Rippa 2022). Some

developed (new) concepts like ‘company’ (Pina-Cabral 2022a), ‘Convivencia’ (Campbell 2022) or hospitality (Harney 2022) to think through ideals, moral ambiguities and conundrums of human sociality.

### ***Research Ethics: Relationships between Researchers and ‘Subjects’***

Lastly, several articles engaged with the complex and much-debated question of how to establish ethical relationships with interlocutors or ‘research subjects’ – in anthropology, but also in other fields (e.g. on dis/enchantments produced through the research ethics systems that govern experimental paediatric medicine, see Addison 2022). Most of the articles focused on challenges of ethnography, such as (im)possibilities of translation (Lebner 2022; Taylor 2022), doubts, uncertainties and moral obligations connected to the fieldworker positionality (Kaell 2022; Pina-Cabral 2022b; Wintrup 2022), or how to deal with and write about ambivalent attitudes towards interlocutors (Rakopoulos 2022b; Wintrup 2022). Here, like in other fields, authors advocated for humane, but realistic, ethical ideals that can accommodate rather than a priori foreclose the complexity of social interactions that can develop in the context of research projects.

### **Conclusion**

What, then, can we learn from European Anthropology 2022? Read cynically, the message (nicely captured in the introductory quote) could well be that no matter how hard people try, it is never good enough: inequalities, injustices, ecological degradation and exploitative forms of profit-making continue despite widespread attempts to create better – more equitable and ethical – ways of living together on and with the planet. However, the message could also be that despite seemingly insurmountable forms of structural violence, self-interested limits to empathetic understanding, irreconcilable needs and differences with others, and recurrent failures, people pursue ethical endeavours and believe in the possibility of a different future. I leave it up to the reader to decide the message.

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## Notes

1. This review is mainly based on a survey of original research articles published during 2022 in the leading European anthropological journals: *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (JRAI); *Social Analysis*; *Social Anthropology*; *Ethnos*; *Critique of Anthropology*; and *Focaal*. This selection is limiting and obviously does not capture, or do justice to, the full breadth of European Anthropology with its many national associations, journals and conferences. However, a broader focus would risk overloading the article, present linguistic challenges and also raise complex questions about who or what *can* adequately represent European Anthropology. For readability purposes, I use the term ‘European Anthropology’ throughout the article, but I am aware that this is problematic given the narrow selection of journals I analyse.
2. The article discusses ‘the poetics of khat’, a reaction by London-based Somalis to the khat prohibition issued in the UK in 2014. According to Ermansons, ‘[t]he poetics of khat situate acts of remembering within a distinctive conception of ideas about Somali nationhood, the need for conciliation, and visions of a common future. Yet remembering proved to be less about nostalgic longing for the past and more about enacting new moral and political relations enabled by the momentum of the khat prohibition’ (2022: 1290).
3. A rough analysis of the regional foci in the articles I looked at revealed the following distribution: Europe: 60 (15 of which were focused on the UK); Africa: 31; Asia: 31; Latin America: 21; North America: 9; Oceania: 9; Middle East: 8; Russia and Mongolia: 4; no specific region/theory: 38.
4. With few exceptions, of course. The Germany-based JSCA, for instance, published a whole special issue on the implications of COVID-19 for anthropological fieldwork (Göpfert et al 2022).
5. For example, <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/com/general-report-2020/en/> and <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/com/general-report-2021/en/>, accessed 22 August 2023.
6. For an interesting and controversial discussion on how to frame and evaluate utopias in ethnographic analysis, see the exchange between Bråten (2022) and Bertelsen and Blanes (2022).

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## Vers un effort éthique: revue d’anthropologie sociale pour 2022

**Résumé :** Cet article repose sur une revue des articles publiés dans les principales revues européennes d’anthropologie en langue anglaise durant l’année 2022. L’éthique est certainement l’un des thèmes saillants parcourant ces publications et avec elle le désir et les luttes des gens pour « bien faire » - en dépit, ou peut-être à cause, des crises sans fin auxquelles le monde fait actuellement face. Dans une tentative pour aller au-delà de la simple critique, de nombreux auteurs s’engagent avec empathie dans les « efforts éthiques » de leurs interlocuteurs, efforts qui tourment autour de trois objectifs principaux : les gens veulent construire un futur meilleur, créer des économies morales et établir des relations éthiques. Cet article résume une pléthore de contributions autour de ces trois thèmes, en révélant les nombreux paradoxes, complexités et conséquences inattendues de la volonté de bien faire, ainsi que les inévitables dynamiques entre les ambitions morales des gens et leurs déraillements.

**Mots-clés :** Anthropologie du futur, care, éthique, expérimentation, bonnes relations, économie morale