

Institution: London School of Economics and Political Science

Unit of Assessment: 24A: Anthropology and Development Studies: Anthropology

a. Context:

The LSE Anthropology Department is embedded in a School dedicated to the social sciences and actively committed to the dissemination of socially consequential knowledge outside of academia. The Department shares this commitment. On the strength of our long-standing disciplinary tradition, we identify the people we meet in the course of fieldwork – whose perspectives on the world we strive to understand – as our main non-academic interlocutors. Of course, whether they need us to be impactful depends on the historical processes that affect them. But, in principle, we subscribe to the view that anthropological research is uniquely placed to provide its own “subjects” of study with powerful tools of public engagement. Aware of the ethical issues involved in this process, we aim to make the findings of our research available to those who might use them to protect their rights and livelihoods (e.g. James’s to the claimants of land restitution and redistribution in South Africa, or Scott’s to the Pacific Islands Society of the United Kingdom and Ireland of whose Council he is a member), or who might find them useful in their own intellectual and community-based debates (e.g. the Mormon community in Salt Lake City studied by Cannell; local folklore associations and cultural bureaus in Enshi Prefecture, central China, in whose meetings Steinmuller has been invited to participate). More generally, we aspire to contribute to the on-going and collaborative process through which the communities we study, the students we teach, the readers we reach, come to think about themselves and the world around them (e.g. in a series of interviews on “civilisation” published in *Nanfengchuang* [Southern Review], Feuchtwang invites Chinese readers to reflect on their own frequent use of the concept, on what it might mean in a global and historical context and on how it may work as a way to recognise similarities to as well as differences from others).

In all cases, our impact lies in a series of interventions in the real world which might, on the face of it, look relatively modest. These, however, have a cumulative effect that is significant, and arguably powerful. To cite a few examples, in addition to the case studies we have selected for REF 2014, we have recently completed a fieldwork project focused on children of undocumented migrant workers and refugees in Malaysia that is relevant to international and Malaysia-based NGOs and charities, as well as advocacy organisations which campaign for refugee rights; the findings of our UK-based research project on Humanists have been used by charities such as Dying Matters and professional associations such as The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management to improve their campaigns about end of life care and their approach to bereavement respectively; the expertise of members of staff has been sought in cases of asylum applications (e.g. from Zimbabwe and the Philippines).

b. Approach to impact:

The most important way by which we support staff in achieving impact is by creating a vibrant and challenging research environment. This helps generate intellectually rigorous and methodologically sound research agendas, which are a precondition to having any kind of significant (and beneficial) impact beyond the walls of academia. This applies just as much to our members of staff as it does to our PhD students, some of whom have become outstanding non-academic figures (e.g., Joanna De Berry, PhD 2000, who is currently a Senior Social Development Specialist at the World Bank; Mila Rosenthal, PhD 2003, who is an internationally recognized human rights advocate with a long international career that has seen her serve as Director of Amnesty International USA’s Business and Human Rights Program and as Executive Director of HealthRight International; Elizabeth Frantz, PhD 2011, who is currently program officer for Asia and the Middle East for the Open Society International Migration Initiative). The impact on policy and advocacy achieved by our graduates stems undoubtedly from their individual qualities, but is also rooted in the rigorous training and in the research culture they have enjoyed in our Department.

We support staff by collectively and collegially contributing to the grant application process, when questions about impact are first raised and carefully considered. The Department’s Research Sub-Committee plays a crucial role in this process, ensuring that colleagues establish the necessary contacts and take the necessary steps at these early planning stages. For example, at the

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application stage for her Templeton Foundation project on *What counts as prayer?* (2012-14), Cannell ensured that it would include in its objectives a direct and practical engagement with the clergy and lay groups of the two cathedrals which are the focus of her ethnographic research (St Edmundsbury Cathedral and York Minster). Similarly, colleagues worked with Feuchtwang to consider what impact his proposed project on Urban Communities in China might have; now that the project is underway (EC funded, 2011-15), the research team has provided Chinese planners and officials with the project's findings about the outcomes, limitations and partial failures of urban planning and governmental initiatives directed at the formation of urban communities. This is not only for their information, but also to seek their responses in what is intended to become an on-going and productive conversation.

Of course, impact is sometimes achieved serendipitously, in which case we support staff by responding contingently to their needs, e.g., by providing space, time, administrative support and/or research assistance. For example, in the summer of 2012 Walker spent a period of fieldwork in Peru among the Urarina, an Amazonian indigenous group where he had previously carried out extensive fieldwork. Unexpectedly, he met the personnel of a small German-run medical clinic in the area, and started working with them on the cross-cultural misunderstandings that arise as a result of conflicting understandings of illness and the healing process. With the support of the Department and the School (by way of a small grant from LSE's Suntory and Toyota International Centres for Economics and Related Disciplines [STICERD]) he returned to the field in the summer of 2013 to continue his work and extend his engagement.

The strategies we pursue for the dissemination of our research findings are integral to our approach to impact. These range from informal interactions during the process of fieldwork, to formal engagement with non-academic organizations and their representatives, to film making and art exhibitions, to free-access editorial initiatives, to interventions in the national and international press and broadcasting. Below are a few illustrations:

- In 2010, at the end of her ESRC funded project on Popular Economies in South Africa, James held a dissemination workshop at the University of Witwatersrand. The workshop was attended by about 50 non-academic users, including treasury officers, debt counsellors, NGO personnel, journalists, bankers, and actuaries. The workshop and the findings of James's research were reported in a piece in the *Mail and Guardian* (6 October 2010). The title of the article: *Debt regulation based on faulty assumptions*, illustrates the kind of critical contribution afforded by detailed ethnographic research.
- In 2010, Bear directed five films based on her fieldwork on the Hooghly river in Kolkata. The films were shown in 2011 at an International Documentary Film Festival, organized by the India-based NGO, *The magic lantern*, which aims to bridge the gap between film makers and their audiences in India. The films were also shown as part of an art exhibit at Hastings Arts Forum Gallery in March 2011, where eleven artists were invited to make artworks about their understanding and experience of time (this initiative was linked to Bear's ESRC funded series of seminars on *Conflicts of Time*).
- In 2011, Stafford launched an open access review website called Anthropology of This Century. Aimed at a general readership, as well as a specialist audience, AOTC has showcased the research of several members of the Department. This has enabled us to reach a much wider audience than is normally the case in anthropology (there have been about 200,000 pageviews to date, and roughly a third of these have come from outside the predictable Western European and North American countries where professional anthropology is concentrated).
- We have made media appearances on, e.g., the Guardian column *Comment is Free* (Engelke), on the BBC *Thinking Allowed* (Engelke) and *The Essay* (Bloch), and on Danish Radio (Steinmuller). Banerjee's research on India "sacred elections" was featured in a full length Radio 4 documentary.

c. Strategy and plans:

Our first goal is to maximize the potential for impact by ensuring the overall quality and seriousness of our research activities. In this respect, the process of recruitment is a cornerstone of our overall strategy for achieving impact. We have a robust system in place for advertising, selecting, mentoring and reviewing our staff; this has served us well in the past and we expect that it will continue to do so in the future. Although evidence of established impact track record is not

highlighted in our searches, we believe that hiring colleagues, as we do, who ask consequential research questions that are motivated by a genuine scientific interest in the nature of human sociality and institutions will provide us with the most effective and enduring pathway to impact. Our most recent staffing decisions testify to this. With the appointments of Gardner, Graeber, Long, Shah, and Weszkalnys, we have acquired scholars whose research has an enormous potential for impact: Gardner with her work on migration flows and the impact of transnational movement and her sustained engagement with the world of development; Graeber with his on-going research on debt, democracy and direct action; Long with his comparative work in Vietnam and Indonesia on emerging conceptions of achievement and his research on democratization and decentralization in Indonesia; Shah with her multi-sited research on the causes of persistent poverty and marginalization of dalit and adivasi populations in India; Weszkalnys with her research on natural resources and her extensive engagement with NGOs and advocacy groups and policy makers.

In our research, we remain committed to our long standing methodological tradition of long-term, small scale fieldwork. Whether we investigate, e.g. land reforms in South Africa, the effects of neoliberalism on the political economy of the river Hooghly in Kolkata, or the relationship of indigenous Amazonian communities to the state, and even when we tackle big societal issues in complex and fast moving contexts, our research operates very close to the ground and generates fine-grained analyses of people's local engagements with a variety of processes – political, religious, economic, and environmental – that often originate at a global scale. While we strive to generate social scientific models with theoretical import, our research necessarily highlights the local specificities that need to be taken into account when applying such models. In this sense, we expect that our most important route to impact will continue to come from our critical engagement with national and international policy makers, NGOs, development practitioners, as well as with the general public. A second key goal is to widen these contact networks over the next few years.

We continue to benefit from a range of School wide initiatives aimed at facilitating and supporting impactful research. The recently introduced Research Incentives Policy, for example, should enhance our ability to apply for external funding for research. A third key goal for the Department will be to increase grant income. This in turn will encourage the articulation and implementation of project specific impact strategies as well as plans for knowledge exchange. As we design new research initiatives, we will continue to seek the advice of the School's Research Division and of the dedicated Knowledge Exchange Manager; at the dissemination stage, we will rely on the LSE Press and Information Office and on various other dissemination services provided by the LSE External Relations Divisions. While there is no doubt that some of these initiatives are a direct response to REF 2014 and its assessment of the impact of research, it is important to stress that the ambition to produce socially impactful and consequential research, which engages with fundamental questions of public concern, has always been at heart of our Department's activities. Our plan is to continue to pursue that same ambition in the future.

Finally, by maintaining a large and vibrant PhD programme, we shall continue to train social scientists who, whether within or outside academia, will be able to bring their anthropological knowledge to bear on complex societal issues, as many of our graduates have done so successfully in the past (see above for a few selected examples).

d. Relationship to case studies:

Our ICSs demonstrate our overall approach to impact and our strategies to achieve it. First, they are all rooted in expertise derived from long-term, localized ethnographic fieldwork. It is through this local knowledge that we address broad, real world issues about community and identity, religious conversion, marginalisation or the effects of state interventions and their withdrawal. Second, they illustrate the slow cumulative effect that our scholarship has on the world outside academia: for example, years of field research lead to a body of academic writings on religious conversion in the former Soviet Union, which in turn lead to the author's sustained engagement with academics and PhD students in Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Georgia, Armenia, and Uzbekistan; this in turn leads to new ways of framing local debates about religious difference and processes of conversion. Finally, they demonstrate the unique contribution anthropology can make to the understanding of complex social and policy issues.