*Ethnologia Polona, vol. 43: 2022, 5–18*
*PL ISSN 0137-4079, DOI: 10.23858/ethp.2022.43.3320*

# INTRODUCTION: ANTHROPOLOGY AND CONTENTIOUS POLITICS

JAN KUBIK

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY, NEW BRUNSWICK
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

When the editors of *Ethnologia Polona* invited me to lead a special issue on ethnographies of protest I decided to cast the net broadly and asked for submissions that would touch on all possible aspects of protest politics, social movements, or contention.[1] As the result we received a wide-ranging set of texts, dealing with such topics as the historical and social conditions of mobilisation (Buzalka; Muszel and Piotrowski), in-depth investigations of far right populist groups and organisations (Oaka; Volk), the role of symbols in far right movements (Chiruta), everyday resistance to unwanted regulations (Mroczkowska), empirically-based re-conceptualisations of who, what, and how is constituted as an agent of protest (Esmoris and Ohanian; Blavascunas and Cope), and the role of empathy in ethnographic studies of contentious politics (Kocyba, Muszel, Trogisch). To organise this wide ranging collection into a coherent – I hope – whole I turned to political process theory, with its multi-dimensional conceptual apparatus. I also found it necessary to expand the focus of the collection from exploring the usefulness of ethnographic methods to reflecting on the benefits of anthropological theories.

Anthropology's boundaries are porous, as behoves the discipline whose ambition is to take stock of the totality of human existence. Its principal method, ethnography, has been shared by a variety of disciplines, ranging from sociology (Burawoy 2000, Brubaker *et al* 2008) to political science (Schatz 2009, Boswell *et al* 2018) and organisational studies (Yanow 2012, Kostera and Harding 2021). Its approaches and theories have penetrated all areas of social science and have shaped many arguments in such diverse fields as political economy, evolutionary biology or theatre studies. Anthropological tools have proven useful also in the study of contentious politics. Malinowski's innovation of grounding theory in intensive fieldwork, appropriately modified, was used, for example, in the study of both complex *situations* unfolding in time (Gluckman 1940, 1947; Kapferer 2005) and *embedded economic processes* (Polanyi 1957, Hann 2019). Even a relatively cursory reading of Malinowski's famous methodological introduction to *The Argonauts of the Western Pacific* leaves no doubt that he wanted the discipline to think in terms of processes, not just structures. Gluckman (1940) pioneered *conflictual analysis*, but Malinowski prepared the ground for him, proposing at least a rudimentary form of *processual analysis*.

---

[1] I want to thank Frances Pine for her incisive, critical comments on the first draft of this Introduction.

And although there is no room here to develop this idea further, there exists elective affinity between the Gluckmanian situational analysis and the subject matter of studies on contentious politics; the common focus is conflict unfolding in time. Anthropologists have a longstanding interest in protest politics and mobilisation (Escobar 1992; Holbraad and Pedersen 2012; Thomassen 2018), acting often not just as analysts but also as practitioners-activists (Juris and Khasnabish 2015), while ethnography has eventually become an established method for studying contentious politics (Tilly 2006; Klandermans and Staggenborg 2002). What are the benefits of ethnography for social researchers? What aspects of reality that are not easily accessible by other methods are opened up for investigation by the ethnographer? Ethnography is the optimal method for studying: (1) informal mechanisms of power, (2) informal dimensions of economic processes and their intertwining with formal processes (Pine 2015), (3) actualization of social structures in everyday life and the dynamic interpenetration of structure and agency, and (4) the formation, transmission, and interpretation of meaning and value in practice of social and political life. The latter task implies focusing on detailed reconstructions of interactions through which some actors attempt to impose meaning on others to achieve hegemony, while others resist such attempts, often proposing counter-hegemonic visions of reality. Such close studies of the give-and-take of social life help us to grasp for example the paradox of creative and strategically fluid human agency on the one hand and the relative permanence of social, political, and economic structures on the other; contradictions between thought and action; context-dependent and often strategically adjusted performances of self-presentation; and inconsistencies as well as unintended consequences associated with the implementation of many "grand" designs.

So, what can anthropology contribute to the study of contentious politics? Although the conventional distinction between anthropological method and anthropological theory is neither sharp nor easy to maintain, it provides a useful heuristic device to analyse separately two practically intertwined and abductively conducted activities: data collection (what we do when we collect data) and data analysis or interpretation (what we do when we are trying to make sense out of data).

## ETHNOGRAPHIC METHODS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION

At the core of an ethnographic approach is the task of acquiring a specific type of knowledge that results from intimate relationships with a group of people. The type of "data" generated by such relationships does not have clear boundaries as it is saturated with details of human existence and is thus more textured and "messy" than the relatively austere snapshots of surveys, carefully arranged results of experiments conducted under more or less arranged artificial conditions, or generalised pictures of selected parameters characterising studied populations found, for example, in statistical yearbooks (Pachirat quoted in Wedeen 2010, 256). Although not all ethnographies are interpretive (Aronoff and Kubik 2013, Kubik 2009, Wedeen 2010), many are and thus hanging around with a group of people and engaging them in long conversations or observing their actions over extended periods of time is only the first step in a process the essence of which is coming up with an interpretation of an observed fragment of reality (Geertz 1973).

Over time the very idea of what it means to "do ethnography" has evolved and expanded to include forms of gathering "data" and constructing knowledge that do not involve direct and/or prolonged engagement (participation) with the actual human beings. Para-ethnography, for example, is based on studying texts generated in specific situations and environments and treating them as records of meaningful human actions to be interpreted (Holmes and Marcus 2006). Another widely practised research technique is employed by those who conduct systematic observations of public performances, for example state rituals, in order to reconstruct and interpret meaning-making strategies of various groups, including governments. The recent emergence of virtual spaces as yet another public forum where humans conduct their affairs, led to the invention of a new incarnation of the method: *digital ethnography*. It involves not only meeting research partners in virtual locations and talking to them online, but also rigorous and large-scale analysis of their products, made possible by new, sophisticated computer-aided techniques of data-scraping and data-analysis. Since humans have not (yet) moved their whole existence online, digital ethnography needs to be creatively combined with the more traditional forms of the method, and such combinations have led to the emergence of *patchwork ethnography* (Volk, in this issue).

What do these disparate research practices, sometimes quite divorced from ethnography's original roots in "being there" with studied people, have in common? Ethnographic sensibility - is arguably the best answer. It is founded on three key premises, as far as I can see: (1) taking the emic (insider) rather than etic (outsider) position when interpreting meaning, thus assuming that in the process of interpreting a given "object" (action, gesture, visualisation, etc.) the interpreter begins with familiarising themselves with the meaning assigned to this object by the "natives"; (2) relentless attention to context, built on the premise that meanings are to a considerable degree shaped by situated discourses within which they appear, under specific circumstances of a concrete time and place; and (3) reflexivity that does not just call for a reflection on the observer's position/status in a given research interaction, but involves also the researcher's readiness to keep re-examining the initial assumptions guiding preliminary interpretations of observed phenomena.

Reflecting on the preparation and training that are necessary to develop ethnographic sensibility, inevitably leads to the question of empathy. Since the inception of the interpretive enterprise the nature of empathy has been examined, sometimes producing more psychological and sometimes more semiotic approaches, but the discussions have often revolved around its relationship with sympathy and setting up the boundary between "going native" and retaining the critical distance deemed to be necessary for insightful interpretive work. Empathy has become particularly hard to procure and sustain in studies on groups and individuals whose cultural worlds are drastically different from the "native" world of the researcher. The task is demanding when meanings that are at play are different; it becomes much more difficult when values are in conflict (Pasieka 2019; Deodhar 2022). The situation of researchers coming from by-and-large liberal cultures who engage in the study of far right groups is exhaustively analysed by Kocyba, Muszel and Trogisch in the present issue. The value of their study comes from the systematic analysis of the role of empathy in three different research situations, ranging from working with groups sharing the worlds of meaning and value with the researcher to the opposite context when such worlds remain apart.

Ethnography can and does help in the investigation of both the specific form of social action called "protest" and the specific form of organising called "social movements". Both of these are often grouped under the rubric of "contentious politics". What is it? In the most general sense the phrase refers to all forms of interaction between challengers and incumbents that are not channelled through established and taken-for-granted or legitimated institutions. Whether something is "not established" or its taken-for-grantedness is dubious depends of course on the specific context of space and time. A form of interaction that is regarded as non-routine at one time or in one location, may later or in another place be recognized as a "normal" part of the institutional repertoire giving form to the political process as a matter of routine. Contentious politics may or may not be counter-hegemonic (Hansen 2021, 44), although the line separating the two is not easy to establish. It is however clear that there are non-institutionalized forms of interaction between challengers and incumbents whose aim is not the wholesale replacement of the system and/or dismantling of its legitimating ideology, but merely a reform and improvement of the existing institutional setup.[2]

Contentious politics includes two closely related yet usefully differentiated phenomena: acts and processes of protest on the one hand and social movements on the other. Each has specific features that call for different methods of study. The study of protest as events, particularly a series of events, demands the observation of people "on the move" who are therefore not easily accessible for participant observation, unless the researcher becomes a participant in the event (Lubit and Gidley 2021). Observation seems to be a more appropriate method, although it may be either direct or indirect, as is the case of event analysis relying on the ex post facto analysis of various records (Rucht, Koopmans, and Neidhardt 1999).[3]

---

[2] McAdam, Tilly and Tarrow talk about contained and transgressive contention (2006, 7).

The study of movements, however, offers other opportunities and makes other methods, such as participant observation or in-depth interviewing, fully applicable. This subfield shares commonalities with the study of institutions or organisations, as at the core of movements are usually SMOs - social movement organisations. As there exists a repeatable set of routines in any organisation, ethnographers can embed themselves in its daily activities, develop a rapport with its members, and start building a model of an organisation's functioning or its culture.

## FOUR DIMENSIONS OF CONTENTIOUS BEHAVIOUR AND ETHNOGRAPHY

In order to generate an analytical template for organising the study of such a complex phenomenon as contentious politics, it is prudent to turn to a theory that would guide the ethnographer/anthropologist who tries to figure out what kinds of data can or should they collect. Contentious politics can be studied in several ways, but the *political process approach*, formulated and practised by many towering figures in the field of social movement studies, is arguably dominant (Tarrow 2011; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001).[4] In a nutshell, there are four analytically separable dimensions in each contentious phenomenon: (1) political opportunity structure (POS), (2) movement organisations or what is known as mobilising structures, (3) culture(s) of protest or movement, particularly framing that allows potential and actual movement members to develop a sense of participating in a common cause, and (4) repertoires of protest that tend to be path-dependent.

### ***Political Opportunity Structure: POS***

The political opportunity structure (POS) is defined as "consistent - but not necessarily formal or permanent - dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow 2011, 85). Focusing on this concept provides the political process approach with its dominant macro perspective and thus constitutes a problem for anthropologists whose ethnographically-grounded methodology is custom-made for the study of micro rather than macro mechanisms. On the other hand, however, the history of anthropology provides countless examples of studies in which explanations or interpretations of ethnographically reconstructed micro situations, mechanisms or structures have relied on the more or less elaborately theorised accounts of macro processes. As far as I can see, there are three ways in which the concept of political opportunity structure can be "anthropologised." This can be done by: (1) constructing an explicit theoretical bridge between macro and micro mechanisms, (2) relying on the concept of *situation* (developed by the Manchester School of social anthropology), as it often references mezzo mechanisms of social and political life, and/or (3) utilising the two conceptual extensions of the POS concept, DOS (discursive opportunity structure) and EOS (emotional opportunity structure - not discussed here).

---

[3] On the difference between observation and participant observation see Kostera 2021.

[4] Hans-Dieter Opp (2022), a friendly critic of the political process approach, organises his theoretical position around remarkably similar categories. He writes about opportunities, organisational resources, and frames.

### *POS: Macro-micro Dynamic*

Many people in East Central Europe have spent their lives under the constraints of two macro structures, state socialism and post-socialism. The latter has been to a large degree structured by the rules derived from the neoliberal economic programme. Both have shaped countless dimensions of people's existence, a fact amply documented by many anthropological studies (see, for example, Pine 2015, Verdery 1996, Kubik 2013). There is no room here to review this literature, but in the context of this special issue on ethnographies of protest politics, two important phenomena should be emphasised. First, the dramatic reorganisation of social structure engineered by the Soviet-backed communist governments resulted in the emergence of a specific social class of peasant-workers. This class or social category, born in the structural "in-betweenness" created by the rapid process of industrialization of both urban and rural areas and mass migration from villages to the emerging urban spaces, has developed a specific *post-peasant culture* with its distinct understandings of reality, values, and norms (Buzalka, in this issue). As Buzalka argues, the post-peasant culture contains elements that are consonant with a number of key precepts of the populist ideology, such as the personalistic construal of power, distrust of central authorities, or the predilection to privilege informal rather than formal rules of economic activity.

Second, the dramatic political regime change in 1989-91 has not simply involved the abolition of command economy and its replacement with a market-dominated system, a dramatic change that could be construed as a move from control to freedom. Two other processes have taken place. As Stark (1990) memorably put it, the move was not simply from plan to market, but rather from plan to clan. And, additionally, many people, but it seems particularly farmers, have ended up having their economic activities not so much "liberated" as subjected to a new system of elaborate constraints, this time designed and enforced by the EU, as Mroczkowska demonstrates.

The 1989-91 revolutions that brought down state socialism happened when most economic experts and many practitioners were beholden to the neoliberal economic blueprint assumed to be the only sensible game in town. That set the tone for economic reforms during the post-communist transformations, and however inconsistently they were implemented in practice (Kubik 2013), they led to the emergence of a social structure predominantly shaped by the logic of capitalism. One of the results of embedding

Central European economies in pan-continental chains of production and distribution was the severe contraction of local industries and the downgrading the value of local expertise. This, in turn, has become one of the key elements of the structural-cultural context invoked to explain the rise of right-wing populism (Oaka, in this issue).

### *Situational Analysis as an Ethnography of POS?*

In his seminal essay commonly known as "The Bridge", Gluckman (1940) proposed the concept of *situational analysis*, a novel mode of ethnographic observation and model-building designed to capture the micro-dynamic of social and political life. It has been further developed in several directions, among which two seem to be particularly influential: Gluckman's own work on *rituals of rebellion* (Gluckman 1954; Aronoff and Kubik 2013) and Victor Turner's concept of *social drama* (1968). Situational analysis is focused not only on the reconstruction of the chain of events, in a manner similar to process tracing in political science, but also on both the discovery of the structures of power that generate and co-determine the course of events in situations, and the reconstruction of the mechanisms of transformation that structures undergo under the impact of events. Ethnographic reconstructions of such micro-processes, invaluable as they are in themselves, can also be treated as contributions to the study of political opportunity structures, as they examine factors that are beyond actors' control.

### *Discursive opportunity structure (DOS)*

Clearly inspired by the existing work on political opportunity structure (POS), Koopmans and Statham (1999), coined the concept of discursive opportunity structure (DOS) built on the observation that human actions are constrained not only by the structural features of the situations actors find themselves in, but also by the features of cultures that shape their minds and provide scripts for 'proper' conduct of interactions. Discursive opportunity structure turns researchers' attention to 'political-cultural or symbolic external constraints and facilitators of social movement mobilisation' and should be operationalized as a set of variables 'which may be seen as determining which ideas are considered "sensible," which constructions of reality are seen as "realistic," and which claims are held as "legitimate" within a certain polity at a specific time' (1999, 228). Volk's analysis of the German PEGIDA's organising and Chiruta's work on the Romanian far right belong to this line of analysis.

## Organisational Structures

The second major area of study concerns organising in its many dimensions, ranging from deliberately created and maintained transparent SMOs (social movement organisations) to more or less secretive informal networks. Ethnographers excel in discovering and analysing the latter that are hard to access through other methods. Mobilisation is an intricate process which – via many twists and turns – moulds out of a set of disparate individuals a rebellious collective agent, a challenger. This process can be reconstructed with the help of rigorous analytical tools of game theory that models individuals as rational agents who engage in explicit calculations about the benefits and pitfalls of joining collective action (Opp 2022). Anthropologists have contributed to dispelling the myth of freely contracting individuals, by showing that most of the time and in most places humans facing the dilemma of collective action are not disembedded individuals but rather belong to prior collectives, ranging from families and kinship structures to extensive networks of friendship, but also professional, religious, or political networks, etc. Moreover, grievances, a frequent fuel of rebellions, often fester for a long time in the relative secrecy of semi-private spaces and give rise to *everyday forms of resistance*, whose significance as crucibles of mobilisation has been seminally revealed by James Scott (1985 and 1990). In this collection Mroczkowska shows how this process of rebellious mobilising transpires among Polish peasants who try to resist the unwelcome agricultural policies imposed on them by the European Union.

The study of organising should not be limited to observing mechanisms that lead to action, but also to those that contribute to what is often described as the formation of consensus. Spaces and situations that allow people to come together, talk, and coordinate their worldviews need to be studied if we want to achieve a deeper understanding of mobilisation. Again, this is a job for ethnographers who are equipped to procure the necessary data (Tilly 2006). Oaka examines the emergence of a common cultural frame among (far)right leaning individuals who share disappointment with the state of politics in the Czech Republic and search for alternatives. Importantly, she shows that many common views on this milieu, also in the social sciences, are misguided. While their positions can be classified as “nazi”, as their ethos or even ideology combines the elements of both nationalism and socialism, it is the latter ideology – she argues – that plays a dominant role in their worldview, while the former is zeroed in on by observers who are interested in sensational headlines.

## Cultures of Protest, Frames and Framing in Different Scales

The relationship between culture and movements/protest has become a major area of research in the last 20 years or so. While the earlier theories dealing with this relationship relied mostly on the concept of *ideology* (della Porta and Diani 2006, 66), it has been gradually replaced by the concept of *collective action frames* (Snow and Benford 1988, Snow *et al.*, 2019) whose conceptual roots lie in Goffman’s celebrated frame analysis (1974). In the most general sense frames are:

> relatively coherent sets of action-oriented beliefs and meanings that legitimize and inspire social movement campaigns and activities. Like everyday interpretive frames, collective action frames focus attention, articulate, and elaborate the elements within the frame, and often transform the meanings associated with the objects of attention. But collective action frames differ from everyday interactional

> frames in terms of their primary mobilization functions: to mobilize or activate movement adherents so that they move, metaphorically, from the balcony to the barricades (action mobilization); to convert bystanders into adherents, thus broadening the movement's base (consensus mobilization); and to neutralize or demobilize adversaries (counter-mobilization) (Snow et al. 2019, 395).

Over time the theorists of contention politics and mobilisation have grown dissatisfied with the concept that generated excessive simplifications of the complex set of relationships that exist between various components of culture and human action, including contention. For example, in their ambitious attempt to revise political process theory, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) argued that the way culture is conceptualised in the model needs to be expanded, as it is impossible to do justice to the multiplicity of framing efforts by focusing only on the frames employed by the movement or protest organisers. Switching their theoretical stance toward more consistent constructivism they argued that "rather than conceiving of only insurgents as interpreters of environmental stimuli, we see challengers, members, and subjects as simultaneously responding to change processes and to each others' actions as they seek to make sense of their situations and to fashion lines of action based on their interpretations of reality" (2001, 46). The reformulated task is not to observe the framing efforts of protest organisers but rather to reconstruct iterative interactions between such efforts and the framing activities of other relevant actors. The field of culture is seen here as an area of intense conflicts over the meaning and evaluation of events, personages, processes, institutions, group identities, etc. The idea that in order to comprehend the effect of contentious actions such as protest marches or strikes, the researchers should not focus exclusively on immediate political changes but also consider long-term cultural shifts, has eventually become one of the axioms of this field of studies.

When it comes to studying the role of cultural factors in contentious politics, anthropologists are particularly well equipped to execute two crucial tasks related to the reformulation called for by McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly: *scaling down* (of analytical focus) and *scaling up* (of interpretive approach). The former move involves employing ethnographic skills to study micro-mechanisms of mobilisation, often in informal and even intimate settings, where new understandings of the situation and framing ideas are developed. It is the domain of Scotian hidden transcripts, but also of open cultural scripts developed during the early stages of emergent protest cultures. Such processes, the essence of which is grievance-framing, can be captured either by interacting with individuals one by one (Mroczkowska) or by participant observation of social situations, including online fora, whereby a group of activists, for example, forges common understandings of their situation (Oaka and Volk pieces).

The opposite analytic strategy is scaling up of the techniques used initially to study the mechanisms of symbolic action at a micro level, the techniques first formulated and applied by such masters of the ethnographic craft as Gluckman (1940), Geertz (1973) and Victor Turner (1973). Turner proposed an explicit tool kit for systematic, step-by-step dissection of meaning created via symbolic action (1973), for example by isolating three dimensions of symbols: the exegetic, the operational, and the positional (1973, 1103). Having been shaped by Gluckman's situational analysis and his idea of rituals of rebellion (Gluckman 1954), Turner created the concept of social drama (1974) that has proved to be an exceptionally nimble tool for analysing many crisis situations, in both small scale, non-industrial and industrial, complex societies (Wagner-Pacifici 1986). Drawing on my work inspired by both Gluckman and Turner (Kubik 1994), Chiruta (in this issue) examines rituals of rebellion and what I called ceremonial revolutions performed by right-wing actors in Romania.

This broadening of the theory's "catchment area" has been aided by the concept of discursive opportunity structure (DOS) that is particularly helpful in trying to answer the question of why some frames work better than others and why their effectiveness changes over time. As in other areas of inquiry, the anthropological-ethnographic perspective enriches the picture offered by political science or sociology. Muszel and Piotrowski demonstrate in their contribution, for example, how discursive opportunities that shape the course of mobilisation are quite different in small towns than in large cities, and this difference is particularly pronounced when it comes to the uneven positions of men and women. In small towns, the latter are subjected to much more stringent "traditional" mechanisms of social control than in large urban spaces.

## Protest repertoires

In Tarrow's definition: "The repertoire involves not only what people do when they are engaged in conflict with others but what they know how to do and what others expect them to do" (2011, 39). A range of works has shown that certain national or sub-national traditions of protest exist, and although these of course demonstrate inventions and sudden switches, like in other areas of political culture, the endurance of repertoires is intriguing. And here the anthropological approach seems to be invaluable, as anthropologists study the mechanisms of cultural reproduction, observing, for example, how people cultivate their own *contentious/rebellious folkways*. Repertoires matter because all actors, challengers and incumbents in particular, have specific expectations that guide their preparations, thus departures from routines are in themselves acts of defiance if not rebellion. Volk shows how digital and "traditional" modes of participation intermesh, while Chiruta contributes to the long tradition of studies investigating links between religious ceremonies and secular/political rituals.

Anthropology, a discipline with a subversive streak, can offer a radical revision of the field of studies on contention, not only by expanding the methodological toolkit and proposing new methods of protest, but also by suggesting novel conceptualizations of who/what counts as agents of protest, who matters, whose participation is a possible gamechanger. Two contributions to this issue propose such reconceptualisations. Esmoris and Ohanian write about objects used in protest actions and reflect on the possibility of agentic power they may acquire in certain situations by activating semantic fields that would have remained latent without their presence. Think about the umbrellas used by protesting students in Hong Kong or the pots Argentinian demonstrators banged to communicate their anger.

The study of the way in which humans interact with objects as props or extensions of their own capacity has a long tradition in anthropology (Appadurai 1986; Holbraad 2011). In this issue, Esmoris and Ohanian show how everyday objects employed in protest are recontextualised to become visual markers of the rebellious intent and signifiers of the protestors' emerging collective identity. The piece suggests that by focusing on objects we may raise the question of how repurposed everyday items expand our conception of rebellious agency. Pots, for example, have rich denotations and connotations, as they invoke domesticity, comfort of a warm kitchen, attachment to a traditional cuisine, etc. Thus their utilisation as props of protest creates a novel semantic field that suggests a link between the protection of domesticity (the "house") and the challenge to the authorities.

However, rethinking the agency of various, including non-human, actors of protest mobilisation can go even further, as Blavascunas and Cope demonstrate. They investigate the agentic power of a specific species of bark beetle found in the revered old forest at the Polish-Belorussian border, but argue also that the forest itself can and should be treated as a powerful agent of protest. By investigating the agency of non-human actors they question the conventional ontology of the whole field of contentious politics and thus make a contribution to what is known as the "ontological turn" in anthropological theorising. There is not room here to engage with this intensely debated theoretical development (see Holbraad 2011; Holbraad, Pedersen and Viveiros de Castro 2014), but its major gist is relevant. As the dramatic transformations of the globe caused by human interventions ushered in a new era, that of the Anthropocene, bold reconceptualisations and innovative empirical strategies are in order (Lowenhaupt Tsing 2015). One way of illuminating this era's unprecedented character is to study the manner in which non-human species are agents, as their ever changing mode of existence becomes an agentic force that intersects with and co-constitutes the space in which human actors attempt to organise themselves in order to achieve common goals.

## CONCLUSIONS

After introducing four key components of the political process theory of contentious politics, I showed how each of them can benefit from engagement with ethnographic data and dialogue with anthropological theory. (1) The study of political opportunity structure (POS) is aided by ethnographers' attention to the way structural, external power is realised in specific circumstances of a given time and place and anthropologists' focus on the constructedness of opportunities. (2) Ethnographic studies of quiet complaining, gradual emergence of networks of defiance, and mechanisms of informal mobilising shed original light on the formation and maintenance of movement organisations or what is known as mobilising structures. (3) Anthropology's extensive experience with the area of human existence called "culture" can be easily put to work on sophisticated reconstructions of the emergence and durability of protest cultures. The conceptual tools of anthropology help to interpret massive public rituals of power, while ethnographic techniques can be employed in observing micro-mechanisms of framing and mobilisation. Finally, (4) anthropology provides tools to deepen the understanding of contentious repertoires by destabilising the conventional conceptions of agency. The collection offers also important reflections on the nature of encounter that is at the heart of the chief anthropological method, participant observation, particularly when the research partner (interlocutor) self-identifies as a member of a group whose ethos and values are different and sometimes antithetical to those of the researcher.

The diversity of the collection, reflected in the Table of Content, testifies to the fact that anthropological approaches and ethnographic methods are extremely useful for the study of contentious politics in several ways. They address lacunae left by other methods and open new vistas on a number of dimensions that are insufficiently treated by other theoretical approaches.

## REFERENCES

Appadurai, Arjun. 1986. *The Social Life of Things. Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Camridge University Press.

Aronoff, Myron and Jan Kubik. 2013. *Anthropology and Political Science: A Convergent Approach.* Oxford: Berghahn Books.

Boswell, John, Jack Corbett, Kate Dommett, Will Jannings, Matthew Flinders, R.A. Rhodes and Matthew Wood. 2018. "State of the field: What can political ethnography tell us about anti-politics and democratic disaffection?" *European Journal of Political Research*, 58 (1): 56-71.

Brubaker, Rogers, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea. 2008. *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Burawoy, Michael. 2000. "Introduction: Reaching for the Global." In *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections, and Imaginations in a Postmodern World*, edited by Michael Burawoy *et al.*, 1–40. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

della Porta, Donatella and Mario Diani. 2006. *Social Movements. An Introduction. Second Edition.* Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.

Deodhar, Bhakti. 2022. "Inside, Outside, Upside Down: Power, Positionality, and Limits of Ethnic Identity in the Ethnographies of the Far-Right." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 51(4): 538-565.

Escobar, Arturo. 1992. "Culture, practice and politics. Anthropology and the study of social movements." *Critique of Anthropology* 12(4): 395–432.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Gluckman, Max. 1940. "An Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand." *Bantu Studies* 14: 1–39.

Gluckman, Max. 1947. "Malinowski's 'Functional' Analysis of Social Change," *Journal of International African Institute* 17 (2): 103-21.

Gluckman, Max. 1954. *Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa: The Frazer Lecture, 1952.* Manchester: University Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1974. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience.* New York: Harper Colophon Books.

Hann, Chris. 2019. *Repatriating Polanyi. Market Society in the Visegrad States. Budapest: CEU Press.*

Hansen, Christina. 2021. "A Critical Ethnography of Political Activism: Challenges Arising from Practical, Emotional and Theoretical Closeness to the Field." *kritisk etnografi – Swedish Journal of Anthropology*, 4, 1: 41-55.

Holbraad, Martin. 2011. "Can the Thing Speak?" Working Papers Series #7. Open Anthropology Cooperative Press. www.openanthcoop.net/press.

Holbraad, Martin and Morten Axel Pedersen, eds. 2013. *Times of Security Ethnographies of Fear, Protest and the Future*. Routledge.

Holbraad, Martin, Morten Axel Pedersen and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro. 2014. "The Politics of Ontology: Anthropological Positions." In *Cultural Anthropology. Editors' Forum. Theorising the Contemporary. The Politics of Ontology*, edited by Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen https://culanth.org/fieldsights/series/the-politics-of-ontology (accessed 30.12.2022).

Holmes, Douglas R., and George E. Marcus. 2006. "Fast-Capitalism. Para-ethnography and the Rise of the Symbolic Analyst." In *Frontiers of Capital: Ethnographic Reflections on the New Economy*, edited by Melissa Fisher and Greg Downey, 33–57. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Juris, Jeff and Alex Khasnabish. 2015. "Immanent Accounts: Ethnography, Engagement, and Social Movement Practices." In *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements,* edited by Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, 578-591. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kapferer, Bruce. 2005. "Situations, Crisis, and the Anthropology of the Concrete: The Contribution of Max Gluckman." *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology.* 49 (3): 85-122.

Bert Klandermans and Susanne Staggenborg, eds. 2002. *Methods of Social Movement Research.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Koopmans, R. and P. Statham. 1999. "Ethnic and Civic Conceptions of Nationhood and the Differential Success of the Extreme Right in Germany and Italy." In *How Social Movements Matter*, edited by Mario Giugni, Doug McAdam, and Charles Tilly. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kostera, Monika. 2021. "Observation: on the importance of being there." In *Organizational Ethnography*, edited by Monika Kostera and Nancy Harding, 31-44. Cheltenham: Edwards Elgar.

Kubik, Jan. 1994. *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland*. University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Kubik, Jan. 2013. "From Transitology to Contextual Holism: A Theoretical Trajectory of Post-communist Studies." In *Postcommunism from Within: Social Justice, Mobilization, and Hegemony*, edited by Jan Kubik and Amy Linch, 27-94. New York: SSRC/NYU Press.

Lowenhaupt Tsing, Anne. 2015. *The Mushroom at the End of the World. ON the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Lubit, Amanda and Devon Gidley. 2021. "Becoming part of a temporary protest organization through embodied walking ethnography." *Journal of Organizational Ethnography*, 10 (1): 79-94.

McAdam, Doug, Sidney Tarrow and Charles Tilly. 2001. *Dynamics of Contention.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McAdam, Doug. 1996. "Political Opportunities: Conceptual Origins, Current Problems, Future Directions." In: Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements edited by Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald. 23-40. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McCammon, Holly. 2013. "Discursive Opportunity Structure." *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* edited by David A. Snow, Donatella della Porta, Bert Klandermans, and Doug McAdam. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Opp, Hans-Dieter. 2022. *Advanced Introduction to Social Movements and Political Protests*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Pasieka, Agnieszka. 2019. "Anthropology of the Far Right." *Anthropology Today* 35 (1): 3-6.

Pine, Frances. 2015. "Living in the Grey Zones: When Ambiguity and Uncertainty Are the Ordinary." In *Ethnographies of Grey Zones in Eastern Europe Relations, Borders and Invisibilities*, edited by Ida Harboe Knudsen, Martin Demant Frederiksen, 25–40. New York and Cambridge: Anthem Press.

Rucht, Dieter, Ruud Koopmans, and Friedhelm Neidhardt, eds.. 1999. *Protest Event Analysis: Methodological Perspectives and Empirical Results*. Lanham: Rowman and Littelfield.

Schatz, Edward, ed. 2009. *Political Ethnography. What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Scott, James. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Scott, James. 1990. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Snow, David A. and Robert D. Benford. 1988. "Ideology, Frame Resonance, and Participant Mobilization." *International Social Movement Research* 1: 197–217.

Snow, David A., Rens Vliegenthart, and Pauline Ketelaars. 2019. "The Framing Perspective on Social Movements: Its Conceptual Roots and Architecture." In *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, edited by David A. Snow, Sarah A. Soule, Hanspeter Kriesi, and Holly J. McCammon, 392–410. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell.

Stark, David. 1990. "Privatization in Hungary: from Plan to Market or from Plan to Clan?" *East European Politics and Societies*, 4 (3): 351–392.

Tarrow, Sidney. 2011. *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics. Third Edition.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thomassen, Bjørn. 2019. "The anthropology of political revolutions." In *Handbook of Political Anthropology*, edited by Harald Wydra and Bjørn Thomassen, 160-176. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Tilly, Charles. 2006. "Afterword: Political Ethnography as Art and Science." *Qualitative Sociology,* 29: 409-412.

Turner, Victor. 1973. "Symbols in African Ritual." *Science, New Series*, 179 (4078): 1100-1105.

Turner, Victor. 1974. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Verdery, Katherine. 1996. *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Wagner-Pacifici, Robin Erica. 1986. *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Wedeen, Lisa. 2010. "Reflections on Ethnographic Work in Political Science." *Annual Review of Political Science* 13: 255–72.

## AUTHOR'S CONTACT:

Jan Kubik
Rutgers University and University College London
E-Mail: kubik@polisci.rutgers.edu
ORCID: 0000-0003-0017-381X