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## Welcoming the New Amateurs A future (and past) for non-academic anthropologists

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**ABSTRACT** | How can we create a more inclusive Pacific anthropology? This article argues that contemporary anthropology's disciplinary norms are based in the Cold War period. These norms are inappropriate given anthropology's current situation. This article argues that interwar anthropology (the anthropology practiced between World War I and World War II) provides us a better set of imaginative resources to create a more common ethnography. Interwar anthropology was more welcoming of amateur scholars and less concerned with rigid norms of professionalism. Reframing a common ethnography in terms of 'amateurs' and 'professionals' may give us new ways of imagining a discipline that is increasingly moving outside the academy.

**Keywords:** History of anthropology; Amateurs; United States, Aotearoa New Zealand

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*Hope is in the undergrowth.* - Anne Salmond (1986)

How can we create a more inclusive Pacific anthropology? Anthropologists now live in a world in which, as Paige West has put it, ‘many people who conduct research in the Pacific Region, including most of the Pacific Islanders who work there, are not anthropologists.’ How then, she asks, can we ‘open our world to our colleagues’ and ‘include these new scholars... while retaining our commitment to the study of sociological questions’ (West 2013: 4-5)? One solution comes from Oceanian anthropologists themselves, who have argued that ‘articulating visions of anthropology’s future, at least from an Indigenous Oceanic perspective, can be done only through genealogical work — the search for, production, and transformation of connections across time and space’ (Tengan et. al. 2010: 14). I am not sure that settler academics have genealogies in the same way that Oceanic anthropologists do, but I do think this call for genealogy should direct settler academics to their own intellectual tradition, searching anthropology’s past for resources with which to imagine a more inclusive future.

Much has been written about how our scholarly norms call out for a more diverse, inclusive, representative, and just anthropology, and I agree with all that has been written on this topic. I would also point out that a more diverse anthropology is not only in accordance with our values, but our interests: in a world of contracting funding, fewer jobs, and institutions whose values and integrity are under threat, anthropologists in even the most hegemonic of positions need new allies and new avenues to pursue their projects. Since conservative academics must recognize a less-funded anthropology is inevitable, they should recognise a more-just anthropology is in their interest.

Our ability to imagine such a future is limited by our immediate past. The Cold War (1945-1990) shaped our disciplinary imagination in powerful ways: we think of anthropology as being done by white male professors with university appointments, government grants, and articles published in peer-reviewed journals. But there is no reason that anthropology must be this way — and in fact for most of its history it was not this way. If we think of anthropology as beginning in 1892 (the year the Polynesian Society was formed in New Zealand and the year after the first PhD in anthropology was awarded in the U.S), the discipline is around one hundred and twenty six years old. The forty five years of the cold were just one period in the history of our discipline, and a highly unusual one at that. Why should we continue to emulate a Cold War anthropology when we no longer have Cold War values or Cold War funding? If a common anthropology seeks to push ‘back against our seemingly reduced capacity to both imagine and enact novel forms of collective life and new solidarities’ (Kelly and Trundle 2018: 2), then a better source for imagining a common anthropology, I argue, is the interwar period, between 1918 and 1939. This period was similar to our own: it featured restricted funding, few jobs, genre experimentation, and inclusion and diversity, and the incorporation of anthropology into a wide variety of biographical projects.

Today, anthropology has a ‘two column’ imagination: in one column are the anthropologists, in the other are their objects. Our imagination is also highly racialized: white people in the anthropology column, and black and brown people in the ‘objects’ column. Much of our writing about decolonizing anthropology has

involved experiments shuffling racial groups between columns while keeping the basic equipment of this exercise—the columns and the colours—intact. We need to continue to critically interrogate the role of racism in anthropology. At the same time, however, I think we should pursue other, less-trod avenues in order to reimagine anthropology. Doing so, I believe, would provide us with additional imaginative resources.

In particular, I want to see what happens if we rethink the history of anthropology not in terms of a 'two-column' divide but three separate dichotomies: amateur/professional, academically employed/non-academic and settler/indigenous. None of these dichotomies necessarily maps on to the others, and each anthropologist exists at an intersection of all three of them. In this article I use the word 'amateur' to refer to someone who is less interested in meeting established professional norms and standards than they are in deforming, innovating, or pushing the boundaries of what anthropology could be. This is different from being academically employed. Once we view anthropology in this way, I hope to show that we should not worry that something terrible will happen to anthropology if it is done by amateurs — indeed, the amateur impulse has a long history in anthropology. We need to move past the stigma attached to the word 'amateur', a word whose Latin root emphasises love and commitment to a task, not a low quality of performance. As I hope to show, non-academic anthropologists have done very professional work during the interwar period, even as academic anthropologists engaged in 'amateurism', experimenting with new forms of writing and novel anthropological genres. The monopoly of academic anthropologists on anthropology is recent, unsustainable, and not obviously ethical, and the line between innovation and conformity was not always the same as the line between academic and non-academic employment.

Increasingly today, as in the interwar period, anthropology is being done by people who might be called 'new amateurs': people who come to the discipline because it allows them to pursue biographical projects that are important to them. Some of these new anthropologists are Indigenous people seeking to recover their past, understand their present, or imagine their future. Others are PhD holders who want to keep doing anthropology even as the job market forces them to work elsewhere. Still others can be found in the hundreds of millions of people in developing countries who have access to the Internet but not to affordable high-quality tertiary education, who seek to learn more about humanity.

In this paper, I focus on the concept of 'projects': The biographically-specific concerns that drive people to undertake scholarly work. I imagine a common anthropology as a capacious space in which people from diverse backgrounds can undertake many different kinds of projects. Anthropology has always been a place which welcomes 'professional professionals' (i.e. academically employed conventional scholars) and has always had a soft spot in its heart for 'professional amateurs', the people who deform, challenge, and innovate existing paradigms of research. So too should a common anthropology welcome 'amateur (i.e. non-academic) professionals' — people who want to undertake conventional scholarly and scientific work, regardless of whether they have an academic position or not. And it should also be a place that can be home to 'amateur amateurs': people who are not academically employed but whose insights challenge and innovate our discipline. Decoupling professionalism from

academic employment, I argue, might open up new ways to imagine a common anthropology.

### **Anthropology Has Never Been Just Academic**

Anthropology has never been only an academic discipline. For most of its history, the Western — that is to say, Christian — academy taught a medieval curriculum based on the classical Mediterranean world in which the church began. This curriculum had almost no space for anthropology or most subjects which are taught today at University. As late as the nineteenth century, for instance, professors resisted teaching what we today would consider ‘classical’ works of English literature. In 1868, Harvard offered only a single course in English literature, which ended with Chaucer. In 1865 one professor wondered ‘can the study of English, the study of Chaucer, Shakespeare, & Milton, say, be made a serious discipline, like the study of Plautus, Lucretius, & Horace?’ (Levine 1996: 78-79). The new forms of knowledge that we now call the natural and social sciences often grew outside of the academy, not in it. Darwin and Einstein, for instance, did not make their greatest discoveries as professors, and disciplines like biology, psychology, and sociology only entered the academy in the late nineteenth century, just slightly earlier than anthropology.

The professoriate has never held a monopoly on expertise and truth, but it began to try to corner the market in the century from 1840-1940. This was when professors and scientists began distinguishing between ‘amateurs’ and ‘professionals’ — mostly in order to ensure the legitimacy and status of the professionals (Rheingold 1991: 24-53). Andrew Abbott has analysed the changing demographics of scholarly societies, including the American Anthropological Association, and documented the way that amateurs slowly yielded to academics. In the United States in 1925 there were 12,272 members of scholarly societies, but only 3,965 PhD holders. In other words, there were roughly three times more amateur scholars participating in scholarly life than there were PhD holders. By 1950, scholarly societies had 31,306 members, of which 22,108 held PhDs: only a third of members of scholarly societies were non-PhD holders. Abbott concludes that ‘the non-professionals were not immediately squeezed out of the ‘professional’ societies but rather persisted in them almost up to World War II. Only around 1940 did the number of PhD holders in the system at a given time approach the number of society members’ (Abbott 2011: 48).

Anthropology was no exception to this rule. While we remember how ‘anthropology... was an activist project which fetishised and commodified Indigenous objects, cultures, and bodies, while positioning Euro-American scientific thought and practice as neutral and normative’ (Bruchac 2018: 178), we tend to forget that Indigenous people were not academic anthropologists’ only target. Boas, Radcliffe-Brown, and Malinowski waged war on amateurs as well, claiming that the professionalisation, specialisation, and objectivity of anthropologists set them apart from the judges, postal clerks, museum curators, and missionaries who were once coequal participants in our discipline. A good example of this can be seen in the politics surrounding the creation of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in 1902. When W.J. McGee, a non-academic anthropologist, first organised a committee to explore the possibility of creating the AAA, he hoped the new association would be open to

everyone, regardless of their expertise. Boas strongly opposed this move, writing to McGee:

A difficult problem often arises among those societies which are most successful in popularizing the subject matter of their science, because the lay members largely outnumber the scientific contributors. Whenever this is the case there is a tendency towards lowering the scientific value of discussion.... The greater the public interest in a science, and the less technical knowledge it appears to require, the greater is the danger that meetings may assume the character of popular lectures. Anthropology is one of the sciences in which this danger is ever imminent, and in which for this reason great care must be taken to protect the purely scientific interests (Boas, in Stocking 1960: 11).

In the face of this opposition, McGee and others simply incorporated the AAA – without telling Boas! Boas was outraged but Boasians would eventually get their revenge. In 1946 the AAA was reorganized because it was not attending to the ‘professional interests’ of academic anthropologists. Reorganizers such as Julian Steward worried that new federal funding agencies like the National Science Foundation would not take anthropology as seriously as sociology or psychology if amateurs were included in its association. There were also concerns about standards. One person involved in the reorganization complained of ‘jerkwater colleges’ where ‘something called anthropology’ was taught (Stocking 1960: 170). The newly-reorganised association had two tiers of members: ‘fellows’ who were certified academic anthropologists, and ‘members’ who were not (Darnell and Gleach 2002: xvii). By the time the Cold War was well underway, then, amateurs had been largely excluded from American anthropology.

New Zealand also saw a transition from amateurs to professionals. In the late nineteenth century, ‘enthusiastic amateurs’ were the main practitioners of a nascent discipline of anthropology (Beaglehole 1938: 154). A central institution of New Zealand anthropology, the Polynesian Society, was founded by amateurs, not professors. As Biggs notes, ‘The enthusiasm of the amateur pervades the early volumes of the Society’s journal.... it was left to amateur ethnologists, missionaries, surveyors, administrators, to record the passing [sic] ways of native life and language. No professional anthropologist attended the first meeting of the Polynesian Society in 1892’ (Biggs 1992:7). While the first appointment of an anthropologist in New Zealand (or Australia) to an academic post was H.D. Skinner in 1918, he oversaw Otago’s ethnological museum and lectured at its university with no other permanent faculty. ‘Forty odd years would pass before the Beagleholes, Buck, Firth and Skinner introduced the caveats and discipline of the scientist to the journal. Then, inevitably, but to the disappointment of some, its content became more technical and specialist. In a word, more professional’ (Biggs 1992: 7). Of course, there were serious differences between New Zealand and the United States as well: After World War II, America was building an empire while Britain was dissolving one, and New Zealand anthropology did not have the same massive inflow of federal money that American anthropology did. Nonetheless, the pattern is clear: In both New Zealand and the United States, amateurs had a role founding the discipline, only to be displaced by academics.

The history of the institutionalisation of anthropology departments confirms this: Many now-influential American departments were not founded until the 1940s, such as Stanford, Cornell, New York University, and the University of California Los Angeles. Other departments may technically have a longer genealogy but languished for lack of support. For instance, anthropology has had a place at The University of Pennsylvania since the nineteenth century because of its museum. Its department was technically founded in 1913 but, like Otago, it consisted of a single professor (Frank Speck) who taught there until 1950. It was only in 1947 that the university decided to create a department with multiple faculty positions (Kopytoff 2005: 33). In New Zealand, Ralph Piddington was appointed to a foundation chair at Auckland in 1949 (Grey and Munro 2011), Otago anthropology 'really got off the ground' in 1963 (Blackman 2014) with the appointment of John Harré and Les Groube, while Jan Pouwer was foundation chair at Victoria in 1966 (Barrowman 1999: 252), and Hugh Kawharu was appointed inaugural chair in anthropology at Massey in 1971 (Walker 2006: 214). Overall, anthropology in the US institutionalised in the 1940s and 1950s at a time when global reach, basic science, application for empire, and massive amounts of funding were all on the menu. In New Zealand, institutionalisation occurred in the 1960s and into the 1970s, in a context where economic recession and the Māori protest movement were salient: The Association of Social Anthropologists of Aotearoa/New Zealand was founded the same year as the Māori Land March. But I think in broad strokes we can see similarities between the two countries.

Cold War anthropology often saw the ascendance of people from hegemonic subject positions. In the United States, this meant less people named Ruth and Esther and more people named Ralph and George — a trend epitomised by the fact that Boas was replaced not with Ruth Benedict (Boas's intended heir), but Ralph Linton. In New Zealand, where the academy was already thoroughly Anglo-Protestant, this hegemony took a slightly different form: its home grown anthropologists had to contend with imported talent. The foundation professor at Auckland was Ralph Piddington, an Australian. Its second was Ralph Bulmer, from England. Victoria University of Wellington's department was founded by Jan Pouwer, from the Netherlands. The tension between imports and local-grown scholars is an enduring feature of New Zealand anthropology.

Academization also meant professionalisation: a narrowed focus on what and who anthropology was for. By definition, it was inward looking. Full professionalisation, Rosenberg says, is 'the moment when... investigators began to care more for the approval and esteem of their disciplinary colleagues than they did for the general standards of success in the society which surrounded them' (in Hinsley 1981: 7-8). This meant a lack of interest in anthropology of artistic, activist, or applied purposes. Jan Pouwer, for instance, argued that 'we should honour our departmental and personal commitments to New Zealand... but not at the expense of depth, connectedness and academic integrity.' He went on to say, 'I do not believe in a 'People's Anthropology', a social engineering cut loose from its epistemological and theoretical bearings.' (In Rimoldi and Rimoldi 1999: 9-10). The Māori linguist Bruce Biggs was even more blunt: 'I regard the expression 'ivory tower' positively rather than pejoratively... the true academic distances himself in the emotional sense from his research object... between activism in the broadest sense and academia... I see an inevitable contradiction which makes it impossible to combine the roles or at least to remain true to both... what saddens

me is when I see... a competent academic go activist.' (In Rimoldi and Rimoldi 1999: 9-10). Professionalisation also meant epistemic privilege over amateurs. We can see this, for instance, in Piddington's dictum that 'the untrained observer is all too ready to assume that his observations of human behaviour can yield information comparable with those of the trained social scientist. Whether in industry, in administration or in far-flung outposts of what used to be Empire, the 'practical man' is always ready to assert dogmatic conclusions, even when these are in opposition to the results of patient and thorough research in such sciences as psychology, economics and anthropology' (Piddington 1957: 525).

### **Hallmarks of Interwar Anthropology**

In contrast to Cold War anthropology's excesses, interwar anthropology existed at a sweet spot in the discipline's history: method and theory really had improved, but the discipline's genre standards were still very much in flux, and people from all walks of life took part in its work. Anthropologists like to think that the training of authors such as Margaret Mead and Zora Neale Hurston occurred because of anthropology's commitment to social justice, but this is only partially true. Anthropology's commitment to diversity was a result of how drastically underfunded it was — interwar anthropology would take who it would get. Women, for instance, were often encouraged to take anthropology in order to keep class sizes up during the depression, not necessarily because of an inherently egalitarian disciplinary habitus (Kerns 2003: 119-121).

Authors in this period wrote in a variety of genres. Some of their work was what we now call 'public anthropology': attempts to explain the discipline's outlook and findings to non-experts. Public lectures were still popular, as were popular books such as Benedict's *Patterns of Culture* (1934) and Peter Buck's *Vikings of the Sunrise* (1938). Ethnographers experimented with a wide variety of forms, ranging from sensitive first-person accounts like Gladys Reichard's 1934 *Spider Woman* to fictionalised accounts of indigenous life like *American Indian Life* in 1922 to genre-bending works of folklore/autobiography like Hurston's *Tell My Horse* (published the same year as Buck's *Vikings of the Sunrise*). In 1930 Oliver La Farge won the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *Laughing Boy*, focused on Navajo lives. Jaime De Angulo wrote multilingual poetry based on his experience of California, and Benedict and Sapir are well known for their poetry. Other early anthropologists experimented with biography in works like *The Ojibwa Woman* and *Crashing Thunder*. As Faye Harrison recognized decades ago,

artistry, creative experimentation, and disciplinary boundary blurring, which are so very prominent in postmodernist anthropology, are not peculiarly 'postmodern.' Zora Neale Hurston and Katherine Dunham are just two examples of intellectuals who, through the use of literary art and dance theatre, took anthropological insights and knowledge to wider audiences beginning more than five decades ago—long before postmodernism, postcolonialism, postindustrialism, or post-anything was in vogue. (Harrison 2010:4).

Amateurism — the willingness to deform and innovate — was a hallmark of interwar American anthropology, both in and out of the academy.

American anthropology was much more unbuttoned and bohemian than New Zealand anthropology, whose hallmark at this time was its ‘professional amateurism’ – work done in accordance with academic genre standards by non-academics. Especially worthy of note was that New Zealand anthropology has been, ‘unique in the extent to which the tangata whenua have participated in its activities’ (Biggs 1992: 7), whereas most of the American genre experiments I mentioned above, whatever their virtues, still involved non-indigenous anthropologists describing Native Americans. And, as Biggs points out, New Zealand ethnography has always looked outward to the rest of the Pacific as well. After all, the first royal patron of the Polynesian Society was not Queen Victoria of England, but Queen Lili‘uokalani of Hawai‘i! Exemplary here are, of course, Te Rangi Hīroa (Sir Peter Buck) and Āpirana Ngata. For these two great Māori anthropologists, ‘anthropology was not merely an academic exercise: it had to be applied to the acculturation process and to the government of native peoples’ — a governance by and for Māori so that they could modernise in a traditional way (Sorensen 1987: x). And note that Both Buck and Ngata ‘preferred the guidance of the amateur ethnologists of the Polynesian Society to the academic speculations of the professors’ (Sorensen 1987: xviii). They valued the insights of scrupulously executed anthropology, but their work was never purely academic. In fact, Ngata’s greatest ethnographic contribution was a piece of ‘applied anthropology’, his 1931 Native Land Development Report, which was in such wide demand that he had to make 1000 extra copies for distribution (Sorensen 1982: 21).

Ngata also experimented with the political economy of publication, creating the Board of Māori Ethnological Research, which subsidised the publication of much early ethnography of Māori. The board subvented the Journal of the Polynesian Society and created a second journal, *Te Wananga*, ‘a periodical wherein could be published material less scientific in character than is usually associated with the Journal of the Polynesian Society’s researches,’ including ‘important Maori texts, the publication of which should provide interesting reading for Maori scholars and the Maori people’ (anonymous 1929: 1). And indeed, this journal often published lengthy Māori texts and represents a groundbreaking attempt to democratise scholarly knowledge about Māori people. Remarkably, as late as 1971 Condliffe could write ‘the Pakeha, privately or through Government departments, have done little to subsidise research. What has been done in New Zealand ethnology has been almost entirely paid for by Maori people’ (Condliffe 1971: 149).

As this example shows, interwar anthropology did not always sort anthropologists into two columns on the basis of their race. Neither did they believe that non-academic research would inevitably be of lower quality than that of professors. Indeed, for Boas the best anthropologist was an indigenous anthropologist. (Berman 1996: 223-226). He recognized that white anthropologists visiting Native American communities lacked facility with the language and culture, had few personal connections in the community, and could rarely make extended stays. This was why Boas encouraged indigenous collaborators, such as George Hunt and Henry Tate. For Boas, an enemy of amateurism, the ideal anthropologist was the professionally-trained insider. In fact, the second PhD he awarded at Columbia was to William Jones, a Native American of the Fox nation. This was also the reason he was interested in working with Zora Neale Hurston: She was an insider willing – at least at first – to receive rigorous scientific training.



Buck and Ngata were even more sceptical than Boas of the possibility of Pākehā ethnography, and saw no contradiction between being Māori and an anthropologist. Indeed, they scoffed at Pākehā anthropologists who lacked the cultural aptitude and racial attunement necessary to understand Pacific Islanders (Sorenson 1982). At the same time, they did not feel that cultural or racial otherness made Pākehā anthropology fundamentally impossible or unethical. For instance, Ngata encouraged the young anthropologist Felix Keesing. ‘He does good work,’ wrote Ngata to Buck, ‘is keen and has the "ngakau" - interest that will carry him far’ (Ngata in Sorenson 1987: 69) even as Buck quipped to Ngata that Keesing had the ‘pakeha way of putting things into a pakeha series of bottles with appropriate pakeha labels. They go well with the pakeha but there is a feeling of strangeness to the person whose mores have been thus bottled’ (Buck in Sorenson 1987: 149). After getting his start publishing in the pages of *Te Wananga*, Keesing moved to Hawai‘i and founded the department of anthropology at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. After World War II, he helped found the Stanford anthropology department. Few think of Stanford anthropology as shaped by Māori patronage, but in fact it was.

### Conclusion

Like all dichotomies, the distinction between Cold War anthropology and interwar anthropology is too simple. Interwar anthropology was hardly a multicultural paradise. Ella Deloria’s novel of American Indian life, *Waterlily*, was originally 215,000 words long, but she was forced to cut the manuscript in half by editors (Gardner 2003), mutilating her vision for the novel. Matilda Coxe Stevenson was forced to publish her work under her husband’s name (Bruchac 2018:177). Anthropologists’ relationship with Native collaborators were often exploitative, including Boas’s relationship with Hunt – which itself largely involved appropriating the cultural knowledge and authority of his spouse (Bruchac 2018). Amateur work was often, well, amateurish. At the same time, Cold War anthropology was not uniformly a fascistic exercise in imperial control. The AAA may have shut out amateurs in 1946, but it also published *Decolonizing Anthropology* in 1991. Ralph Piddington preached scientific anthropology, but he spoke out against racial injustice in Australia (Grey 1994) and thought Sol Tax’s action anthropology should be a model for the Pacific because ‘it emphasises the right of Fox self-determination’ (Piddington 1960: 205).

Still, it’s useful to treat ‘Cold War anthropology’ and ‘interwar anthropology’ as ideal types. Doing so, I’ve argued, helps us see just how capacious anthropology can be as a discipline. It gives the legitimacy of tradition to anthropologists who are too often told their ideas or subject positions are novel or illegitimate, and it helps us revise how people once considered ‘informants’ or ‘amateurs’ were a central part of our discipline. It also helps us see that anthropology’s past is not one of unremitting objectification and oppression of indigenous people — although to be sure there are many anthropologists who have a lot to answer for. All traditions are internally heterogenous, change over time, and face the challenge of being ‘modern’ even as they stay ‘traditional’ — that is to say, true to their historical experience in a new and contingent present. Anthropology included. In this article I’ve argued that interwar anthropology offers us examples of how to do that.

There will come a time, possibly even in the near future, when most anthropology will not be done by academic anthropologists, for the simple reason that there will be so few of us. It will be done by cultural practitioners, Wikipedia enthusiasts, and anthropology PhDs employed in the private sector. We already live in a time when the Internet and social media help us — as they say in the tech world — ‘surface expertise’, or realize just how knowledgeable and skilled non-academics are. Once we recognize the ‘amateurs’ and ‘informants’ of the past as anthropologists, then we can imagine new ways to ensure that our discipline is open to people with non-academic projects such as political engagement, cultural heritage, survivance, resurgence, antiquarian interest, a documentary impulse, obsessively footnoted Tumblr posts, and other goals we can’t yet predict. Embracing these new anthropologists ‘should open up the possibility of as yet unanticipated ways of being a ‘we’ who are matters of concern for one another on the basis of equally unanticipated terms of relevance’ (Keane 2018: 37). As our discipline prepares to boot itself up, outside of the academy, these ‘new amateurs’ are our future. It is a daunting time, but also a time with a lot of promise. And as I hope to have shown in this article, there is nothing more true to our discipline’s history than welcoming this new era and the practitioners it brings with it.

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