

# Revisiting Positionality in Critical Anthropology: From Radical Roots to the Challenges of Neoliberal Academia

Marta Songin-Mokrzan

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# REVISITING POSITIONALITY IN CRITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: FROM RADICAL ROOTS TO THE CHALLENGES OF NEOLIBERAL ACADEMIA

MARTA SONGIN-MOKRZAN

INSTITUTE OF ETHNOLOGY AND CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF ŁÓDŹ

Within the field of critical anthropology, the scope of the reflection goes beyond one's own society, encompassing a thorough exploration of anthropologists themselves as complex products of their socio-cultural environments. This aspect is becoming increasingly important in today's critical analysis of the status of anthropology. Drawing on the insights of radical anthropologists, this article explores the economic and political context that shapes anthropological practice.

While radical critics of the 1970s were confronted with well-defined sources of authority, the rise of neoliberalism disperses power and complicates the pursuit of critical anthropology. The question remains: Can critical anthropology maintain its potency amidst the influences it seeks to challenge? This question resonates as a central introspective point for contemporary critical anthropologists, inviting them to navigate the complex web of power, subjectivity, and socio-political context in their pursuit of transformative scholarship.

**KEYWORDS:** critical anthropology, radical anthropology, positionality, reflexivity, neoliberalism

A critical mode of analysis is characterised by its tendency to question assumptions and beliefs that are often taken for granted. At the same time, it dissects the power dynamics and societal influences that shape not only cultural artefacts, texts, and ideas, but also the totality of human and nonhuman experiences. This mode of analysis delves into the examination of underlying ideologies and biases, challenging well-established norms and revealing the intricate tapestry of power relations. It traces how these dynamics shape various aspects, including identity, representation, and the very framework of socio-material relations. A cornerstone of critical analysis is its unwavering focus on context, encompassing the historical, social, political, economic, and cultural backdrop within which knowledge, an artefact, or a subject emerg-

es. It also ventures into the realm of alternative viewpoints, contributing to a more inclusive and accurate representation of both human and non-human experience.

According to Ghassan Hage, critical thinking is the ability to “reflexively move outside of ourselves” (Hage 2012, 287). In essence, it allows us to recognise what might otherwise go unnoticed and provides a different and alternative perspective on our culture and society. Hage emphasises that different disciplines have their unique ways of being critical, offering insightful analyses into the intricate workings of social realities. Critical sociology, for example, “not only allows us to capture the existence of social relations, structures, and forces that are a *sui generis* reality and as such exist ‘outside of us’ (...), it also allows us to examine the causal power of these social structures and social forces and ascertain the way they work to help shape us into what we are” (Hage 2012, 287). On the other hand, critical anthropology “takes us outside of ourselves, (...) by telling us that, regardless of what and who we are, we, as individuals and as a society, can dwell in the world in a completely different way from the way we dwell in it at any given moment” (ibid.). As Hage suggests, anthropology enables us to recognize that we have the potential to be radically different from what we are (ibid. 289). Throughout the history of the discipline, anthropologists have used these different modes of critical analyses interchangeably to demonstrate that Western ways of being in the world are not universal and fixed but are rather open to transformation.

A particularly valuable feature of critical anthropology is not only its inherent ability to challenge established norms and power structures or its implicit pursuit of a more equitable society and sustainable practices, but above all, its reflexive nature. Interestingly, critical anthropology takes a transformative journey from scrutinizing Western society through the lens of radical alterity to casting a critical eye on the discipline itself, as one of the institutions constructed within a particular framework of thought. This reflexive turn urges researchers to question the very conditions under which knowledge is produced. It invites us to consider how historical, political, cultural, and institutional factors influence us as researchers, shaping our theoretical frameworks and professional practices. In this sense, critical anthropology offers a profound opportunity for self-examination and introspection. It serves as a mirror through which we can examine anthropologists’ own assumptions, biases, and positions that shape the interpretation of the world around us. This introspective process compels us to confront our own standpoints and increases our sense of self-awareness.

The aim of this article is to show how critical anthropology, by “taking us outside of ourselves” helps us to understand our own positionality and, consequently, to better understand the conditions of knowledge production. In particular, I would like to draw attention to the debates raised by radical researchers in the 1960s and 1970s — a moment that I consider to be a turning point in the development of critical

discourse within the discipline — in order to reflect on the challenging situation that critical anthropologists find themselves in today.<sup>1</sup>

### CRITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

The critical approach within modern anthropology can be traced back to the early days of the discipline, when the focus was on the study of indigenous communities. At that time, ethnographic data collected in the field served not only to demonstrate their similarities to us, but also to question whether our ways of life could be recreated.

The inherent critical capacity of anthropological thought and its impact in challenging the rigidity of our own cultural practices was recognized as early as 1938 by Bronislaw Malinowski in his article “A Nation-Wide Intelligence Service”, in which he argued for anthropology at home. In this innovative piece, Malinowski emphasizes the significance of studying ourselves with the same methods and mindset as those used to study indigenous communities, suggesting, for example, that social movements that emerged in the early twentieth century had similarities to primitive mythologies in terms of their use of mysticism, magic, and mythical narratives (Malinowski 1938, 104). Similarly, Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that anthropology “invites us to temper our beliefs in our own importance, to respect other ways of living, and to put ourselves in question through the knowledge of other customs that astonish us, shock us or even make us repulsed” (Levi-Strauss 2011, 51 as quoted in Hage 2012, 288-289). This transformative capacity was particularly evident in the reception of Margaret Mead’s *Coming of Age in Samoa*. Regardless of its factual accuracy and the subsequent controversies it generated, the book sparked debates and discussions about the social construction of gender roles, and the influence of culture on human behaviour.

The critical potential of anthropology stems from the fact that it is rooted in an encounter with radical alterity. The difference between self and other not only gave rise to the concept of culture but also shaped the approach of anthropological analysis, which is fundamentally dependent on this distinction. When socio-political changes led anthropologists to conduct research within their own societies, this perspective was not abandoned but rather adapted to new fields of inquiry. Interpreting the actions, beliefs, and norms of members of one’s own culture requires the anthropologist to perceive them as non-obvious, non-natural, and non-universal ways of being in the world. This is only possible when a researcher, by relying on difference as

1 This issue is also addressed in an article I have co-authored with Michał Mokrzan (2020).

a conceptual framework, implicitly acknowledges the presence of the absent other.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, it can be argued that the anthropological mode of analysis is fundamentally critical and has a potential for transformation.

While anthropology is inherently thought-provoking, it also has a historical practice of adopting a critical sociological approach which, as Ghassan Hage points out with reference to Bourdieu, can also offer de-naturalisation or de-fatalisation. Such a perspective allows “us to view ourselves and the social spaces we inhabit as ‘social constructs’ and/or as ‘objects of struggle’” (Hage 2012, 287). This is particularly evident in engaged research that aims to influence change, especially in socio-cultural contexts where power relations are prevalent and significant. By examining and questioning these power dynamics, critical sociology challenges existing structures, cultural norms, and beliefs that perpetuate inequality and oppression. It aims to foster socio-material transformation, promote more equitable and just realities, and create a sustainable future for all living beings. Engaged research similarly focuses on the power dynamics that perpetuate various forms of exploitation and identifies socio-cultural areas in need of reconstruction. Rejecting the status quo, it stimulates action by identifying practices that contribute to imbalances, injustice, and environmental degradation.

#### REFLEXIVITY

What makes critical thinking in anthropology particularly valuable is its transition from reflection on Western ways of living and thinking to introspection on itself. Initially aimed at challenging Western social structures and cultural dynamics through ethnographic data that suggest the potential for radical difference, critical anthropology then shifts its focus inwards, recognizing its own embeddedness within the society it studies. This introspective approach becomes a particular strength of critical anthropology. It requires a deliberate detachment from established practices and challenges researchers to examine their perceptions of the world through a socio-cultural lens. By acknowledging wider contexts and biases, critical anthropology offers profound insights into how these elements influence scholarly work and shape worldviews. Scholars are encouraged to consider the fundamental aspects of the discipline and the reciprocal relationship between their contributions and the wider socio-cultural landscape. This mode of analysis invites individuals to question assumptions and privileges that influence their understanding of the world and their interactions with others.

2 It can be highlighted that while critical anthropology depends on radical cultural alterity, critical sociology also focuses on the experience of the other — individuals whose lives are shaped by structural inequality and differ significantly from the experiences of the privileged.

Anthropology, as noted above, inherently has the potential to reverse its gaze on its own assumptions, a capacity rooted in its foundational encounter with radical alterity. However, it was not until the 1980s that this potential was first widely acknowledged to any significant degree, marking a period of intense critical debates about the role of the researcher's authority in knowledge production (Clifford and Marcus 1986, Clifford 1988, Geertz 1988, Tyler 1987, Van Maanen 1988). During this period, the emphasis was on locating power in the semantic structures of ethnographic texts as a means not only of describing other cultures, but also of shaping and constructing them. This era witnessed a profound departure from the concept of the objective and detached observer, as anthropologists grappled with the complex dynamics of representation: the power of ethnographic authority and the rhetorical means employed in their work.

While the representational crisis of the 1980s is widely regarded as having had the most significant impact on anthropology, largely because of its emphasis on self-awareness, self-criticism, and the recognition of the researcher's role in knowledge production, it was the radical thinkers of the 1960s and 1970s who first drew attention to the biases and assumptions within the theoretical foundations of the discipline (Hymes 1972, Asad 1973, Huizer 1979). In their analysis, they used a Marxist conceptual framework to consider the status of indigenous communities and, subsequently, the position of anthropology itself as a Western institution created within specific circumstances (Gough 1968, Diamond 1964, Brreman 1968). Their significant contribution to the development of anthropological reflexivity involved a comprehensive examination of the discipline's situational context within a broader political and economic framework. While researchers in the 1980s focused on delineating power dynamics within ethnographic texts, their radical predecessors drew attention to the structures of power that shaped the interactions between indigenous, underdeveloped communities, and Western anthropologists.

The self-reflexive approach pioneered by radical anthropologists is particularly relevant to understanding the challenges facing contemporary critical researchers. It reminds us of the paramount importance of seeing ourselves as social actors embedded in specific contexts. Acknowledging our own positionality enables us to approach research with heightened awareness and a deeper understanding of the complexities of the process of knowledge production.

#### UNCOVERING CONTEXT: RADICAL ANTHROPOLOGISTS' TAKE ON POSITIONALITY

The concept of positionality has been extensively examined in a number of critical studies, where in-depth analyses of power relations underlying social forces, discourses, and institutions have illuminated their significant impact on shaping individuals'

subjectivity. The fact that the vast majority of these fields of inquiry highlight the importance of the distinction between oppressor and the oppressed as a key element in forming a political subject's identity is especially significant. This perspective is exemplified in fields such as feminist studies, LGBTQ+ studies, disability studies, animal studies, postcolonial studies, and others.

In these academic domains, critical theory derives its disruptive power by drawing on the experiences of those whom Edvin and Shirley Ardner aptly referred to as the “muted groups” (Ardner 1975): slaves, the proletariat, indigenous peoples, women, people of colour, transgender, or non-binary people, the disabled, among others — those whose experiences have been silenced in the dominant discursive fields. The insights offered by these marginalized voices have the potential to refute what was once considered universal and unquestionable. Critical theory offers a distinctive perspective, “a view from below”, which emerges from an alternative space of experience and is used to challenge the prevailing viewpoint.

This perspective is also characteristic of the early critical approaches that emerged within anthropology, inspired by Marxist and feminist theory<sup>3</sup>. These studies not only identified the distribution of power within Western societies and across global socio-political landscapes but, more importantly, prompted reflection on the processes of knowledge production and the importance of considering the positionality of the anthropological subject. While feminist anthropology questioned the transparency of gender and emphasized its role in shaping fieldwork and our view of cultures under study, Marxists highlighted the economic and political context.

Radical anthropologists of the 1960s and 1970s gained a new vantage point for their research by adopting Marxist class conflict theory, which, among other things, provided an explanation for the disparities in development between different regions of the world. Through this perspective, indigenous cultures were no longer seen as closed and isolated entities, but rather as entangled in processes of modernity. Critics also suggested that the relationship between the anthropologist and the non-Western other should be seen within a broader economic and political context, recognizing it as a power relationship that influences their understanding of the way knowledge is constructed and disseminated. Marxist theory thus became a means of establishing a perspective capable of challenging structural conditions that had been taken for granted and were not problematic for most scholars until the emergence of counter-cultural movements and the onset of decolonization processes. They were only recognized when circumstances began to change, and new narratives emerged.

Although Marxist anthropologists opposed imperialism and colonialism, the ultimate object of their reflection was anthropology itself and the conditions of knowl-

3 This topic is extensively covered within feminist studies (Songin-Mokrzan 2014). See for example: Harstock (1997), Harding (1987, 1991, 1993), Haraway (1988).

edge production. This critique showed that anthropology is the European science *par excellence* and could only have emerged within the structural dominance of the West. As radicals argued, anthropologists were the same kind of Western agents as colonial administrators, traders, and missionaries who flooded various parts of the world and were engaged in so-called “scientific colonialism.” This was characterized by Johan Galtung as a “process whereby the centre of gravity for the acquisition of knowledge about the nation is located outside the nation itself”, by means of the unrestricted exportation of ethnographic data “to one’s own home country to have it processed there and turned out as ‘manufactured goods’, as books and articles” (Galtung 1967, 13). As a result, they operated exactly like entrepreneurs who imported raw materials at a low price in order to transform them into an expensive finished product, through which the researcher gained prestige and climbed the social ladder. Anthropology as a discipline was thus caught up in the network of political and economic relations between the Western imperial powers and their overseas dependencies. Radical critics were so dismissive of anthropology that they claimed that if anthropology did not exist, it should not have been invented (Hymes 1972).

In the view of Marxist thinkers, as mentioned above, the relationship between self and other is redefined in terms of power, which clearly outlines the roles and responsibilities of a revolutionary anthropologist (Gough 1968, Stavenhagen 1971). Knowledge becomes a tool for the empowerment of the oppressed. Here, the political subject is constructed through shared experiences which, as in other critical studies and activist movements, form a cohesive community of common interests, with the aim of reclaiming voice and agency while challenging the dominant narrative. This critical approach allows revolutionary anthropologists to unambiguously identify the victims and beneficiaries of the political and economic landscape, provide clear guidelines for action, and point out problems and possible solutions.

It is worth noting that numerous other critical anthropological endeavours have recognized the relationship between self and other as inherently rooted in power dynamics. These projects have sought to redefine this relationship in various ways, transcending the boundaries of the identities as outlined above and moving beyond the constraints of the binary logic that distinguishes between the Western self and the non-Western other. Lila Abu Lughod, for example, sheds light on individuals who identify as “halfies” or those who embrace “hyphenated identities”, revealing their unique capacity to critically challenge the theoretical underpinnings of anthropology. This capacity arises precisely because these individuals do not fit neatly into the binary division between self and other that serves as the foundation of the concept of culture. Drawing on her own non-obvious identity as half-Palestinian and half-American, Abu Lughod examines the problematic construction of culture as a manifestation of power dynamics. Her ultimate proposition is to discard the con-



cept of culture and replace it with discourse, a term free from the burden of colonial history (Abu Lughod 1991).

This perspective is also apparent in the concept of “native anthropology”, described by Delmos Jones as the “anthropology of the oppressed” (Jones 1970). In this framework, anthropologists benefit from an “insider’s perspective” to represent cultural reality. Feminist and women’s anthropology also follow this approach, emphasizing the importance of gender identity and the social distribution of power. In all these different anthropological projects, the “view from below” is seen as an authentic representation of one’s own experience. Silenced others are regarded as having epistemic authority, a concept rooted in “double consciousness”, which enables them to contribute to a more comprehensive and reliable body of knowledge.

For radical anthropologists, conceptualizing the relationship between self and other as a power dynamic also initiates a reflexive introspection of the discipline as a Western institution that has far-reaching implications. This raises questions about its structural and discursive formation, how it shapes the practices of anthropologists, its impact on knowledge production processes, theoretical frameworks and ethnographic practices. As Bob Scholte has observed, anthropology has been rediscovered as “culturally mediated” and “contextually situated” activity, therefore, it must become the subject of “ethnographic description and ethnological analysis” (Scholte 1972, 437).

While previous generations of anthropologists, including the radical critics of the 1960s and 1970s and the cultural critics of the 1980s, have undertaken this profound reflexive task, it should not be considered as a completed endeavour, but as an ongoing project. The changing political and economic landscape in which anthropology as an institution is embedded, together with new tools of critical analysis, can provide new insights into contemporary research practices and reveal the ways in which our own social identities and positionalities are constructed. The critique initiated by radical anthropologists seems particularly beneficial in this context as it draws our attention to the structural and discursive elements that influence the operational framework of universities as institutions, and how they shape the role of anthropologists as social actors within this environment. This is one of the most widely debated issues in academic circles today.

#### ANTHROPOLOGY OF NEOLIBERALISM

In recent decades, driven by factors such as the 2008 economic crisis and the rapidly growing awareness of climate change due to global warming, many critical anthropologists have shifted their focus to the analysis of capitalism and its more radical

manifestation — neoliberalism (Hilgers 2011, Ong 2006, Collier 2011). While the theoretical tools and vocabularies employed may significantly vary from one researcher to another, they collectively share the goal of defamiliarizing capitalist imaginaries, economies, and policies. In the following sections of this article, I will explore the anthropological analysis of neoliberalism, with a particular focus on the neoliberal academy. This exploration aims to provide a contextual framework for considering the problematic positionality of contemporary critical scholars.

Anthropological interest in neoliberalism gained momentum in the early 2000s, fuelled in part by the burgeoning governmentality studies that focused on the development of Foucauldian concepts of neoliberal power and biopolitics (Foucault 2008). The economic crisis of 2008 further exacerbated these trends and inspired many researchers to actively participate in the various protests organized during that time. In the United States and beyond, demonstrators rallying under the banner of “Occupy Wall Street” brought together students and respected academics to express their dissent not only against the pervasive influence of finance but also against the spread of neoliberal practices into various aspects of our lives, including universities. As Pauline Gardiner Barber, Belinda Leach, and Winnie Lem have noted: “In Canada during April 2011, students mobilized on the largest university campus in the country against the corporatisation of the university. Earlier in the same year, their counterparts in the UK flooded the streets in massive numbers to protest the doubling of tuition fees and the dismantling of social infrastructure” (Barber, Leach and Lem 2012, 1).

The university is one of the many institutions that have experienced the effects of neoliberal imaginative and managerial restructuring. While this phenomenon is recognized as a global trend, the processes of neoliberalisation show variations in different socio-cultural contexts. Accordingly, Aihwa Ong defines neoliberalism as a mobile technology, a global form that interacts with local political and ethical regimes, resulting in the production of site-specific assemblages (Ong 2007). A common thread, however, is that neoliberalism not only produces structural transformations within institutions but, more importantly, it introduces novel languages, norms, ethics, and politics (Shore and Wright 2000). In the realm of higher education, this transformation extends to how we conceptualize universities, the processes of research and teaching, our roles as scholars and the responsibilities that go with them.

What is particularly specific to neoliberalism, as Michel Foucault noted, is the application of the economic model to analyse “a series of objects, domains of behaviour or conduct which were not market forms of behaviour or conduct” (Foucault 2008, 267-268). This implies the application of “the grid, the schema, and the model of *homo oeconomicus* not only to every economic actor but also to every social actor in general” (Foucault 2008, 268). Foucault perceives neoliberalism not merely through

the lens of economic theory or political ideology, but rather as an art of guiding social subjects. What is distinctive about the neoliberal mode of governance is that the source of power is not explicitly defined but rather directed towards generating “economic inducement that will lead to the desired behaviour” (Kipnis 2008, 279). The aim is to foster individuals who are accountable not solely to superiors but primarily to themselves. As a result, power operates not through traditional methods of command and control but rather through the calculated choices of formally autonomous actors (Kipnis 2008, 279). Neoliberal governance is thus characterized by the self-discipline of individuals to embody attributes of accountability, responsibility, flexibility, and entrepreneurship.

There is a significant body of research on neoliberalism and neoliberal governmentality in diverse spheres of life. Critical anthropologists highlight how social subjects employ various forms of self-management techniques to influence desired behaviours (Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Ferguson 2015, Thedvall 2017). In his book, for example, Michał Mokrzan (2019) interprets coaching services as neoliberal governance technologies adopted by the middle class to cultivate their emotional capital, which is now recognized as an essential skill in self-management. Those who receive these services increase their self-awareness, self-confidence, and self-esteem. They also develop entrepreneurial skills and strengthen their sense of responsibility, mental resilience, and emotional regulation. All of these skills help individuals to meet the challenges posed by competitive work environments.

The application of the Foucauldian conceptual framework and the analysis of neoliberal forms of governmentality lead Mokrzan to rather unexpected conclusions. Over time, the anthropologist comes to an uncomfortable realization: his own work has been shaped by neoliberal governmentality. The exploration of coaching practices eventually results in the recognition of the anthropologist’s own context — that of working within an institution that employs neoliberal tools of governance. Consequently, Mokrzan comes to the realization that he embodies the neoliberal subject. Although the effects of neoliberalism on higher education in general and on anthropology — as a specific discipline — have been extensively examined and explored from various angles, Mokrzan’s ethnographic approach prompts reflection on the researcher’s own positionality. This approach shows how even today’s critical anthropologists are themselves entangled in neoliberal regimes of knowledge production. This raises a thought-provoking question: Is critical anthropology even possible under such circumstances?

As mentioned earlier, a distinctive feature of neoliberal power, as described by Foucault in terms of neoliberal governmentality, is that it operates indirectly, using various incentives to steer social subjects towards self-guidance through techniques of self-management. As Mokrzan and I argue elsewhere (2020), in the context of

higher education, and similarly to other institutions subjected to the processes of neoliberalisation, considerable emphasis is placed on the development of tools that encourage scholars to engage in competitive behaviours. This process is facilitated by a variety of methods to evaluate the performance of individuals, departments, and universities. For example, in the Polish context, a number of points are assigned to different scientific activities as a means of assessing a researcher's achievements. Although many anthropologists oppose this evaluation system, we are nonetheless involved in the affective and self-management practices that form its basis.

The neoliberal mode of governmentality operates simultaneously through the rational, calculative decisions of social actors (Rose 1996) and, as Frédéric Lordon explains, through positive (joy, fulfilment, pride, relief) and negative (stress, frustration, shame) affects that guide our thoughts and actions (Lordon 2010). Therefore, the entanglement of individuals in the web of neoliberal power reaches deep into the realm of emotions and affective experiences as well as strategic choices made in response to the evaluation system. This shows that neoliberalism in the sense presented by Nikolas Rose (1996), infiltrates the very fabric of the subject itself, appealing to the constitutive foundation of one's own identity and leaving little room for emancipation. Success, achievement, and recognition are the incentives that it offers, inviting individuals to participate in the complex game of affects and calculations, capturing their attention and ensuring their involvement, which in turn influences their actions and the way they approach work planning and the scientific field as a whole. This rationale can lead to a paradoxical situation: although a research grant is not a strict requirement for my fieldwork, applying for one is nonetheless essential both for the benefit of my employer and for my professional development. As such, its impact ripples not only through my personal evaluation but also through the rankings of my department and university, which in turn affect how much funding they receive.

The Foucauldian conceptual framework of analysis allows us to transcend our individual perspectives and shed light on the complex predicament in which critical anthropologists find themselves today. However, it also seems important in this context is that self-reflexivity, a powerful tool of critical anthropology, does not provide an immediate means of breaking free from the grip of neoliberal power. Even researchers who are critical of neoliberalism may gradually succumb to its emotional influence. There is a sense of satisfaction that comes with securing a grant or publishing in a high-ranking journal. This reveals a further paradox: having a cognitive understanding of the mechanisms of neoliberalism does not necessarily protect one from its emotional seductions. As Mokrzan and I have argued elsewhere (2020), despite our recognition that the value of our work transcends quantifiable measures of efficiency and productivity, the rankings — designed to make our performance ob-

jective — exert considerable influence over our emotional experiences. These rankings have the capacity to evoke feelings of frustration and injustice, and to serve as a source of pride and inner satisfaction. All of these emotional responses are expressions of conformity to the neoliberal affective paradigm. In addition to this element, there are also decisions that need to be made on a daily basis. These include such calculative decisions as where to publish and what specific scientific endeavours to pursue in order to meet evaluation criteria.

#### CHALLENGES OF PRACTICING CRITICAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN NEOLIBERAL ACADEMIA

Within the field of critical anthropology, the focus extends beyond the traditional scope of simply reflecting on one's own society. It also includes an in-depth exploration of the positionalities of anthropologists themselves as social actors who are profoundly influenced by their specific socio-cultural contexts. Their insightful and thought-provoking debates have had a profound impact on the development of reflections on the processes of knowledge production in anthropology. This aspect is particularly relevant in today's exploration of the place of critical anthropology within neoliberal academia. The insights of radical anthropologists offer a valuable perspective in this regard, as their analysis focuses on the economic and political context in which anthropology operates.

The particular value of radical criticism is that, by scrutinizing the interplay between the self and the other through the lens of power relations, it not only highlights the importance of critiquing Western society, but also directs this critical gaze towards anthropology itself — an institution that was born within that very social framework. This focus encompassed the intricate interplay between anthropological knowledge production and the prevailing power dynamics that highlighted the complex relationships between researchers and the societies they studied. In contrast to their successors in the 1980s, radical anthropologists were more interested in the structural underpinnings and systemic forces that shape anthropology and its practitioners, and advocated a comprehensive examination of the discipline's embeddedness within broader socio-political landscapes. This perspective is particularly relevant today, as critical anthropologists turn their attention to neoliberalism and engage in a thorough critique of its institutions. In doing so, they may uncover a compelling revelation: that they themselves actively participate in producing neoliberal subjecthood. This realisation raises profound questions about the feasibility of practicing critical anthropology in such a context.

The radical critics of the 1960s and 1970s presented a startling picture of the redistribution of power between the Western self and the non-Western other. This image reflects how the ability to destabilise dominant discourses depends on the perspective and experiences of the subjugated other, which in turn catalyse subsequent political action, ethical commitment, and theoretical reconstruction. As a result, the framework rooted in the recognition of power relations between the self and the other offers a diverse range of avenues for engagement. These avenues are all guided by the fundamental principle that anthropological knowledge should be used in the service of marginalised and oppressed communities. This principle was a guiding beacon for radical critics in the 1970s, when social actors' positionalities were more distinct and well-defined. During this period, the source of power, symbolised by the West and capitalism, could be seen through the lens of Marxist theory and resulted in a relatively straightforward confrontational approach (Armbruster 2008).

However, with the rise of neoliberalism, as Foucault illuminated, power becomes diffuse, lacking a distinct source, and often permeating the subjects themselves. Consequently, the attempt to challenge neoliberalism takes on a more nuanced character as the problem arises when trying to assess it from within an environment which is itself shaped by the neoliberal principles. This situation casts a shadow over the practice of critical anthropology within the framework of neoliberalism. Doubts as to whether critical anthropology can maintain its power and integrity when its practitioners are themselves influenced by the very forces they seek to challenge. This issue is a central point of introspection for contemporary critical anthropologists, urging them to navigate the intricate web of power, subjectivity, and the socio-political context in their pursuit of transformative scholarship.

In Ghassan Hage's perspective, the capacity of critical thought to "take us outside of ourselves" enables us to understand the external influences that shape our identities and behaviours as social agents, and thus holds a certain potential for liberation. As he points out, it implies the promise of transformative possibilities: "There is always an outside of a system of intelligibility, of governmentality, of domestication, of instrumental reason . . . etc." (Hage 2012, 306). However, when examining the dominance of neoliberal power and its infiltration into the academic realm, the critical ability to "take us outside of ourselves" reveals quite the opposite: it exposes the extent of our entanglement, leaving little room for hopes of change and also casting doubts upon the viability of critical anthropology itself.

A remarkable excerpt from Bronislaw Malinowski's book *The Dynamics of Culture Change* is very instructive in this regard. This is the passage where the author proposes to take a bird's-eye view of Africa in order to stimulate the reader's imagination in understanding the ongoing cultural transformations on the continent. Malinowski tries to convince the reader that his intention is not purely metaphorical, but rather

akin to an actual view that “a passenger flying over the inland route of the *Imperial Airways* can obtain [emphasis added]” (Malinowski 1945, 9). The compelling excerpt effectively demonstrates that even an apparently neutral and all-encompassing view is inherently situated. This begs the question: Can we really get out of our airplanes? Is there an escape route? Or do we, as Mokrzan aptly describes, “resistantly but humbly” (2019, 411) perpetuate the circumstances into which we are thrown?

The introduction of the neoliberal mode of governmentality in various institutions, including universities, has led to the establishment of mechanisms that shape the attitudes of individuals. The primary aim of these mechanisms is to internalise the desire for personal advancement. The power of governmentality is evident in our tendency to appraise both our work and ourselves in terms of rankings, even though we recognise their unreliability. This connection between academic achievements and personal growth leads us to subject them to evaluation through available assessment tools. In essence, whether we like it or not, we all assume the role of neoliberal subjects. These considerations raise other significant questions: Can critical anthropology operate effectively within the neoliberal university? How can we actively resist in an environment where the scope for emancipation is limited? This is particularly relevant when even the most radical anthropologists benefit from critiquing neoliberalism by publishing such critiques in high-ranking journals.

As I have attempted to show, the impact of neoliberal governmentality goes beyond mere structural changes within universities; it also shapes our subjectivities, influences our choices, and fundamentally affects our perceptions of science. Despite being enmeshed in the intricate web of neoliberal governance, contemporary critical anthropologists can, at the very least, try to reflect upon the potential reassessment of the role of the university, its codes of conduct, ethical norms, and the type of governance that should inform our practice. This introspection requires us to consider the values we want to promote and the kind of the university environment in which we hope to work in. Consequently, this task represents a significant undertaking, not only for navigating the intricate nuances of the neoliberal academic landscape, but as a fundamental step towards initiating change.

In the context of revolutionary anthropology — a project advocated by radical critics in the 1970s due to the recognition of a clear redistribution of power in the West — the political subject of intervention was straightforward, and the sides were clearly defined. The neoliberal form of governmentality, however, makes it more difficult to form such a cohesive political community of intervention, as power becomes diffused and internalised by the subjects. In addition, there are researchers who accept neoliberal tools of governance as valid and believe in an idea of personal development and an academia structured through the lens of calculative choices made by individuals. The task before us is to decide whether these are the values we

wish to endorse and whether this is the model of university we desire to support. This comprehensive examination of our roles, values and academic environment is essential not only to critically understand our current situation, but also to actively contribute to its transformation.

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#### AUTHOR'S CONTACT:

Marta Songin-Mokrzan

Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Lodz

E-mail: marta.songin@filhist.uni.lodz.pl

ORCID: 0000-0003-0019-9200



