



Dark anthropology and its others

Theory since the eighties

Sherry B. ORTNER, *University of California, Los Angeles*

In this article I consider several emergent trends in anthropology since the 1980s against a backdrop of the rise of neoliberalism as both an economic and a governmental formation. I consider first the turn to what I call “dark anthropology,” that is, anthropology that focuses on the harsh dimensions of social life (power, domination, inequality, and oppression), as well as on the subjective experience of these dimensions in the form of depression and hopelessness. I then consider a range of work that is explicitly or implicitly a reaction to this dark turn, under the rubric of “anthropologies of the good,” including studies of “the good life” and “happiness,” as well as studies of morality and ethics. Finally, I consider what may be thought of as a different kind of anthropology of the good, namely new directions in the anthropology of critique, resistance, and activism.

Keywords: anthropological theory, neoliberalism, Marx, Foucault, well-being, morality, critique, resistance

Academic work, at least in the social sciences, cannot be detached from the conditions of the real world in which it takes place. The theoretical frameworks we use, and the phenomena we choose to explore, are affected in myriad ways by the political, economic, and cultural circumstances in which we carry out our research, even if that research is about the distant past or faraway places. As science studies scholars have argued for decades, even the study of physical objects and forces remote from human affairs is conditioned by the historical circumstances surrounding the research.

The case in point for this article is the transformation of contemporary anthropology in relation to, among other things, the onset of the socio-economic-political



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order called “neoliberalism.” While I will define the term more specifically later in the article, I need to say a few words about it here. In the period under discussion—roughly from the mid-1980s to the mid-2010s—neoliberalism as a new and more brutal form of capitalism was expanding rapidly over the globe. On the domestic front, the American economy in the 1980s began what historian Robert Brenner (2006) has called “the long downturn,” culminating in the near crash of the stock market in 2008, followed by a deep recession. The banks had grown “too big to fail,” were bailed out after the crisis with taxpayers’ money, and promptly rewarded themselves with giant bonuses to their top executives. In addition, the gap between the rich and poor in America increased steadily during this period, eventually exceeding the gap in place before the Great Depression of the 1930s—and economists are increasingly pessimistic about reversing this trend (Piketty 2014). Meanwhile, on the international front, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank pursued neoliberal economic policies that essentially crushed the economies of some of the smaller and poorer nations of the world (Ferguson 1999; Duménil and Lévy 2004; Harvey 2005; Klein 2007; Ortner 2011).

I write, admittedly, from the perspective of the United States, where the situation has been very extreme, particularly with respect to the upward transfers of wealth and its impact on American politics, and with respect to the growth of deep inequality. Of course there is a great deal of variation across national and local cases. Aihwa Ong cautions us against seeing neoliberalism “as a tidal wave . . . that sweeps from dominant countries to smaller ones” (2006: 12), and instead urges us to look at the complex “assemblages” (Ong and Collier 2005) into which neoliberalism enters in different times and places. In addition to these kinds of variations, the situation is actively evolving in different parts of the world even as I write. Anthropologists are beginning to document creative adaptations to neoliberalism, as well as resistance movements against it—and, in any event, some countries are clearly doing better than others. So again, the discussions in this article do not assume some uniform unfolding of neoliberalism everywhere, but are written against a backdrop of the American case, and in the period in which conditions were particularly “dark.”

This article also does not mean to suggest that neoliberalism explains all the bad things happening in the United States and globally. Issues of race and gender, and religious and ethnic violence, have their own local histories and their own internal dynamics, although they do not escape entanglement with neoliberal forms of economy and governance where these appear.

And finally, this article does not pretend to cover all developments in anthropology in the period under discussion. Many interesting and important new developments are not discussed, including the “ontological turn” (e.g., Costa and Fausto 2010; Graeber 2015; Salmond 2014; Tsing 2015), the “affective turn” (e.g., Mankekar 2015; Mazzarella 2009; Rutherford 2016), and the turn to “ethnographic theory” (da Col and Graeber 2011), among others. Rather this essay focuses on a cluster of three interrelated areas of work that I see as related to the problematic workings of neoliberalism: (1) the emergence of what I call “dark anthropology,” including both theory and ethnography; (2) the dialectically related emergence of what have been called “anthropologies of ‘the good’”; and (3) the re-emergence of the study of “resistance,” which I treat as an umbrella term for a range of new critical ethnographic and theoretical work.



The triumph of dark anthropology

As I discussed in an earlier essay (Ortner 1984), in the 1960s and 1970s American anthropology was dominated by a split between a “culturalist” wing, led by Clifford Geertz (e.g., 1973) and his students, and a Marxist or materialist wing, led by Eric Wolf (e.g., 1982) and his colleagues (e.g., Hymes 1972). Inspired mainly by Max Weber, Geertz and his followers were interested in new ways of thinking about culture—about how culture provides people with meaning in their lives, and about how anthropologists can come to understand those meanings. Wolf and company, on the other hand, were inspired mainly by Marx, and were interested in the ways in which people’s lives are shaped less by their culture, and more by the economic and political forces in play, both locally and globally. From the point of view of the culturalists, the work of the political economy scholars was reductionist: people’s motives were reduced to simplistic “interests,” and people’s lives were seen as reflexes of mechanical forces. From the point of view of the materialists, on the other hand, the work of the culturalists was basically effete: treating culture as literary texts, they ignored the harsh realities of power that drove so much of human history.

The culturalist perspective prevailed through much of the 1960s and 1970s, at least in the United States. At the same time, and partly overlapping with the Marxist/political economy approach, new critiques were taking shape that also insisted on the importance of taking questions of power, inequality, domination, and exploitation into account. Of particular significance was the rise of postcolonial theory across a wide range of disciplines. Within anthropology, an early and very important publication was Talal Asad’s collection *Anthropology and the colonial encounter* (1973).¹ The early 1970s also saw the rise of feminist studies, again across a wide range of disciplines. The major entries into this field in anthropology were Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere’s *Woman, culture and society* (1974) and Rayna (Rapp) Reiter’s *Toward an anthropology of women* (1975). Although race was not foregrounded in the same way until somewhat later (but see Szwed 1972), the critical studies of colonialism and postcolonialism contained a strong dimension of racial critique.

The practitioners of these new kinds of work did not necessarily agree with one another: the political economy people tended to ignore gender (if not race); the colonialism scholars often had issues with political economy; and the gender scholars did not necessarily agree with the others. But they all agreed, at least implicitly, that anthropology had to start paying attention to issues of power and inequality, and in the long run, starting somewhere in the 1980s, they came to prevail. Questions of power and inequality have come to dominate the theoretical landscape, both at both the level of theoretical “ancestors” (Marx, Weber, etc.), and at the level of the most prominent subjects of contemporary research (colonialism, neoliberalism, patriarchy, racial inequality, etc.). I call this the rise of “dark anthropology”: that is, anthropology that emphasizes the harsh and brutal dimensions of human experience, and the structural and historical conditions that produce them. This

1. Five years later Edward Said published *Orientalism* (1978), which was hailed as a work of great originality, although he was making points virtually identical with Asad’s.

shift toward dark anthropology (including both “dark theory” and “dark ethnography”) is at least in part a response to the internal critiques just outlined, but also a response—I would argue—to the increasingly problematic conditions of the real world under neoliberalism.²

Let us look first at the shift in theoretical ancestors. In 1971, Anthony Giddens published one of the all-time best-sellers of social science literature, *Capitalism and modern social theory*. Giddens argued that modern social theory was launched by the work of Karl Marx, and by that of Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, responding in part to Marx’s work. This represented a significant break with previous conventions in the social sciences, which, for varying reasons on the two sides of the Atlantic, had for the most part left the work of Marx out of the canon of theory. The Marx–Durkheim–Weber set is still probably taught as foundational in many, if not most, graduate core courses, but in fact I would propose that the role of the three figures in defining key theoretical issues in the field has changed considerably, as part of the shift of focus being discussed here. Insofar as Durkheim was primarily associated with a static functionalist perspective, and insofar as he displayed relatively little interest in power and inequality, his influence has greatly faded, although there are certain neo-Durkheimian trends emerging that I will return to later. Insofar as the work of Weber came to be associated primarily with issues of culture, and in fact with the largely apolitical culture concept of Clifford Geertz, the influence of Weber has waned as well, although his work on the cultural origins of capitalism and forms of domination keeps him more actively in the mix. At the same time, the influence of Marx has grown enormously, in several respects. His general model of capitalist modernity, emphasizing economic exploitation and class inequality, is, if not hegemonic, then very widely accepted, even as it has been cracked open and complexified in myriad forms of neo- and post-Marxism(s). Moreover, the dominant version of the culture concept in use today is the Marxist-inspired concept of hegemony, a political sharpening of the anthropological culture concept with the Marxist concept of ideology (R. Williams 1977). At the same time, the influence of Foucault, who was almost invisible to English-language anthropology in the 1970s, has expanded to major proportions. Foucault developed a theoretical framework that is deeply concerned with forms and modalities of power. He has given us a whole new vocabulary of power language, including “governmentality,” “biopolitics,” “subjectification,” and more, all of which seek to grasp the multifarious ways in which power in the modern world is both grossly and subtly deployed (Foucault 1977, 1980, 2008; see also Burchell, Gordon, and Miller 1991).

The work of Marx and Foucault, each in its own way, both defines and represents the shift to “dark theory,” theory that asks us to see the world almost entirely in terms of power, exploitation, and chronic pervasive inequality. Some of Foucault’s work is an almost perfect exemplar of this concept, a virtually totalizing theory of a world in which power is in every crevice of life, and in which there is no outside

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2. There are obviously many other factors behind this shift at that point in time. Among other things, one would have to look more closely at other tensions within the field, particularly those surrounding the publication of *Writing culture* (Clifford and Marcus 1986). I am indebted to Johnny Parry for emphasizing this point, but unfortunately it cannot be dealt with within the confines of this article.



to power (e.g., *The history of sexuality*, 1980). Of course, his thought evolved over the course of his career, and some of his later work moves away from the relentless power problematic (especially *Technologies of the self* [Martin, Gutman, and Hutton 1988]). Nonetheless I think it is fair to say that it is the dark Foucault—the Foucault of the Panopticon, of *Discipline and punish* (1977), of capillary power, and of multiple forms of governmentality—who has been having the greatest influence on sociocultural anthropological theory. The same point can be made with respect to Marx. Although there are certain optimistic aspects of Marxist theory, the Marx in play in anthropological theory today is primarily the darkest Marx, who emphasized the enrichment of the wealthy and powerful at the expense of the poor and powerless, and the relentless global expansion of capitalism as a brutal and dehumanizing social and economic formation.

If the array of theoretical ancestors has shifted toward “dark theory,” so have many of the subjects and objects of ethnographic research shifted toward dark subject matter. The primary example of this to be discussed in this article will be the widespread turn to the study of neoliberalism and its effects. But before getting to that it is important to note briefly, along the same lines, the explosion of the study of all things colonial.

It is hard to overstate the degree to which the colonial framework has reshaped the way anthropology relates to the world today. In my undergraduate anthropology major and graduate training, the word “colonialism” was, as far as I can recall, hardly mentioned. Anthropologists interested in colonialism in that era, like Bernard Cohn (1996), were considered odd and marginal figures. But in the wake of the work of Talal Asad, Edward Said, and eventually many others, the field as a whole was quite literally transformed. It became impossible to look at the so-called Third World without understanding it as part of a history of colonial (and, for the Marxists, capitalist) expansion. The division of the world into rich and poor nations that we have today became intelligible as a result of, among other things, the extraction of wealth from the colonies in the past. Many social and cultural formations that appeared in earlier anthropological work as “timeless” came to appear in a different light when set against a backdrop of colonial history (see, e.g., Mamdani 1996 on ethnic conflict; Dirks 2001 on caste). Fine-grained histories of the colonial encounter (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997 in Africa; Merry 2000 in Hawaii) tell stories of the relentless remaking of peoples and cultures under conditions of Western (i.e., missionary and colonial) penetration and domination that were simply not on the agenda when I was an anthropology major, and that represent one of the many dark transformations of the field under discussion here.

Ultimately, the postcolonial and neoliberal frameworks will begin to converge, as most postcolonies will, through one or another mechanism, be neoliberalized. Here, then, I turn to the phenomenon of neoliberalism.

Neoliberalism in the world and in anthropology

If neoliberalism (among other things) lies behind the rise of dark theory, then we can say that it also lies in front of it: neoliberalism and its effects have become both objects of study and frameworks for understanding other objects of study across

a wide range of anthropological work (for starters, see Greenhouse 2010; Gusteron and Besteman 2010). As with colonialism, it is hard to overstate the degree to which these issues have come to dominate the field. I will focus here on two of the largest bodies of work that have accumulated on this subject since the 1980s. One begins with neoliberalism as a specific kind of economic system and traces out the impact of neoliberal economic policies in both the Global North and the Global South. The other begins with neoliberalism as a specific form of governmentality, and traces the variety of forms it takes in different contexts. I will look at these two areas separately, but I emphasize here that this is not some hard-and-fast distinction, and there is much overlap between the two kinds of work. I emphasize, too, that this is not meant to be some exhaustive analysis of neoliberalism as such, but rather it is an attempt to sort out some of the more prominent kinds of work that anthropologists have been doing on the subject.

Economics: Accumulation by dispossession

David Harvey begins his brief and indispensable history of neoliberalism with the following basic definition:

Neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (2005: 2)

This institutional framework includes, among many other things, the removal of government regulations on business; the reduction of the power of labor to make demands; the downsizing of the labor force itself; the privatization of many public goods and institutions; and the radical reduction of programs of social assistance for poor people. The effect of all this has been the growth of extreme inequality both within and across nations, with a handful of wealthy individuals getting dramatically richer, the masses of poor people getting significantly poorer, and the middle class hanging on—where it does—only by dint of extremely hard work and self-exploitation. Harvey has described this as a system of “accumulation by dispossession” (ibid.: 159), whereby wealth is redistributed upward within and across capitalist economies.

It is important to note that neoliberalism emerged against a backdrop of a long period of prosperity in the Global North after World War II, producing a sense of security in that era and great optimism for the future. In the United States this took the form of the idea of “the American Dream,” the idea that anyone could achieve economic security for themselves and their families if they simply worked hard enough and had the right attitudes (see, e.g., Ortner 2006). Globally, this took the form of “modernization” and “development” programs, with the idea that the poor nations of the Global South could “catch up” with a reasonable infusion of material and technological resources from the “more developed” nations. While at one level all of this was ideological, it was nonetheless grounded in real material conditions: in the Global North, economies were booming, and levels of inequality were falling; in the Global South, many poor nations experienced a period of economic growth and a sense of promise for the future.

Starting in the 1980s, under Reagan in the United States and Thatcher in the United Kingdom, all this began to change. Under neoliberal policies of downsizing and offshoring to increase profitability, many plants and other production facilities were shut down, and hundreds of thousands of people were laid off from their jobs. At the same time, under neoliberal theories of the importance of shrinking the state and abolishing, or at least cutting to the bone, virtually all social support programs, many fewer resources were available for people and families suffering from un- and underemployment. Moreover, these theories were imposed on other nations as the price of accepting loans from the world powers. Many individuals and whole nations (again with a lot of variation) rapidly began losing whatever resources they may have accumulated in the past.

Starting in the early 1990s, anthropologists began to chronicle the ways in which this process played out, both at home and abroad, including not only the negative economic effects but also the emergence of painful new “structures of feeling” (R. Williams 1977). In 1993, Pierre Bourdieu and colleagues published a large volume titled *The weight of the world: Social suffering in contemporary society*. Based on interviews with native French and French-immigrant working-class people, it presents first-person accounts of, and scholarly reflections on, the miseries of life in the new economy. I pick one example out of the more than six hundred pages of mostly very disturbing interviews. Bourdieu quotes a union official on the consequences of unemployment: “There is a lot of pain, a lot of suffering, mental and physical, people suffer and suffer. . . . Unemployment divides us and brings out the worst in us, individualism, jealousy, envy . . .” (Bourdieu et al. 1993: 318). In 1999, James Ferguson published an account of how Zambia, which seemed to be one of the most promising sites of successful modernization and development in Africa, has been both deindustrialized and neoliberalized, and how there is a pervasive sense of the undoing of the earlier mood of promise. He describes the sense among many contemporary Zambians of what he calls “abjection, of “being thrown out [and] being thrown down” (1999: 236), and of disconnection, of being “unplugged” from the world system, a place where—among other things—the major airlines no longer stop. In 2013, Anne Allison published an extended study of what she calls “precarious Japan,” recounting the many ways in which Japanese people of all ages are suffering in the new conditions of economic and social insecurity. In the chapter on what she calls “ordinary refugeism,” she discusses the rise in the rates of suicide, and in forms of social withdrawal, including the voluntary homelessness of “net café refugees” and the by-now well-known phenomenon of *hikikomori*, or youths who withdraw to their rooms in their parents’ house and refuse to come out for years on end.

Turning to the United States, anthropologists began by looking at the consequences of the deindustrialization of the economy in the 1980s. As factories and other industrial facilities (e.g., mines) shut down, many thousands of workers were thrown out of work, and the American working class basically collapsed, economically and politically. Several ethnographic studies documented the impact of plant closings on workers and working-class communities. Kathryn Dudley (1994) conducted a study of the far-reaching impact of the closing of the Chrysler auto plant on the town of Kenosha, Wisconsin; the subtitle of her book is a play on both the closing of the auto plant and the closing of hope: “the end of the line.” And Christine

Walley (2013) wrote a personal ethnography about the closing of the Wisconsin Steel Works in southeast Chicago, and its impact on her family along with the rest of the community. She tells us, among other things, about her father's increasing depression over his unemployment, and his eventual refusal to shave, change his clothes, or leave the house (ibid.: 128).³

The plant closings of the 1980s were represented as necessary outcomes of globalization, in which advances in technologies of communications and transportation provided access to cheaper labor markets.⁴ American industry represented itself as "having to" outsource production in order to compete in the global market. Yet there is a way in which neoliberalism seems to foster a kind of contemptuous attitude toward the working classes and the poor beyond the necessity for profit. This attitude is embodied in the shrinkage of the state and the slow death of all its social service functions, noted earlier, and it plays out in many different ways in different parts of the society. Thus beyond deindustrialization we see a kind of more active war on the poor, again documented ethnographically in a number of sites and contexts. For example, Jane Collins (2010) has looked at the ways in which Wal-Mart destroys whole communities and impoverishes its workers at home and abroad. She argues that this destruction is not an accidental by-product of a rational business plan, but rather that "there is an integral, intentional, and multifaceted relationship between Wal-Mart and poverty" (ibid.: 99). Brett Williams has documented the growth of a highly profitable money-lending industry that operates mainly in poor neighborhoods, and of "an aggressive and abusive debt-collection industry" that pursues the borrowers when they cannot repay their debts. She concludes, "With bad credit you are not a human being any more" (Williams 2010: 230; see also Wacquant 2009 on "punishing the poor").

And for an in-depth ethnographic study of neoliberalism at work on a poor community devastated by disaster, we may turn to Vincanne Adams' study of the before and after of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005. The flooding that destroyed many poor neighborhoods was caused not by the hurricane itself, but by the breaking of the levees that had protected the city from the surrounding waters. The background to the disaster, then, is the neglect and deterioration of the levees, and Adams tells us of the increasing influence in the federal government of big private contractors like Halliburton and Blackwater, who played a major role in diverting funds and attention toward more profitable areas of work, leaving the levees highly vulnerable. On the other end, after the hurricane and massive flooding, a national emergency was declared, but the Federal Emergency Management Authority (FEMA) was similarly in bed with these and other large contractors, who obtained the contracts for conducting the emergency relief even though they had no experience in such situations. Adams calls the recovery a "second order

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3. Similarly, Michael Moore's documentary *Roger and me* (1989) documents the devastation of his hometown, Flint, Michigan, as a result of the closing of the General Motors auto plant there
 4. Those "cheaper labor markets" have also been studied by anthropologists, starting with Ong (1987), and including studies of the conditions of workers along the US--Mexican border (Fernández-Kelly 1983; Sklair 1993; Wright 2001).

disaster” (2013: 1), in which almost no one received the help they were promised, and neighborhoods and lives were left still in ruins.

In sum, in the worst cases, which is to say among the poor, there is increasing poverty, deterioration of life conditions, and increasing hopelessness and depression. But even in the middle classes, there is a sense of declining fortunes (Newman 1993), loss of optimism, and great insecurity about the present and the future.

These dark moods have not failed to register in the public culture—film, television, advertising, print media—which must be included in any broad definition of ethnography. It is worth noting, then, that Anne Allison’s concept of “ordinary refugeeism,” noted earlier, was in fact inspired by a documentary film called (in translation) *Net café refugees—The drifting poor* (Mizushima 2007), which had a major impact in Japan when it came out. My own recent book, *Not Hollywood* (Ortner 2013a), chronicles the rise of American independent film in the 1980s and 1990s. Independent filmmakers pride themselves on being committed to harsh realism, as against what they see as the fake glossiness of Hollywood movies. In many, even the majority, of independent films, emotional violence is the prevalent form of social relations, darkness and depression the dominant mood, and happy endings are virtually nonexistent. Finally, Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel optimism*, also drawn from readings of public culture, provides a brilliant reflection on the “fraying fantasies” of “upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy” in the neoliberal era, and the affective consequences of these deteriorating aspects of the good life (2011: 3). The central trope of the book is the title phrase, “cruel optimism,” which is defined as a relation “when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (ibid.: 1) and refers to the fact that people still cling to the props of the old order, even though they are no longer functional in the world we inhabit now.

It is important to mention here that most of these works do not end on a completely negative note. Most of them provide indications of local forms of critique of, and resistance to, the new order. For example, in Allison’s *Precarious Japan*, we are introduced to Yuasa Makoto, cofounder of the Reverse Poverty Network, and co-director of Moyai, a drop-in support center for mostly homeless people who need both social support and practical assistance in getting their lives back on track. And in *Not Hollywood*, I devote a chapter to politically active filmmaking by documentary filmmakers, who show us many of the dark sides of neoliberalism discussed here, but who also show us individuals and groups who are attempting to challenge these trends. I will discuss resistance and activism more fully in the final part of this article.

***Governmentality: The republic of fear*⁵**

Foucault’s concept of governmentality has been highly productive, and has inaugurated a number of different lines of work in anthropology. One line follows from his arguments about the production of the liberal subject—the freely choosing individual—as the hegemonic form of governmentality in the neoliberal world (Rose 1996; Brown 2003). In that context anthropologists have asked not so much about the impact of neoliberalism as an economic policy, as discussed in the previous

5. The phrase is from the title of Lancaster (2010).

section, as about the ways in society is being neoliberalized, that is, made to operate on neoliberal principles of market efficiency, and geared to the production of self-managing entrepreneurial neoliberal subjects (Ong 2006; Foucault 2008; Urciuoli 2010). Another line of inquiry, also descending fairly directly from Foucault, has followed the linkages between governmentality and the regulation of populations. Thus Aihwa Ong explores the forms of governmentality enacted by states and other agencies in regulating the voluntary or involuntary mobility of “mobile subjects,” whether elites like Chinese businessmen or “virtual slaves” like Southeast Asian domestic workers (1999, 2006; see also Gregory 2007). And Akhil Gupta (2012) has examined the “structural violence” enacted against the poor through governmental mechanisms of bureaucracy in India.

However, there is another line of anthropological inquiry into governmentality broadly defined that has received somewhat less attention: what Roger Lancaster called “punitive governance” (2010: 74), or the proliferation of forms of violence by the state against its citizens. The link between neoliberalism and proliferating state-organized violence, including but not limited to war, has been explored in depth by Naomi Klein (2007). Central to her argument in *The shock doctrine* is the point that incidents of extreme violence, whether natural disasters or political coups, have everywhere been part of the strategy for imposing neoliberal economic measures on polities, in both municipalities, like New Orleans, and whole countries like Chile or Poland. She also observes a widespread connection between the imposition of neoliberal economic measures and the use of torture, in the United States and elsewhere. She quotes the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano as saying, “How can this inequality be maintained if not through jolts of electric shock?” (ibid.: 7).

In the United States, this kind of violence by the state against its own citizenry is particularly visible in, among other things, the proliferation of prisons. Roger Lancaster has written about the United States as, in Foucault’s phrase, a “carceral state,” arguing that “punitive governance is the real cultural logic of neoliberalism” (2010: 63, 74). Lancaster quotes statistics to the effect that “the United States now ranks first in the world both in the rate of imprisonment (one in every 99 adult residents is behind bars) and the absolute number of people imprisoned (2.26 million)” (ibid.: 64). A high proportion of those prisoners in turn are African American, who suffer the double harms of poverty and race. But a carceral state is not simply one that has many prisoners; it is one in which “a bloated prison system supplies the norms for governance in general” (ibid.: 63). This, then, is the other side of neoliberal governmentality: if in the classical/Foucauldian scheme, neoliberal governmentality works through the consent of ostensibly free subjects, one of the ways in which it claims to secure that freedom is by incarcerating, and indeed in many contexts killing, those who supposedly threaten it—not just criminals, of course, but in the post-9/11 world all those construed as “terrorists.”

If, as Lancaster argues, the carceral state “supplies the norms for governance in general,” it also supplies a kind of reverse and perverse model for ordinary social life. In his social history of Los Angeles, social critic Mike Davis (1992) has a chapter called “Fortress L.A.,” in which he explores the new architecture in Los Angeles, and the ways in which a kind of prison aesthetic has taken over the city. He shows through illustrations how buildings and homes have become more prison-like, while prisons are being “architecturally naturalized” (ibid.: 256). The cover of

the book is a photograph of the Metropolitan Detention Center in downtown L.A., which he calls a “postmodern Bastille” (ibid.: 257). As for the point that buildings and homes are becoming more prison-like, we may turn to several ethnographic studies of gated communities. Setha Low (2010) has documented the rise of such communities in the United States. We learn that increasing numbers of people are moving to gated communities in order to feel more secure from “crime,” yet Low shows ethnographically that people in these communities actually come to feel less rather than more safe: “Living behind gates reinforces the perception that people who live outside are dangerous or bad. This social splitting has always existed, but the walls and gates exacerbate social distinctions” (ibid.: 35). Teresa Caldeira (2001) has undertaken study of gated communities in São Paulo, Brazil. She calls São Paulo a “city of walls,” and like Mike Davis she writes about, and illustrates with photographs, an “aesthetic of security” spreading across the city (ibid.: 291).

What is the logic connecting the proliferation of prisons, and of prison-like models for the built environment, to neoliberal economic theory? As with everything else about neoliberalism, there is both a top-down logic and a bottom-up logic. From the point of view of the state and other entities of governance, the proliferation of prisons is part of the war on the poor and the racially low: through a blame-the-victim logic they are stereotyped as nonresponsible neoliberal subjects (if they were responsible, they would not be poor), and imprisoned at the slightest hint of wrongdoing, and sometimes without even a hint. From the bottom up—that is, from the native point of view—on the other hand, the logic emerges from the broader atmosphere of insecurity bred by the riskiness of jobs and the associated culture of precarity. The precariousness of life under neoliberalism is projected outward as a threat from poor and racialized others; the historical emergence of gated communities corresponds, as many observers have noted (e.g., Caldeira 2001; Ortner 2013a), not to a rise in the crime rate—in fact the rate of violent crime has been declining throughout this period—but to the onset of the neoliberal economy.⁶ And in a coda to this story, we note that prisons themselves do not escape neoliberalization; many prisons in the United States have been privatized, and are now run as for-profit businesses.⁷

Finally, punitive governance may be seen to encompass the economic rationality discussed in the previous section, and we can see this ethnographically too. I noted earlier that, although the downsizing of the US labor force was represented as a kind of necessary economic evil in relation to global competition, in fact it sometimes seemed to have a more irrational, almost cruel, motivation behind it,

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6. The spread of gated communities may also be interpreted in relation to the demand for “privatization” in neoliberal economic logic. However, the term “privatization” in the economic context is not about personal “privacy,” but about selling public assets to private businesses. Yet in some ways the results are the same: when public property is sold off, or when people withdraw to private gated communities, the result is the weakening of the public sphere.
 7. This is an ugly story in itself, but was taken to further extremes in a now-famous kick-back scheme in Pennsylvania, where two judges colluded with the owners of a local private juvenile detention facility to send thousands of children to prison so that the owners/jailers could collect the per capita fees (Moore 2009; Ecenbarger 2012).

which I discussed in terms of various examples of the war on the poor. But the punitive irrationalities of downsizing can also be seen much higher up the ladder of occupations, as for example in Karen Ho's (2009) study of Wall Street bankers. Ho presents a portrait of Wall Street investment banks engaging in cycles of hirings and firings that are only partly related to the ups and downs of the market. Rather, the idea of job insecurity is deeply normalized and even valued as a way of having firms appear flexible and dynamic.

Indeed, workers throughout the new economy have been forced to adapt to a life in which jobs are precarious, unemployment is likely, and spending long periods of time as "independent contractors" is normal. Richard Sennett (1998) has called this the logic of "no long term"; all work today is deeply insecure and can be cut at any time. And as with the self-managing person, and the prison aesthetic, this has been generalized to the entire culture. Thus David Harvey launches his brief history of neoliberalism with a quote to this effect from Jean-François Lyotard (1984) about the postmodern condition "as one where 'the temporary contract' supplants 'permanent institutions in the professional, emotional, sexual, cultural, family and international domains, as well as in political affairs'" (Harvey 2005: 4).

Anthropologies of the good

I have been providing an overview of what I called the turn to "dark anthropology"—to theories of ubiquitous power and inequality, and to ethnographic studies of economic insecurity (at best) and punitive governmentality. But the turn to dark anthropology has not gone uncontested, and indeed has provoked strong reactions in some quarters. Noting the "marked increase in anthropological work looking at experiences of violence and cruelty," for example, Tobias Kelly asks, "At what point does an ethnography of suffering turn into a voyeuristic quasi-pornography?" (2013: 213). Actually there are several kinds of work that can be looked at as constituting a kind of resistance to the dark turn; I will review them briefly here.

In an influential article titled "Beyond the suffering subject: Toward an anthropology of the good," Joel Robbins argues that "the suffering subject. . . living in pain, in poverty, or under conditions of violence or oppression now very often stands at the centre of anthropological work" (2013: 448). Robbins seeks to establish in its place "an anthropology of the good . . . focused on such topics as value, morality, well-being, imagination, empathy, care, the gift, hope, time, and change" (ibid.).

Among these terms, "well-being" has become one major focus of research. For example, Edward F. Fischer's *The good life: Aspiration, dignity, and the anthropology of wellbeing* (2014), is a study of ideas of well-being among middle-class Germans and Guatemalan coffee growers. As with Robbins' "anthropology of the good," Fischer sees his book as part of, and contributing further to, what he calls "a positive anthropology" (ibid.: 17). Closely related to the idea of well-being is "happiness." The following year *HAU* published a special issue titled "Happiness: Horizons of purpose" (Vol. 5, No. 3), which consisted of a series of articles on happiness in a wide range of ethnographic cases. In the introduction the editors refer to "the recent 'happiness turn' in the social sciences" (Walker and Kavedžija 2015: 2) and call on anthropologists to contribute more to this trend. They speculate on the reasons

for anthropology's relative absence from this area of work: that for anthropologists "there is a certain suspicion of happiness as an essentially bourgeois preoccupation, increasingly associated with a neoliberal agenda, and potentially at odds with emancipatory politics" (ibid.: 4); and that "the discipline has often gravitated toward more 'negative' forms of human experience, such as suffering, pain, or poverty" (ibid.). Thus they too in effect call for a more positive anthropology, although it must be said that the discussions in the specific articles show happiness to be a much more complex and ambivalent phenomenon than the word itself tends to evoke, at least in American/English.

These bodies of work are both interesting and important. I agree that it is important to inquire closely "into what gives lives a sense of purpose or direction, or how people search for the best way to live—even in dire and hostile circumstances" (ibid.: 17), and that "happiness" seems to provide a powerful entrée into this question. I also agree that anthropologists are almost certainly better suited to ask these kinds of questions, and to think deeply about the answers, than the survey researchers who seem to control much of the happiness research today. But I confess I found myself startled by "the happiness turn" in the middle of all the darkness discussed in the previous section of the article. On reflection, however, it makes sense precisely as a reaction to that work.

The other major area of work responding at least in part to the dark turn is the work on morality and ethics. Michael Lambek opens his important collection *Ordinary ethics* with the following statement:

Ethnographers commonly find that the people they encounter are trying to do what they consider right or good, are being evaluated according to criteria of what is right and good, or are in some debate about what constitutes the human good. Yet anthropological theory tends to overlook all this in favor of analyses that emphasize structure, power, and interest. (2010a: 1)

He then presents a list of themes covered in the collection that was perhaps the inspiration for Robbins' list (above): "freedom, judgment, responsibility, dignity, self-fashioning, care, empathy, character, virtue, truth, reasoning, justice, and the good life for humanity" (ibid.: 6).

The anthropology of morality and ethics is by now a large, sprawling, and somewhat contentious subfield of research and theorizing that includes both a more social side, descending at least in part from the work of Durkheim, and a more individual side, set up largely in opposition to the Durkheimian paradigm. I note this first in relation to my earlier point that the position of Durkheim among the ancestral theorists has faded a great deal. Durkheim has certainly faded with the passing of functionalism, and of the holistic vision of society that prevailed in anthropology in the early to mid-twentieth century. He has also faded in relation to the rise of theories of power, domination, and exploitation, about which he had little to say. On the other hand, as a theorist of society as a moral universe, he has taken on renewed relevance, both pro and con, in this body of work (Lambek 2010b; Yan 2011; Fassin 2014).

The morality/ethics movement presents another important complement to the dark turn in anthropological theory and ethnographic work discussed in the

first part of this article. The focus on the attempts of real actors to grapple with moral dilemmas and to make ethical choices can be seen as offering a positive and humane counterweight to the darkness of the work on neoliberal oppression and governmental constraint. Similarly the focus on themes like care, love, empathy, responsibility, on trying—even if failing—to do the right thing, is a refreshing and uplifting counterpoint to a steady diet of (early) Foucault, in which no good deed goes unpunished, and in which every would-be positive action simply magnifies the webs of power in which we live.

My one concern about all this (again valuable) work, including both the more psychological/medical version with its emphasis on (the pursuit of) happiness and/or well-being, and the more moral/ethical version with its emphasis on (the pursuit of) virtue and the good, is the sharp line that is sometimes drawn between this work and the work on power, inequality, and violence discussed earlier. Rather than positing an oppositional relationship between the two, it will be useful here to look at work that attempts to integrate them. One good starting point might be an essay by Veena Das in the Lambek volume called “Engaging the life of the other: Love and everyday life” (2010). The article is about the marriage of a Hindu man and a Muslim woman in a low-income neighborhood in Delhi, and the way in which this slowly gets worked out in the shadow of a long and ongoing history of Hindu–Muslim enmity and violence. Throughout the article, Das moves back and forth between, on the one hand, the shaping of the everyday relationships between the bride, the groom, and their respective families, and, on the other, the larger political implications and potential for violence surrounding cross-caste and cross-religion marriages. She urges us to “pay attention to the manner in which moral striving shows up in everyday labors of caring for the other, even in contexts where mutual antagonism defines the relation” (ibid.: 398–99).

Didier Fassin has also devoted extensive work to exploring the complexities of ethics in the context of political situations of inequality and violence. In his lecture/essay “Troubled waters: At the confluence of ethics and politics” (2015), for example, he looks at three cases, at different levels of scale: European and American military interventions in Libya under the “Responsibility to Protect” principle of the United Nations; the French national response to the terrorist attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and a kosher supermarket in Paris; and the ways in which police treat youth in the heavily immigrant and minority areas of the Parisian suburbs. Exploring Weber’s “heuristic differentiation between the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility,” he argues that this “needs to be assessed in each historical and political context, considering more specifically the power relations and power games in which they are inserted” (ibid.: 195).

In sum, I would agree with scholars of the good life that the study of power and inequality, and the damage they do, cannot be the whole of anthropology. I would also agree with scholars of morality and ethics that it is important to look at the caring and ethical dimensions of human life, for what is the point of opposing neoliberalism if we cannot imagine better ways of living and better futures? How can we be both realistic about the ugly realities of the world today and hopeful about the possibilities of changing them? I turn now to the final section of the article, to consider a different kind of anthropology of the good: the anthropology of critique, resistance, and activism.



Resistance redux

I use the term “resistance” here to cover a range of modes of (anthropological) engagement with political issues: critical theoretical discussions; critical ethnographic studies; studies of political movements of all kinds; activist anthropology; and more. In this section I will sort out some of this variety, and take stock of the wide range of important work in this area in the same period in which “dark anthropology” has been in the ascendance.

The anthropology of resistance—in one form or another—has had its ups and downs. There was a flurry of theoretical and ethnographic interest in the question in the 1980s (Comaroff 1985; Ong 1987; Scott 1985, 1990). But by the time I published an article on the subject in mid-nineties, there was already a certain amount of backlash, if not against the concept, then against the term (Ortner 1995). Dimitrios Theodossopoulos has argued that resistance was “pathologized” and “exotimized,” and lost its legitimacy as an object of study (2014: 415). Why and how this “resistance to resistance” took shape is unclear, and probably varies within different contexts of research. The general take is that the concept was over-broad conceptually—Rabinowitz refers to its “theoretical slackness” (2014: 476)—and also over-used. That may well be true, but for present purposes I would point to a different set of factors: the point that the real world in the 1990s was getting darker, as the promise of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s began to fade, and as young people born in the 1960s and 1970s were beginning to experience the beginning of the end of “the American Dream” (Ortner 1998, 2013a). “Resistance” may have begun to seem a less realistic, even absurd, perspective, while “governmentality,” the myriad ways in which people and populations are molded and regulated, may have seemed increasingly relevant to the real-world conditions of life. It is perhaps no accident that this period also saw the rise of theories of “postmodernity,” including among other things the “end of grand narratives” like those of resistance and revolution (Jameson 1984; Lyotard 1984). Without speculating further about real-world connections, however, it seems clear that the anthropology of resistance, again in a wide variety of forms, is back.

We may begin with Charles Hale’s distinction between “activist research” and “cultural critique” (2006). By activist research he refers to research conducted in the course of being personally engaged in the political struggle under study; by “cultural critique” he refers to ethnographic work that professes political solidarity with the cause under study, but in which the ethnographer is not directly involved in the political struggle in question. He expresses “adamant refusal” to accept cultural critique “as a resting place for anthropological research and writing” (ibid.: 97). As we will see, however, both kinds of work are flourishing in anthropology today, and I prefer to see both of these—and more—as part of a broad package of critical anthropological work in which the various elements support and enrich one another.

I would distinguish at least three broad areas in which important work is going on: (1) “cultural critique” (*pace* Hale), which includes critical ethnographic writings about conditions of inequality, power, and violence in various parts of the world; (2) a range of mostly theoretical work addressed to rethinking capitalism as a system; and finally (3) a body of work on social movements that have taken shape in the neoliberal period. I will say a few words about each.

Under the rubric of “cultural critique,” I would first point back to all the critical empirical studies reviewed in the early part of this article, including both ethno-historical studies in the case of colonialism, and more strictly ethnographic studies. The latter included ethnographies of communities impacted economically by neoliberalism, showing the many ways in which individuals and communities experienced the fallout of deindustrialization, globalization, and loss of jobs and opportunities. This group also included studies of businesses and industries that are organized to profit from these kinds of losses. Beyond the economic, we looked at studies of neoliberal governmentality, including the proliferation of prisons, the growth of “the carceral state,” and the spread of the “prison aesthetic.” I bring all this back here as it is important to recognize these works not as examples of “misery porn” (dark as they may be), but as examples of a new and important critical ethnographic genre, shining a light on, and revealing the inner workings of, the world we live in today.

I would also include in this group a body of critical work being done in the broad zone of anthropology of media. For example, the landmark collection *Media worlds: Anthropology on new terrain* (2002) edited by Faye D. Ginsburg, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Brian Larkin includes essays on the subject ranging from the use of media in indigenous politics, through the use of media by nation-states in large-scale ideological and cultural projects, through on-the-ground circulation of media technologies among diasporic groups, and more. I would also include here my own study of the world of independent film, which explicitly uses the concept of cultural critique to think about how American and other independent filmmakers use film to grapple with the new conditions of life in the neoliberal order (Ortner 2013a).

Under the rubric of “rethinking capitalism,” next, there is first of all a body of recent theoretical work outside of anthropology, of which a few examples may be mentioned here: *Empire* (2000) by literature scholar Michael Hardt and sociologist Antonio Negri, argues that we must understand the world today in terms of new configurations of money, power, and law that are almost completely postnational; *The new spirit of capitalism* (2005) by sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello looks at the ways in which capitalism as a system has always been, and continues to be, susceptible to internal critique; and *Rethinking capitalist development: Primitive accumulation, governmentality, and post-colonial capitalism* (2007) by economist Kalyan Sanyal explores the implications of the increasing exclusion of vast numbers of poor people from the core structures of capitalist economies.

Anthropologists, too, are “rethinking capitalism,” and more generally rethinking “economies” in the contemporary world. This work includes an important collection by Keith Hart, Jean-Louis Laville, and Antonio David Cattani titled *The human economy* (2010), which argues that we must look at the real world of varied economic practices rather than simply at “capitalism” as a monolithic entity, and includes a large number of articles on, among other things, “economics with a human face” and “moral politics.” A similar line of thinking is to be found in the work of the “Generating Capitalism” group (Bear et al. 2015). This group has produced “a feminist manifesto for the study of capitalism,” which argues for the importance of recognizing that capitalism is not just about “the economy,” but that all sites of value production are internal to capitalism itself. They seek to build upon “the feminist critique of Marx, which argued that kinship, personhood, the household,

and social reproduction reside firmly within capitalist creations of value” (ibid.). In addition, ethnographies inspired by these new perspectives have begun to appear. Recent examples in this category would include James Ferguson’s *Give a man a fish: Reflections on the new politics of distribution* (2015) and Jamie Cross’ *Dream zones: Anticipating capitalism and development in India* (2014). These and other works seek to both enlarge and break down a monolithic conception of capitalism, and to make room for a much wider and more diverse range of social and political projects.

Finally I turn to the anthropology of resistance in its classic form: that is, the study of social movements. I begin with a few words about Pierre Bourdieu, who became active in the antiglobalization/antineoliberalism movement, and whose little book *Acts of resistance: Against the tyranny of the market* (1998) was among the earliest of the publications by an anthropologist-as-activist.⁸ At the end of an earlier article on the state of anthropology (1984), I argued that the theoretical work of Bourdieu among others constituted a major break with earlier constraint-based theories of social life, insisting as it did on the proposition that society and culture are produced and reproduced through human practice. Although Bourdieu in general emphasized the ways in which social practices tended to reproduce rather than change the world (but see Gorski 2013; Ortner 2013b on Bourdieu and history), the transformative possibilities of what I then called “practice theory” were to me immediately evident. In simplest terms, if we make the world through social practice, we can unmake and remake the world through social practice. Or as David Graeber later wrote, “The ultimate, hidden truth of the world is that it is something that we make, and could just as easily make differently” (2009: 514). I’m not sure about the “just as easily” part, but in any event the work of Bourdieu in particular, and practice theory in general (e.g., Sahlins 1981), must clearly be seen as theoretically foundational for work in and on resistance.

Needless to say, there are all kinds of social movements, for and against all kinds of things: feminism(s), environmental movements, racial justice movements, indigenous rights, disability rights, and much more. Here, in keeping with the overall thematics of this article, I will concentrate on the proliferation of work specifically on antiglobalization/antineoliberalism movements. Work in this area began to flourish in the first decade of the twenty-first century. (For an excellent overview, see Kurik n.d.) Several useful collections of essays have appeared, including Charles Hale’s *Engaging contradictions: Theory, politics and methods of activist scholarship* (2008), Jeffrey Juris and Alex Khasnabish’s *Insurgent encounters: Transnational activism, ethnography, and the political* (2013), and Dimitrios Theodosopoulos’ *Rethinking resistance in the 21st century: History and anthropology* (2014). All of these contain multiple essays about resistance movements in many parts of the world, by both junior and senior scholars. They give an effective sense of the explosion of interest in such work, the diversity of issues at which movements are currently directed, and the range of problems connected with doing ethnographic research in these contexts.

8. I realize, of course, that Bourdieu is technically a sociologist, but he has been a major figure in anthropology as well.

In addition we have a small number of in-depth ethnographic studies of several movements, written from the point of view of deep participation by the anthropologist. Jeffrey Juris' *Networking futures: The movements against corporate globalization* (2008) is a study of a large activist network based in Barcelona but acting in multiple sites throughout the world, including the very successful mobilization in Seattle in 1999 against the World Trade Organization meetings. David Graeber's *Direct action: An ethnography* (2009) is a study of the work of a group called the Direct Action Network, based in New York City, as they developed and then carried out a major direct-action campaign against Summit of the Americas in Québec City in 2001. Finally we have several essays by Arjun Appadurai (2013) about his work based in Mumbai, India with a transnational organization called Shack/Slum Dwellers International, which works on issues of housing for the poor.

What is new about many of these studies is the turn to “activist anthropology”: that is, to work in which anthropologists themselves are not simply doing the research, but are directly involved in the movements. Anthropologists studying social movements in the past have often been drawn into involvement at some level, but in many cases now the anthropologist is a full participant as well as an observer. This has produced a lively and fascinating literature about the many contradictions and conundrums experienced during the fieldwork, but also much broader reflections on what all this resistance might realistically hope to accomplish. For one example of this point, let us look at the anthropological responses to Occupy Wall Street in 2011. The events in New York produced a spate of anthropological publications, beginning with the May 2012 issue of *American Ethnologist*. The journal featured a photo of the Occupy demonstrators on the cover, as well as two articles and a commentary on the events (Juris 2012; Razsa and Kurnik 2012). In a different journal Hannah Appel published ethnographic notes from the occupation (2012), and in 2014 she published an article, “Occupy Wall Street and the economic imagination.” In this case (and many of the others noted earlier), the participation/observation of the ethnographer does not simply provide “thick” ethnography of the demonstrations, although it certainly does do that, but also provides openings into much wider theoretical reflections—into the nature of democracy and political participation more generally, and in this case into what Appel calls “the economic imagination.”

For another example, let us go back to Arjun Appadurai's work with the local India-based groups that are part of the transnational Shack/Slum Dwellers International network. The people involved are among the poorest of the poor, the masses of people whom Kalyan Sanyal described as not simply at the bottom of capitalism but ongoingly produced as capitalism's “outside.” Appadurai describes a number of housing actions in which the group has been involved, and also an initiative he has collaboratively developed with the group involving training in basic research methods, with the slogan “Documentation is Intervention” (2013: 280). In addition, Appadurai uses all this to reflect more broadly on the significance of activism both for the people involved and for contemporary anthropology. Directly addressing the darkness of the long contemporary moment, he draws a contrast between what he calls an ethics of probability and an ethics of possibility. The ethics of probability bet on what we have called the dark side of the world and of anthropology (Appadurai specifically points to Naomi Klein's work on “disaster capitalism”), while



the ethics of possibility are grounded in “those ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that increase the horizons of hope” (ibid.: 295). Appadurai calls on anthropologists “to be mediators, facilitators, and promoters of the ethics of possibility . . . which can offer a more inclusive platform for improving the planetary quality of life and can accommodate a plurality of visions of the good life” (ibid.: 299).

Brief conclusions

Before I move into the conclusions proper, it is worth repeating my earlier acknowledgment that this article does not pretend to be written from anything other than an American perspective, in terms of its takes on both neoliberalism and anthropology. Others will have different views, either because things are genuinely different in other places, or because people will, of course, always have different views. Nor have I meant to suggest that neoliberalism is the cause of all bad things in the world, and there are all sorts of other axes of inequality, conflict, and violence—gender, race, ethnicity, religion—that have their own dynamics, even as/when they articulate with an aggressive neoliberal order.

This article began with the turn to “dark anthropology,” arguing that, since the 1980s or so, the emergence of neoliberal capitalism has had profound effects on the field, at the levels of both theory and ethnography. Marx (including various post- and neo-Marxisms) and Foucault, with their theories emphasizing exploitation, inequality, and the workings of power, have come to dominate the field theoretically. In addition, a large number of ethnographic studies, looking at the impact of neoliberalism as both an economic system and a system of governmentality, have come out. Like the theory, the ethnography is often very dark, emphasizing the harsh, violent, and punitive nature of neoliberalism and the depression and hopelessness in which people under neoliberal regimes are often enveloped.

In the next section I looked at work on “anthropologies of the good,” with the idea of “the good” encompassing both well-being (“the good life,” “happiness”) and also morality and ethics. This work forms an important counterpoint to the dark anthropologies discussed in the first part of the article, but its relationship to that work can sometimes be problematic. In some cases authors frame work on the good in opposition to work on oppression and inequality (dismissed as “misery porn”), and in other cases they simply ignore the larger contexts of power and inequality in play. In response to that I tried to emphasize the importance of keeping these two kinds of work, or more broadly these two perspectives, in active interaction with, rather than opposition to, one another. For the violence of power and inequality is not simply physical force and/or deprivation, but always at the same time the ways in which it limits and deforms projects of what Veena Das has called “the everyday,” projects of care and love, happiness and the good life.

In the final section of the article I looked at the burgeoning of new work on resistance and activism. I used the term “resistance” broadly to include several different kinds of work: critical ethnography, including critical media ethnography, grouped under the category of “cultural critique”; new theoretical and ethnographic work attempting to rethink the seemingly monolithic category of “capitalism,” thus opening up new visions of alternative political economies; and finally the

ethnographic study of social movements, including a large subset in which the anthropologist is an active participant. Ethnographically thick accounts of resistance in all these categories are important not only for understanding the extraordinary range of creative ways in which challenges to the existing order can be constructed, but also for understanding the alternative visions of the future embedded in such movements.

I want to conclude by pointing out that the anthropology of resistance, at least as I am defining it here, includes both “cultural critique”—that is, the critical study of the existing order—and studies that emphasize thinking about alternative political and economic futures (both “rethinking capitalism” and social movements). Cultural critique tends to be on the dark side, emphasizing what Arjun Appadurai called an “ethic of probability,” while these other kinds of work are at least partly oriented toward envisioning more positive alternatives, embodying what Appadurai called an “ethic of possibility.” It seems likely that anthropology will always need both. It is thus fitting to end with Antonio Gramsci’s famous dictum: Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.

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L'anthropologie dark et ses autres: Théories en anthropologie depuis les années 1980

Résumé : Dans ce papier je m'intéresse à plusieurs tendances en anthropologie, qui émergent, depuis 1980, face à la montée des formes économique et gouvernementale du néolibéralisme. Je présente d'abord un tournant que j'appelle l' "anthropologie dark," c'est à dire une anthropologie qui se concentre sur les dimensions les plus difficiles de la vie sociale (pouvoir, domination, inégalité, et oppression), ainsi que sur l'expérience subjective de ces dimensions sous la forme de la dépression et du désespoir. Je présente ensuite un ensemble de travaux qui réagissent, explicitement ou implicitement, à ce tournant dark, et qui peuvent être rassemblés sous la rubrique d'anthropologie du bien. Cette rubrique inclue notamment les études de la "vie bonne" ou du bonheur, ainsi que les études de la moralité et de l'éthique. Enfin, je présente ce que l'on peut concevoir comme une autre anthropologie du bien, à savoir les nouvelles directions prises par l'anthropologie de la critique, de la résistance et de l'activisme.

Sherry B. ORTNER is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). She is a long-time contributor to anthropological and feminist theory. In addition she has done extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Nepal and the United States. Her most recent book is *Not Hollywood: Independent film at the twilight of the American Dream* (Duke University Press, 2013).

Sherry B. Ortner
Department of Anthropology
UCLA
341 Haines Hall
Box 951553
Los Angeles, CA 90095-1553
sortner@anthro.ucla.edu