

Newsletter of the Department of Anthropology, University of Sussex

## New Book by Raminder Kaur: Kudankulam: The Story of an Indo-Russian Power Plant

**Raminder Kaur's** new book tells the many stories that circulate around a nuclear power plant in Kudankulam in the southern peninsular of Tamil Nadu in India from the late 1980s. The tales are by way of fishermen and women, farmers, environmentalists, activists, writers, scholars, teachers, journalists, priests, children, as much as they are of lawyers, scientists, state officials and the author drawing upon an interdisciplinary field as the subject compels. They show how peninsular residents contended with the prospect of one of Asia's largest nuclear enterprise being built on their doorstep. They reveal what part the nuclear plant plays in contested discourses of development, democracy and nationalism in multiple spaces of criticality.

Based on over a decade of historical and ethnographic research, we learn about the anti-nuclear campaign's part in 'right to lives' movements, the (re)production of knowledge and ignorance in the understanding of radiation, and tactics to create an evidence-base in response to the otherwise unavailable or inaccessible data on radiation and public health in India. In the process, we cast a lens on how national and transnational solidarity was both received and curtailed, where processes of neoliberalisation and national security led to the hardening of the 'nuclear state'. This phenomenon came with the direct and indirect repression of the anti-nuclear movement with the engineering of 'death conditions' for its protagonists. Altogether, this is one of few books that have at its heart the many facets of a grassroots movement for energy justice in the global south from the 1980s that, three decades on, went on to become an international cause célèbre.

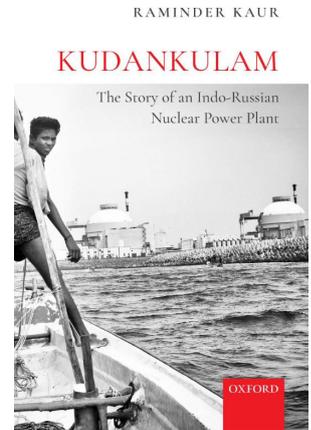
**Jane Cowan** co-edited with Julie Billaud a special issue of *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* entitled "**Bureaucratisation of Utopia**". The issue includes articles by Jane and **Agathe Mora**.

"Bureaucracies, whether national or international, have rarely been conceived as 'utopian' sites. On the contrary, classic representations tend to describe bureaucratic formations as 'rationality machines', administrations as homogeneous black boxes and bureaucrats as individuals working 'without hatred or passion' to implement a broader vision of which they remain largely ignorant. The idea for this special issue emerged out of a feeling of unease with such renderings which, although providing important elements of understanding about the nature of bureaucratic power and its effects, do not fully reflect the insights we gained through ethnographic fieldwork and archival research in international bureaucracies. We argue that a focus on actors working in international organisations allows the exploration of distinctive bureaucratic subjectivities forged in these settings. By exploring the affective life of international bureaucracies, we seek to understand how actors maintain a sense of agency in spite of the tedious and burdensome nature of the administrative procedures in which they take part."

## Impact and Covid 19

Many of our colleagues have been active in research and commentary in relation to Covid-19. **Maya Unnithan** and CORTH submitted evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry into 'Unequal Impact: Coronavirus and the impact on people with protected characteristics'. **Paul Boyce** prepared the report on in/equalities related to Covid-19 for submission to the Parliamentary International Development Committee.

Commentaries include "Covid-19 in Tamil Nadu: Textile livelihoods under threat" (**Geert de Neve**); 'One size fits all? Why lockdowns might not be Africa's best bet' (**James Fairhead**); 'Covid-19, International Trade and Global China: Reflections from Yiwu' (**Magnus Marsden**)



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### Internal Funding

Along with colleagues Dr. Mary Menton and Dr. Mika Peck in Life Sciences, **Evan Killick** has been awarded an ID-CF-SSRP grant for the project Indigenous Rights and Environmental Protection in Peruvian Amazonia. The team will work with faculty and students at the Universidad Nacional Intercultural de la Amazonia in Pucallpa, Peru, to co-produce research and digital technologies to contribute to an observatory of violations of Indigenous rights and environmental protections in the region. The project seeks to empower Indigenous communities, provide evidence for civil society and other actors who fight to defend human rights and the environment, and promote development and policy options which are inclusive and respect the cosmovisions and collective experiences of Indigenous communities.

Further IDCF-SSRP grants were awarded to **Diana Ibáñez-Tirado** for Caring for the Liver: Chronic Hepatitis, Gender and Debt in Tajikistan; to **Peter Luetchford** for Quality and Inequality in Costa Rica: the Effects of Quality Standards on Producers' Livelihoods in global food chains; to **Filippo Osella** for follow-up funding for Radio Monsoon: Coproducing Knowledge for the Sustainability of Traditional Fisheries in Kerala.

### Events



### Tuesday Seminars

Department Tuesday Seminars hosted Maya Mayblin (University of Edinburgh) and Monica Heintz (University of Paris Nanterre) in February 2020. Maya Mayblin's presentation was on "Libidinous Politics: Desire and Cultivation of Power among Brazilian Catholic Prieststurned-Politicians"; Monica Heintz gave a paper entitled "Is Immoral Behaviour Acceptable in Times of Crisis".



### Fellowships

**Margaret Sleeboom-Faulkner** has been awarded a one-year British Academy/ Leverhulme Senior Scholarship to write a book and conduct research on what she calls Regulatory Brokerage in the life sciences. Regulation in the life sciences is usually presumed to have the power to protect patients and to enable research. But regulations are also often treated as something static; something to be followed and implemented. Margaret's research concerns the need to see regulation as an active practice. The research-based examples that she has gathered from Asia, the USA, and Europe show how regulation in the life-sciences, apart from being reified and commodified, is also brokered, ritualised and performed in local and international transactions between scientists, companies, governments and international organisations. Her book-project examines the practices of scientists, entrepreneurs, medical experts, patients, officials and politicians and their global links to develop a performative perspective on the international dynamics and politics of regulation in the emerging and shifting field of regenerative medicine. In addition, she is putting together a research proposal building to examine the unfolding regulation of Human Genome Germline Editing in jurisdictions across the world.

### Book Launch

The Department hosted its first book launch event on 28 January 2020.

Maya Unnithan presented her book *Fertility, Health and Reproductive Politics: Re-Imagining Rights in India*. Peter Luetchford introduced the 39th volume of *Research in Economic Anthropology* he co-edited with Giovanni Orlando on "The Politics and Ethics of Just Price: Ethnographies of Market Exchange."



## External Funding

**Evan Killick** has been awarded an ESRC grant for the project 'The Making of an Integrated Landscape of Conservation: Sustainable Development, Environmental Justice and the Politics of Territory in the Amazon'. Centred on the Purús-Manu conservation corridor in Peruvian Amazonia the project will examine indigenous territorial and environmental conceptions and priorities in the region, and how they relate, intersect and diverge from those of NGOs and government actors particularly in relation to the conservation of the forest and its resources. Beginning in September, the project, worth £939,001, will bring three postdoctoral researchers to Sussex and run for 28 months. The team will conduct simultaneous fieldwork in sites across the region in 2021. In parallel to the academic research, the team will work with local communities and indigenous federations to co-create audio-visual documents that evidence local issues in ways that speak to local and national policy planners. Overall, the project seeks to explore how equitable and effective forms of conservation can be achieved that integrate and respect the rights and knowledge of all stakeholders.

Led by Mike Collyer with **Meike Fechter**, Tahir Zaman, Ceri Oepfen, Priya Deshingkar, a project under the 'Protracted Displacement'; Global Challenges Research Fund call takes an all encompassing view of political economies in situations of prolonged displacement in camps and cities in DRC, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Myanmar and Pakistan.

The project is worth £2.9m. **Meike** will be leading on the research in Myanmar, specifically looking at the ways how migrants have been setting up forms of mutual support system and grassroots social protection in situations of protracted displacement, working with a research team based in Yangon, Myanmar.

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## Citations

The article on transgender experience and inclusive sanitation in South Asia, co-authored by **Paul Boyce** has been one of the most downloaded of the year in the Journal Waterlines. It also informs DfID policy development in this field.

The article "Speculative Futures at the Bottom of the Pyramid" authored by **Dinah Rajak** has been one of the top cited articles in Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute (between January 2018 and December 2019).

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## New Permanent Staff



Warmest congratulations to our colleagues **Diana Ibanez-Tirado**, **Karis Jade Petty** and **Agathe Mora** who join us as permanent members of staff.



*Observing an NREGA work site in Tamil Nadu, September 2019*

**Geert De Neve**, in collaboration with Grace Carswell, is currently conducting research in Tamil Nadu as part of a large GCRF-funded project entitled, Challenging Inequalities: An Indo-European Perspective (2019-2021). Their part of the research is funded by the ESRC and is entitled, Unequal access to social networks and skills in South India. Their project focuses on the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, which is one of the most urbanized and industrialized states in India. Despite the state being considered a 'model' of development in India today, inequalities of opportunity and outcome persist. The research examines the ways in which access to (new) labour markets, socio-economic mobility, and social protection schemes is shaped by the interplay between skill formation, social networks and individual enterprise.

Until now the role of skills has largely been evaluated in isolation, by purely focusing on their effects on individual choices and preferences, thereby neglecting the social structures and networks within which individuals and families act. The research therefore explores 1) how access to labour markets and new jobs is shaped by education, skill formation and social networks; 2) the extent to which the acquisition of new skills enables members of marginalized communities to overcome caste, class and gender based forms of exclusion and inequality; and 3) how the current neoliberal policy focus on skills development intersects with social protection policies, such as NREGA and PDS.

To answer these questions, Geert and Grace are conducting a re-survey of two villages in the hinterland of Tiruppur, where a first survey of 500 households was completed in 2008-9. The survey covers topics of livelihoods as well as skills training, socio-economic mobility and access to social protection programmes. The survey is accompanied by in-depth interviews to explore how skills are acquired and turned into labour market opportunities, how social networks shape inclusion/exclusion in job markets, and how social protection intersects with labor market participation.

### From Jon Mitchell, Head of Department

The Sussex Anthropology newsletter does not normally include a statement from the Head of Department, but in these unprecedented times I thought it would be appropriate to say a few words of thanks, support and solidarity.

**THANKS:** to everybody in the broader Sussex Anthropology community for their patience, hard work, compassion, generosity, kindness and spirit over these last few months. The Covid-19 pandemic has turned all of our lives upside down, but this has only revealed the depths of compassion and humanity at the centre of our Department.

**SUPPORT:** to everybody who has been and continues to struggle with the consequences of the pandemic. We have all been affected differently: taking on extra caring responsibilities; dealing with our own or others' illness; coping with bereavement; dealing with increased anxiety, social isolation and uncertainty over the future; coping with the new contexts of learning and teaching remotely. I want to say that the Department has tried and will continue to support you as best we can through all of this.

**SOLIDARITY:** to all those, globally, who have, and continue, to struggle with the implications of the pandemic, and the ways it has been handled by different governments. It seems clear that the effects of Covid-19 have been filtered through the structural inequalities, vulnerabilities and precarities that are endemic to contemporary society. In particular, the virus has had a disproportionate effect on Black and Minority Ethnic people in UK and USA (the countries with the worst overall mortality rates), whilst globally there are once again protests against police brutality and structural racism in the wake of George Floyd's killing. Black Lives Matter. Solidarity to all.

As you will see in this newsletter, Sussex Anthropologists have already begun to try to understand the social and cultural implications of Covid-19 for communities around the world. Now more than ever it is vital that we carry forward Anthropology's central message that the world is united by global processes, but that these processes are experienced and understood differently in different contexts.



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