

*Introduction*

# **Alterity and Human Evolution**

Deep-Time Perspectives on Difference and Variation

---

*Martin Porr and Oscar Moro Abadía*

The notion of “alterity” has gained greater prominence across the humanities and the social sciences in recent years. This is probably not a surprising development, given the increasingly variable and complex global research landscape that includes more and more voices from different cultural backgrounds and traditions. In philosophy, alterity is traditionally understood in a phenomenological sense as the entity that is opposed to the self and that allows the construction of identity in a dialectical and recursive way (Corbey and Leerssen 1991). The notion of the (human) Other becomes crucially important in this context, and this view has been foremost developed by Levinas (2001) throughout the twentieth century. An equally influential perspective was developed more recently in the poststructuralist tradition by Baudrillard, who proposed the notion of “radical alterity” (Baudrillard and Guillaume 2008). Baudrillard explored the possibility of the radically different Other throughout his career but focused foremost on the threat of the modern condition to human difference. Within a postcolonial framework, Spivak (e.g., 1999) has explored the notion from a feminist point of view, with a particular focus on the construction of other or alternative histories. More recently, alterity has become a key concept within a politically oriented anthropology that stresses the potential of anthropological research to show the full breadth of human ways of living and modes of existence. This acknowledgment is taken as the basis for a radical challenge to existing power and exploitation relationships, which can also be conceptualized in terms of the limitations they provide for political imagination (Hage 2015; Latour 2013; Viveiros de Castro 2015a). While these aspects

Alterity and Human Evolution

Deep-Time and Multispecies Perspectives on Difference and Variation

Edited by Oscar Moro Abadía and Martin Porr

<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/AbadiaAlterity>

Not for Resale

emerged through the encounter and ethnographic engagement with non-Western people and outside Europe, the term has also been attacked by anthropologists and Indigenous scholars who have argued that the concepts of “Other” and “alterity” are intrinsically Eurocentric and reduce Indigenous peoples to the status of “they” (Graeber 2015; Todd 2016; Tuhiwai Smith 2012).

\*\*\*

As the introductory examples above illustrate, the concept of “alterity” has been employed in different fields. However, there is little doubt that the term has been most intensely debated in (social and cultural) anthropology, and the respective contributions are consequently most significant and relevant for this volume (Bertelsen and Bendixsen 2016; Chua and Mathur 2018; Leistle 2016). The field of anthropology is traditionally concerned with understanding and explaining human difference and the encounter with the Other. It is not possible to review the development of the discipline and its many strands here in detail, but the history of anthropology itself could certainly be written as a history of changing understandings of human difference from a Western perspective. The formal establishment of anthropology as an academic discipline during the late nineteenth century can be understood as the culmination and formalization of attempts to understand the exponentially increasing amount of information about the variability of human societies because of the expansion of European colonialism. Together with archaeology, anthropology profited from Europe’s political and economic dominance globally, and both disciplines played important intellectual roles in its justification (Gosden 1999). It is only over the last few decades, however, that both fields have started to move away from their exploitative and unequal roots toward more balanced and symmetrical engagements in which the position and authority of Western ontologies and epistemologies are increasingly questioned. In this process, the notion of alterity fundamentally changed and acquired a different and more critical quality, as we will briefly discuss here.

From the Enlightenment period onward, debates about human difference moved increasingly away from theological and religious arguments. Questions about human nature, human origins, and variability were increasingly formulated in terms of the relative significance of cultural and biological factors in explaining differences between human groups or societies. During the nineteenth century, racial or biological factors gained increasing prominence and were more systematically and empirically explored. These developments were enhanced by the experiences of European and imperial colonialism, and the influence of Darwinism

Alterity and Human Evolution

Deep-Time and Multispecies Perspectives on Difference and Variation

Edited by Oscar Moro Abadía and Martin Porr

<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/AbadiaAlterity>

Not for Resale

(Anderson 2007). Academic anthropology was consequently founded within an intellectual climate that often took a racial basis for human difference for granted. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at the height of European colonial dominance, racism was the main interpretative framework for anthropology and archaeology (Marks 2008, 2012). This orientation was mainly opposed by researchers related to the German cultural anthropological tradition, which was linked to German Romanticism (Vermeulen 2015). Most prominent in this respect was Franz Boas, who was educated at the University of Kiel and subsequently established the North American tradition of cultural anthropology. His work in the early twentieth century engaged extensively with questions surrounding race and racism. This aspect of his work and their implications for social justice and public policies were central to his engagements with the wider public (see e.g., Boas 2021).

After the genocidal horrors of World War II, significant steps were taken to fundamentally reject race as a framework to guide political and policy decisions. The newly created United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) embarked on a complex journey to develop a new and generally accepted understanding of human difference, and communicate it to the wider public (Brattain 2007). This process and the respective debates formally and informally involved a significant number of prominent social and biological anthropologists, working toward alternatives to a racial and hierarchical understanding of human differences. However, disagreements between different strands of anthropological research remained about biological and cultural differences, and the resulting epistemological implications. One of the consequences of the reorientation of anthropology after the war was an increased separation between biological and social/cultural anthropology. The respective fields became institutionally more and more divided, and followed different epistemological pathways (Kuper and Marks 2011). Cultural/social anthropology increasingly distanced itself from the positivist orientation, which continued to dominate biological anthropology, expressed, for example, by the employment of Darwinist or related explanatory frameworks. In these cases, human difference was approached foremost as the result of adaptive or related evolutionary processes, and variability in behaviors between humans or human groups was explained in cognitive terms and as a result of adaptive strategies to solve specific environmental challenges (McManus 2017). While it is difficult to generalize in this respect, approaches within the archaeological and paleoanthropological fields that deal with the earliest periods of human lineages followed these patterns as well. The notions of alterity as radical difference did not fit into these universalizing frameworks, and

because of the generally positivist epistemological orientation, elements of critical reflexivity continue to play minor roles to this day (Corbey and Roebroeks 2001; Schroeder 2020).

Social anthropology, by contrast, began to distance itself from a positivist paradigm after World War II. Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, the field became increasingly entangled in processes of decolonization and the postcolonial reconfiguration of the global political system. In the last decades of the twentieth century, social anthropology experienced a crisis of representation and, consequently, a radical departure from positivist epistemologies. An aspect of these developments was the fundamental change in the relationships between researchers and their research subjects. Over time, these became much more balanced because of the challenge of the unequal power relationships that structured researcher–researched interactions over the previous hundred years or more. The recalibration of the social anthropological research process initiated a new phase of reflexivity that was equally applied to contemporary research practices and the critical reanalysis of past ethnographic works (Clifford 1988, 1997, 2013; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986). The field also began to question more fundamentally its ethical positioning. According to Viveiros de Castro (2014: 40), for example, social anthropology is less a discipline of understanding the rules of human (social) behaviors or practices, and more “the theory/practice of the permanent decolonization of thought.” While the above-mentioned developments in social anthropology did not encompass the whole field, they became well established in the practice and theory of social anthropology. In this setting, the notion of alterity played a much more significant role toward the end of the twentieth century. This aspect can be observed in, for example, Taussig’s work (1993), which explored the notion of alterity with a focus on dialectical processes of identity creation in intercultural bodily encounters, particularly in colonial or related contexts. A tension exists in these situations in which the Other is constructed through the recognition of similarity and difference, which is explored through the notions of alterity and mimesis that involve both Indigenous people and researchers in these entanglements.

More recently, questions of radical difference have gained a new quality and a new dimension in the context of a range of conceptual developments that can be described within innovative theoretical frameworks such as new materialism, the ontological turn, and multispecies approaches. Over the past ten years or so, a growing number of contributions labeled as “ontological” have had an increasing impact on many areas in the social sciences (Moro Abadía and Porr 2021). This concern with ontology has emerged as one of the most significant influences

Alterity and Human Evolution

Deep-Time and Multispecies Perspectives on Difference and Variation

Edited by Oscar Moro Abadía and Martin Porr

<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/AbadiaAlterity>

Not for Resale

in social theory, philosophy, and the arts. While this turn toward “the ontological” is not without critics (Todd 2016), ontological approaches have made important contributions to anthropological theory and practice (Cadena and Blaser 2018; Descola 2013; Holbraad and Pedersen 2017; Viveiros de Castro 2015a). Despite the great degree of diversity that exists between these propositions, they are foremost concerned with the notion of alterity in different and more profound ways. As the name of this turn suggests, difference is not located in the cultural or epistemological realm but is ontologically determined. This is evident, for instance, in the “ontological anthropological-inspired” approaches that are intended to “move from the epistemological critique of ethnographic *authority* to the ontological determination of ethnographic *alterity*” (Viveiros de Castro 2015b: 4). Hage, for example, has argued that in the early periods of anthropological research, the notion of alterity related to “a mode of difference that is so seriously different from us that we cannot simply think it and make sense of it just relying on our socially and historically constrained imagination” (Hage 2015: 71). While the encounter with such difference is initially disorienting and can undermine our sense of security in the world, it can also become a catalyst for a broadening of what is socially and culturally possible. Together with Viveiros de Castro, Hage takes this argument further toward its ontological implications and the critical and political ramifications of multiple realities. The encounter with the other not only opens ways of recognizing the possibilities of being other than what we are or recognizing the potential for otherness that is already contained in our way of being. It also allows us to understand that “certain realities come to dominate others so much that they simply become ‘reality,’ foreclosing their history as a process of domination and equally foreclosing the very possibility of thinking reality as multiple” (Hage 2015: 253). A comparable position has been developed by Blaser as a political ontology, which draws attention to the relationship between power and the creation of versions of reality, particularly in settler-colonial contexts (Blaser 2009, 2013).

The extensive concern with Indigenous philosophies and ontologies within social anthropology has further produced a reassessment of the understanding of the relationship between material objects, human practices, and worldviews. Indeed, the idea of materiality has itself been questioned together with dichotomies such as subject/object, mind/matter, and life/death. Approaches in this context have sometimes been labeled as “new materialism” (Bennett 2010), and they extend questions of alterity into the interactions between humans, things, and the environment. Finally, human beings are not only surrounded by other human beings and material objects, but are also constantly interacting with non-human

agencies, particularly animals and plants. Under the influence of the growing literature that reflects on the conditions of the Anthropocene (Lewis and Maslin 2018), a reassessment of animals and plants and their roles in human lifeways is ongoing. Here, the different elements are afforded much greater agency and independence. Because of this general orientation, these approaches are often summarized as “multispecies” (Haraway 2016; Pilaar Birch 2018; Povinelli 2016), and in some cases the notion of alterity as developed by Levinas is also extended to non-human actors (Harman 2007).

From these few remarks, it becomes clear that significant divisions continue to persist between biological and social anthropology. This separation has only deepened over the last two decades (Kuper and Marks 2011). It creates an unsatisfactory situation for the field of human evolutionary studies, which is aimed at explaining and approaching human becoming holistically. Very few authors have attempted to bridge recent developments in both fields. One exception would be Barnard’s book (2011) on social anthropology and human evolution, but he specifically excluded the critical and reflexive elements from his exploration. Another major exception to the rule remains the work of Tim Ingold, who has significantly engaged with a wide range of human evolutionary topics over the last thirty years from the perspective of a social anthropologist. Key elements have been a fundamental critique of the understanding of human–environment relationships, processes of perception and cognition, and the generally essentialist orientation of modern biological thinking (e.g., Ingold 2000, 2011; Ingold and Palsson 2013; Porr and Weidtmann 2024).

\*\*\*

In light of these considerations, we can identify several areas in which an engagement with current social anthropological and social theoretical approaches in the context of human evolutionary studies seems particularly relevant and necessary. In each area, notions such as “alterity” and “difference” need to be critically interrogated (see also Porr and Matthews 2020a).

The concepts of “genus” and “species” are fundamental points of reference within human evolutionary and paleoanthropological research (Corbey and Lanjouw 2013). For instance, each time that paleoanthropologists discover new fossils, they consider it crucial to determine whether they come from an already-known species or if they belong to a new one. Controversies around the relationships between different genera and species have shaped the history of paleoanthropology and the popular perception of human origins in general. Recent debates about the status of and relationships between Anatomically Modern Humans

Alterity and Human Evolution

Deep-Time and Multispecies Perspectives on Difference and Variation

Edited by Oscar Moro Abadía and Martin Porr

<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/AbadiaAlterity>

Not for Resale

(AMH), Neanderthals, and Denisovans may illustrate this point (Bae, Douka, and Petraglia 2017). However, different strands of recent research continue to blur the divisions between different human populations, and point to the need to question established understandings (Roebroeks and Soressi 2016). This research further supports human population genetic findings that have established that most genetic difference occurs *within* a population or species/genus and not between populations (Long and Kittles 2003). These insights are further complicated by the complex intersections between archaeological, paleoanthropological, and molecular genetic evidence, which imply that both the seemingly biological categories of species and genus need to be reassessed from a variety of perspectives beyond taxonomic, anatomical, cognitive, and behavioral categories (Will, Conard, and Tryon 2019).

Research into human origins continues to be fundamentally structured by the notion of anthropocentrism—the view that AMH are the culmination of human evolution and that AMH are clearly distinguished from all other animals (Porr 2014). However, within the humanities and social sciences, the idea of human exceptionalism has been widely criticized, and several researchers have called for a “multispecies” understanding of human beings, history, and evolution (Celermajer et al. 2020; Pilaar Birch 2018). According to this view, humanity can only be fully understood in entanglements with other active entities and creatures, who previously appeared on the margins of scientific research (animals, plants, other-than-human entities). These understandings move beyond traditional ecological approaches, and attempt to understand humanity’s past and present as a product of the relational constitution of human and non-human agencies and alterities.

Technological variability is considered one of the main proxies for exploring difference in human evolution. For instance, Paleolithic archaeologists typically evoke several technological developments to characterize “modern human behavior,” which refers to behaviors that are reflective of the capacities of living human populations (Henshilwood and d’Errico 2011; Henshilwood et al. 2018; Nowell 2023; Scerri and Will 2023). While technological variation is still typically understood in cultural terms, there are an increasing number of works suggesting that it may also reflect different ontologies and ways-of-being (Moro Abadía and Chase 2021; Porr 2020a). These insights have significant implications for the understanding of the conceptualization of human–environment relationships and processes of adaptation, which remain the center of attention of human evolutionary studies (Kandel et al. 2016). Accordingly, a reconceptualization of these interrelationships will also impact the acceptable causal frameworks that are employed.

Narratives in human evolution are often unilinear accounts that reduce a multitude of complex processes to simple narrative frameworks (Landau 1991; Porr and Matthews 2016). These, furthermore, often stem from deep ethnocentric biases. For instance, it is often proposed that archaeology can uncover *the* origins of modern human behavior, *the* “human revolution” and *the* beginning of art and symbolism. However, recent conceptual and empirical research has demonstrated that these narratives are increasingly inadequate and even detrimental to our understanding of humanity’s deep past (Moro Abadía, Conkey, and McDonald 2024). For instance, recent research into Paleolithic art indicates that “art” does not have a single origin. Instead, we are dealing with a pan-human (even pan-hominin) activity that independently arose and disappeared at different times and in different locations with changing contextual and social circumstances (Aubert et al. 2019; Aubert et al. 2018; Brumm et al. 2021; Moro Abadía and Gonzáles Morales 2013). In addition, notions of time and history themselves are crucially undertheorized in human evolutionary studies, and evolutionary narratives and explanations are too often based on a progressive temporality that relates to the modern Western understanding of the human past (Porr 2020b).

Research on human evolution has historically been marked by multiple forms of Eurocentrism. For instance, for many years, archaeologists overlooked the importance of the African record in the origins of modern human behavior (Will, Conard, and Tryon 2019). Similarly, it was assumed that the package of cultural innovations that marked the so-called “Human Revolution” in Europe could be used as a measure to evaluate the “modernity” of other places (Dennell and Porr 2014). Similarly, research was embedded in several gender stereotypes such as “Man the Hunter” and “Woman the Gatherer.” More generally, the epistemology and ontology of human evolution will have to be assessed at a deeper level in relation to the challenge from recent developments in social theory, including queer theory, Indigenous knowledges, and decolonial theory (Gero and Conkey 1991; Liebmann and Rizvi 2008; Porr and Matthews 2020b).

\*\*\*

The chapters in this book are engaging with the abovementioned aspects in different ways. They reflect a considerable degree of variability that is also a consequence of the variability existing in the field of human evolutionary studies in a wider sense of the term, and the fact that this field crosses the traditional boundary between the social and the natural sciences. The book is also an attempt to move beyond this divide and provide critical explorations beyond the sciences and the humanities. The

Alterity and Human Evolution

Deep-Time and Multispecies Perspectives on Difference and Variation

Edited by Oscar Moro Abadía and Martin Porr

<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/AbadiaAlterity>

Not for Resale

topic of alterity was selected to provide a theme and concept that captures a central aim of human evolutionary studies, the description, exploration, and explanation of hominin or human diversity. However, as mentioned earlier, the notion of alterity as “otherness” is a very Western one, and for this reason, several authors were critical of this term. The rejection of the term was done partly for epistemological reasons and partly for ethical considerations. From this situation emerges a complex picture of critical perspectives on current understandings of past and present human diversity, and how this field should be approached and conceptualized.

Chapters in Part I, “Alterity and the (Biological) Species Concept,” discuss questions about human diversity and the notion of alterity concerning the biological species concept. As the latter provides the central taxonomic concept that has been employed to classify organisms and humans since the time of Linneaus, this is not surprising. However, contributors to this section call into question the applicability of the species concept, and challenge the academic community to develop more flexible and dynamic approaches. A key critique is the traditional essentialist orientation of the species concept, which is in contradiction to the dynamic character of life processes at different scales and fundamental issues related to processes of inheritance (Ingold 2022). Jonathan Marks asserts in his chapter that narratives of human ancestry are not equivalent to other narratives of biological development, because the former are essentially reflective of humans studying themselves. As such, they are irreducibly the products of biopolitical and cultural choices of classifying people. There is consequently no “correct” classification of primates or hominins “to be read from nature.” Susan C. Antón draws attention to the need to fully capture and consider the morphological variability that exists between individuals of any hominin population, which cannot adequately be included in a species-level description. Sang-Hee Lee and Cathy Willermet argue that the species concept should be abandoned for hominin populations, at least from the Middle Pleistocene onward, because of the interdependencies of environmental, ethnogenetic, ecological, cultural, and biological factors. With reference to Neanderthals, Brian Boyd argues along similar lines and for a multivariable understanding of difference beyond the established species concept and dualisms between *Homo sapiens* and other hominins. Such an understanding does not just refer to morphological differences but includes variable processes of gender differentiation, embodiment, semiosis, and ways of becoming. Penny Spikins also suggests that approaches toward Neanderthals should consider alternative evolutionary pathways in neuroendocrine responses with associated emotional capacities and constraints. Such a framework will allow the conceptualization of alternative human adaptations that can be seen as *differently social*.

Alterity and Human Evolution

Deep-Time and Multispecies Perspectives on Difference and Variation

Edited by Oscar Moro Abadía and Martin Porr

<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/AbadiaAlterity>

Not for Resale

Beyond the biological species concept, contributors to Part II, "Alterity, History, and Reflexivity," engage more specifically with the notion of alterity in the context of human evolution, as a feature of differentiation between hominin individuals and groups, an ontological and epistemological challenge, as well as an integral part of reflexive anthropological science. Lauren Schroeder and colleagues demonstrate through their careful analysis the interdependencies between sociopolitical developments in Southern and Eastern Africa and narratives of human evolution and origins. Their work shows how political interests have shaped the paleoanthropological canon and otherized certain regions and fossils. These intersections have prevented the field from "shifting to a more holistic, integrative model for the evolution of the genus *Homo* grounded in evolutionary theory and regional interactions," and they continue to impact practices of inclusivity regarding African researchers and the integration of alternative worldviews into research designs and interpretations. Using Neanderthals as a case study, Susan Peeters and Hub Zwart demonstrate how this group of hominins continue to be constructed as boundary creatures, "which threaten the stability of human identity by blurring and challenging some firmly established categories." Again, these processes are influenced by contemporary cultural values and relations of significance. In this case, the authors focus on the entanglement of the construction of the process of history as the process of "civilization," which requires an anti-thesis in a primordial stage of humanity. The latter is equated with Neanderthals but is also linked to nostalgia for the undiluted male-dominated early stages of humanity during which anthropogenesis was equated with andro-genesis. Following a comparable theme, Michelle Langley draws attention to the absence and misrepresentation of children in illustrations and reconstructions of the deep human past. It has long been established that images are arguments in themselves, and they continue to transport simplistic views that focus on limited sections of society to develop narratives of activity, innovation, and progress. For Agustín Fuentes, it is particularly important that research into human evolution actively addresses existing stereotypes about past hominins with important political implications. Significantly, he argues that such a direction needs to be developed from within the discipline of biological anthropology itself. It must involve a careful and systematic reading of the evidence and interpretation of the full range of the available data, and the developmental, morphological, and behavioral diversity that is reflected therein. Mathilde Lequin makes the case for a relational understanding of the notion of alterity to challenge essentialist views of human becoming. Like others, she argues that alterity can serve as a

Alterity and Human Evolution

Deep-Time and Multispecies Perspectives on Difference and Variation

Edited by Oscar Moro Abadía and Martin Porr

<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/AbadiaAlterity>

Not for Resale

concept to weave together different lines of evidence and establish new connections between biological and cultural/social anthropology.

Part III (Chapter 11) is a powerful critique of the concept of ‘alterity’ by Paulette Steeves. In her chapter, Steeves identifies alterity as “a root instigator of racism, hate, violence, and social and political disparities.” As an Indigenous scholar, she asserts that the idea of alterity is related to Western anthropocentrism and the notion that humans are superior to all other beings. This worldview is not only the basis of capitalism and destructive social and material processes of extraction; the application of alterity in anthropology and archaeology has also erased other histories, cultures, and ways of being. As such, these fields are still participating in the Othering of Indigenous knowledge systems and their exclusion from many contexts of academic and non-academic education.

Chapters in Part IV, “Alterity as an Ontological and Epistemological Challenge,” present a variety of works that deal with the ideas of “alterity” and “difference” from several ontological and epistemological viewpoints. Ben Alberti provides a discussion of the intersection of the notion of alterity and the ontological turn, and engages with different conceptualizations of humanity and being human. He questions the idea that humanity as a characteristic must always be tied to a particular biological form. By contrast, he proposes that being human can also be expressed as tool-being or art-being, which then fundamentally questions established approaches toward the boundary between humanity and animality, and how it would map onto biological (hominin) species. Oscar Moro Abadía and colleagues also draw attention to the complexity of the notion of alterity and its ability to enhance the reading of past evidence and understand past cultural processes of change. The challenge in the context of changing art traditions during the transition from the Late Pleistocene to the Early Holocene in Southwest Europe is navigating the tension between potentially radically different worldviews and the need to conceptualize transitional processes of change. From these considerations emerge questions around the character and the basis of differences between human populations and their understandings of the world, and if the notion of alterity is a useful one in this context. Also, in relation to European Paleolithic image-making practices, Carole Fritz conceptualizes the relevant processes not in terms of alterity but of the relational creation of identity through mythological storytelling that equally involve animals and humans.

Extending the discussion about the conceptualization of the notion of alterity for the understanding of deep-time processes, Clive Gamble engages with questions surrounding the research process itself. Taking Levinas’s approach as a starting point, he critically questions the former’s

focus on face-to-face encounters, vision, and speech. For archaeology, these dimensions are often not accessible, but notions of strangeness, unintelligibility, and foreignness are also aspects of archaeological interpretation and translation. These are, however, navigated and negotiated through “the full suite of body-metaphors which underpin knowledge and cognition.” Rather than stressing alterity and fundamental differences, archaeologists should consider the idea of hospitality and extend it to their encounter with material evidence, spaces, and objects. These considerations draw attention to the need to systematically explore the basis of differences between human beings and organisms more generally. Siobhan Guerrero Mc Manus accordingly asserts that the use of the term alterity relates to differences beyond morphology, physiology, and behavior. The term rather refers to differences in the construction of modes of existence that “refer to entities and properties that reflect an ontological enrichment of the world.” As such, it needs to be considered that alterity refers to the creation of fundamental difference as a defining feature of humanity. This difference is not, however, just a feature of past populations or people. It is a feature of those human beings who are involved in the research process themselves. Shumon Hussain consequently makes the case that using the notion of alterity refers to difference that has no analogue in the present or on the horizon of contemporary experience. This does not mean that it is unintelligible, but it is novel, and it requires “scholars to open up—conceptually, methodologically and interpretively—for radical novelty in the behaviors, cognitive horizons, relationships and dynamics that make up the pasts they study.”

\*\*\*

As the examples above illustrate, the notions of “alterity” and “difference” can open new avenues of research in paleoanthropology and human evolution. However, as noted at the beginning of this Introduction, over the last decades several authors (especially Indigenous ones) have revealed the colonial ideologies behind the Western constructions of “Otherness”—an idea that was already explored by Edward Said (1978, 1994) in the context of European colonialism. It is beyond question that notions such as alterity have been used to deny agency and other abilities to the so-called “subaltern Other.” The notion, consequently, has close connections to ideas of racism and hierarchical understandings of ways and modes of being human. For these reasons, we decided to include in this book a Critical Intervention in Part III, “Against Alterity,” by Paulette Steeves on the idea of “alterity.”

Steeves' powerful rejection of the notion of "alterity" makes clear that Paleolithic archaeology and human evolutionary studies need to engage more seriously with decolonial thinking to address fundamental legacies of Western colonial thought. Together with anthropology, archaeology emerged within this broad intellectual climate as a discipline aimed at the classification, ordering, and understanding of human difference. More importantly, these aims were embedded in and a consequence of the enormous expansion of the European colonial global system, which exposed European people, to an unprecedented degree, to information about different forms of cultural expression, human modes of living, and biological and physical variability. Archaeology not only became a way of making sense of human variability and difference in the past and present for European observers, it also became a mechanism of real and intellectual European colonialism. The respective processes have been recognized and studied for some time within the discipline (Alberti et al. 2011; Trigger 2008). An awareness of the historical legacies of the theories and practices of archaeology are currently an integral part of the discipline's structure, although there are certainly great differences across its subfields. Archaeology has certainly changed considerably over the last decades, and has shifted toward a greater awareness of ethical issues of research and its implications for social justice, especially in settler countries (Smith et al. 2019). A considerable section of the field is actively engaged in the exploration of the integration of decolonial and postcolonial elements in archaeological theory and practice. However, we would argue that a systematic engagement with current postcolonial/ decolonial thinking is still not well developed. As outlined elsewhere (Porr and Matthews 2017, 2020a), this situation especially applies to the area of human evolutionary studies in a wider sense of the term, which is particularly characterized by a lack of engagement with critical social theory (see also Hussain, this volume).

There is little doubt that a field that is aimed at understanding human becoming and human difference at a fundamental level would significantly profit from broadening its theoretical toolkit and reflexivity. These aspects include a greater and more systematic awareness of its own epistemological and ontological foundations and assumptions, and how these intersect with political structures and historical legacies (Madison 2023; Porr and Matthews 2020b; Schroeder and Ackermann 2023). Such a shift is not only suggested by the global and often universal (c)aims of human evolutionary studies but also by the global character of human evolutionary research itself, which often cuts across today's political and cultural boundaries. Similarly, because of its global character, human evolutionary research might equally be in constant danger of replicating

Alterity and Human Evolution

Deep-Time and Multispecies Perspectives on Difference and Variation

Edited by Oscar Moro Abadía and Martin Porr

<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/AbadiaAlterity>

Not for Resale

colonial power structures between the Global North and the Global South as well as universalizing ideas about humanity that mirror dominant Western values.

The science of human origins and diversity is still embedded in the legacies of a history that had many negative consequences for Indigenous populations in settler-colonial countries. Engaging with these histories and legacies is critical to the future of the field, its associated disciplines, and supporting institutions. Moving forward, it will be important to provide a vision for a diversified and vibrant version of the science of human evolution that is not burdened by notions of essentialism, race, or racial hierarchies (Black Trowel Collective et al. 2023). The field needs to understand the risk of harm to Indigenous communities through the use and application of outdated epistemological and ontological schemes and problematic research practices. These aspects relate mainly to implicit and explicit racial interpretative frameworks, which continue to cause disadvantages in social, health, and economic outcomes for People of Color (Flewellen et al. 2021). In this context, the ongoing use of the notion of alterity can equally be a source of positive change or ongoing alienation.

Diversifying, decentering, and decolonizing the science of human evolution also requires structural change (Atalay 2019). Dismantling systemic barriers to equity along cultural, gender and socioeconomic vectors at all levels of scholarship will be essential. The same applies to projects and their governance that are actively aimed at challenging relationships in a decolonizing fashion (Klymiuk 2021; Liboiron 2021). Research teams constituted of only a slim section of geography, gender, and demographics will always be vulnerable to conceptual and methodological biases. By contrast, greater diversity and equitable power-sharing are much more likely to produce innovation and meaningful impacts (AlShebli, Rahwan, and Woon 2018; Freeman and Huang 2014; Malhi, Antón, and Fuentes 2019). In this spirit, the engagement with the deep history of humanity needs to integrate the notion of alterity in a politically and ethically responsible fashion that is reflective and mindful of the diversity of the deep past of humanity itself.

**Martin Porr** is Associate Professor of Archaeology at the University of Western Australia and a member of the Centre for Rock Art Research and Management. He is currently an Australian Research Council Future Fellow and his work has so far concentrated on decolonizing approaches in archaeological research, Palaeolithic archaeology, the Palaeolithic art of Europe, Australian rock art, and ethnographic collections research.

**Oscar Moro Abadía** is a Professor of Archaeology at Memorial University of Newfoundland (Canada). He specializes in the study of prehistoric and Indigenous arts, with particular attention to the history, epistemology, and ontology of rock images. In 2021, he co-edited *Ontologies of Rock Art: Images, Relational Approaches and Indigenous Knowledges* (with Martin Porr, Routledge). In 2024, he co-edited *Deep-Time Images in the Age of Globalization: Rock Art in the 21st Century Series* (with Margaret Conkey and Josephine McDonald, Springer). His research has been published in *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, *History of Science*, *History of the Human Sciences*, *Journal of Social Archaeology*, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, *Journal of Archaeological Research*, *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory*, and *World Archaeology*. He is a member of the research group EVO ADAPTA (Universidad de Cantabria, Spain), and is currently undertaking several projects focused on the rock art of the Canadian Maritimes.

## References

- Alberti, B., S. Fowles, M. Holbraad, Y. Marshall, and C.L. Witmore. 2011. "Worlds Otherwise': Archaeology, Anthropology, and Ontological Difference." *Current Anthropology* 52(6): 896–911.
- AlShebli, B.K., T. Rahwan, and W.L. Woon. 2018. "The Preeminence of Ethnic Diversity in Scientific Collaboration." *Nature Communications* 9(1): 5163. doi:10.1038/s41467-018-07634-8.
- Anderson, K. 2007. *Race and the Crisis of Humanism*. New York: Routledge.
- Atalay, S. 2019. "Can Archaeology Help Decolonize the Way Institutions Think? Community-Based Research is Transforming the Archaeology Training Toolbox and Helping to Transform Institutions." *Archaeologies: Journal of the World Archaeological Congress* 15(3): 514–35.
- Aubert, M., P. Setiawan, A.A. Oktaviana, A. Brumm, P.H. Sulistyarto, E.W. Saptomo, and H.E.A. Brand. 2018. "Palaeolithic Cave Art in Borneo." *Nature* 564(7735): 254–57. doi:10.1038/s41586-018-0679-9.
- Aubert, M., et al. 2019. "Earliest Hunting Scene in Prehistoric Art." *Nature* 576(7787): 442–45. doi:10.1038/s41586-019-1806-y.
- Bae, C.J., K. Douka, M.D. and Petraglia. 2017. "On the Origin of Modern Humans: Asian Perspectives." *Science* 358(6368): eaai9067. doi:10.1126/science.aai9067.
- Barnard, A. 2011. *Social Anthropology and Human Origins*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baudrillard, J., and M. Guillaume. 2008. *Radical Alterity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Bennett, J. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ontology of Things*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Bertelsen, B.E., and S. Bendixsen. 2016. "Recalibrating Alterity, Difference, Ontology: Anthropological Engagements with Human and Non-Human

Alterity and Human Evolution

Deep-Time and Multispecies Perspectives on Difference and Variation

Edited by Oscar Moro Abadía and Martin Porr

<https://www.berghahnbooks.com/title/AbadiaAlterity>

Not for Resale

- Worlds." In *Critical Anthropological Engagements in Human Alterity and Difference*, ed. B.E. Bertelsen and S. Bendixsen, 1–40. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Black Trowel Collective, M. Berihuete-Azorín, C. Blackmore, L. Borck, J. L. Flexner, C.J. Frieman, C.A. Herrmann, and R. Kiddey. 2023. "Archaeology in 2022: Counter-Myths for Hopeful Futures." *American Anthropologist* 126: 135–48. doi:10.1111/aman.13940.
- Blaser, M. 2009. "Political Ontology: Cultural Studies without 'Cultures'?" *Cultural Studies* 23(5–6): 873–96.
- . 2013. "Ontological Conflicts and the Stories of Peoples in Spite of Europe." *Current Anthropology* 54(4): 547–68.
- Boas, F. 2021. *Anthropology and Modern Life*. London: Routledge.
- Brattain, M. 2007. "Race, Racism, and Antiracism: UNESCO and the Politics of Presenting Science to the Postwar Public." *The American Historical Review* 112(5): 1386–413.
- Brumm, A., A. Oktaviana Adhi, B. Burhan, B. Hakim, R. Lebe, J.-x. Zhao, and M. Aubert. 2021. "Oldest Cave Art Found in Sulawesi." *Science Advances* 7(3): eabd4648. doi:10.1126/sciadv.abd4648.
- Cadena, M. de la, and M. Blaser, eds. 2018. *A World of Many Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Celermajer, D., et al. 2020. "Multispecies Justice: Theories, Challenges, and a Research Agenda for Environmental Politics." *Environmental Politics* 30 (1–2): 119–40. doi:10.1080/09644016.2020.1827608.
- Chua, L., and N. Mathur, eds. 2018. *Who Are "We"? Reimagining Alterity and Affinity in Anthropology*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Clifford, J. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 1997. *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- . 2013. *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Clifford, J., and G.E. Marcus, eds. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Corbey, R., and A. Lanjouw, eds. 2013. *The Politics of Species: Reshaping our Relationships with other Animals*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Corbey, R., and J.T.L. Leerssen, eds. 1991. *Alterity, Identity, Image: Selves and Others in Society and Scholarship*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.
- Corbey, R., and W. Roebroeks, eds. 2001. *Studying Human Origins: Disciplinary History and Epistemology*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Dennell, R., and M. Porr, eds. 2014. *Southern Asia, Australia, and the Search for Human Origins*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Descola, P. 2013. *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Flewellen, A.O., J.P. Dunnavant, A. Odewale, A. Jones, T. Wolde-Michael, Z. Crossland, and M. Franklin. 2021. "'The Future of Archaeology Is Antiracist': Archaeology in the Time of Black Lives Matter." *American Antiquity* 86(2): 224–43. doi:10.1017/aaq.2021.18.

- Freeman, R.B., and W. Huang. 2014. "Collaboration: Strength in Diversity." *Nature* 513(7518): 305. doi:10.1038/513305a.
- Gero, J.M., and M.W. Conkey, eds. 1991. *Engendering Archaeology: Women and Prehistory*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Gosden, C. 1999. *Anthropology & Archaeology: A Changing Relationship*. London: Routledge.
- Graeber, D. 2015. "Radical Alterity is Just Another Way of Saying 'Reality': A Reply to Eduardo Viveiros De Castro." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5(2): 1–41. doi:10.14318/hau5.2.003.
- Hage, G. 2015. *Alter-Politics: Critical Anthropology and the Radical Imagination*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Haraway, D. 2016. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Harman, G. 2007. "Aesthetics as First Philosophy: Levinas and the Non-Human." *Naked Punch* 9: 21–30.
- Henshilwood, C.S., and F. d'Errico, eds. 2011. *Homo Symbolicus: The Dawn of Language, Imagination and Spirituality*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Henshilwood, C.S., F. d'Errico, K.L. van Niekerk, L. Dayet, A. Queffelec, and L. Pollarolo. 2018. "An Abstract Drawing from the 73,000-Year-Old Levels at Blombos Cave, South Africa." *Nature* 562(7725): 115–18. doi:10.1038/s41586-018-0514-3.
- Holbraad, M., and M.A. Pedersen. 2017. *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ingold, T. 2000. *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Liveliness, Dwelling and Skill*. London: Routledge.
- . 2011. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. London: Routledge.
- . 2022. "Evolution without Inheritance. Steps towards an Ecology of Learning." *Current Anthropology* 63: S32–S55. doi:10.1086/722437.
- Ingold, T., and G. Pálsson, eds. 2013. *Biosocial Becomings: Integrating Social and Biological Anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kandel, A.W., M. Bolus, K. Bretzke, A.A. Bruch, M.N. Haidle, C. Hertler, and M. Märker. 2016. "Increasing Behavioral Flexibility? An Integrative Macro-scale Approach to Understanding the Middle Stone Age of Southern Africa." *Journal of Archaeological Method and Theory* 23: 623–68.
- Klymiuk, A.A. 2021. "Addressing Unconscious Coloniality and Decolonizing Practice in Geoscience." *Nature Reviews. Earth & Environment* 2(11): 745–46. doi:10.1038/s43017-021-00235-y.
- Kuper, A., and J. Marks. 2011. "Anthropologists Unite!" *Nature* 470: 166–68.
- Landau, M. 1991. *Narratives of Human Evolution*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Latour, B. 2013. *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence: An Anthropology of the Moderns*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Leistle, B., ed. 2016. *Anthropology and Alterity: Responding to the Other*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Levinas, E. 2001. *Alterity and Transcendence*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Lewis, S.L., and M.A. Maslin. 2018. *The Human Planet: How We Created the Anthropocene*. London: Pelican.
- Liboiron, M. 2021. "Decolonizing Geoscience Requires More Than Equity and Inclusion." *Nature Geoscience* 14(12): 876–77. doi:10.1038/s41561-021-00861-7.
- Liebmann, M., and U.Z. Rizvi, eds. 2008. *Archaeology and the Postcolonial Critique*. Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press.
- Long, J.C., and R.A. Kittles. 2003. "Human Genetic Diversity and the Nonexistence of Biological Races." *Human Biology* 75(4): 449–71. doi:10.1353/hub.2003.0058.
- Madison, P. 2023. "Tug-of-War: Bones and Stones as Scientific Objects in Postcolonial Indonesia." *Isis* 114(1): 77–98. doi:https://doi.org/10.1086/723725.
- Malhi, R.S., S.C. Antón, and A. Fuentes. 2019. "Increasing Diversity in Evolutionary Anthropological Sciences—the IDEAS Program." *American Anthropologist* 121(2): 478–79. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13226.
- Marcus, G.E., and M.M.J. Fischer, eds. 1986. *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Marks, J. 2008. "Race: Past, Present, and Future." In *Revisiting Race in a Genomic Age*, ed. B.A. Koenig, S. S.-J. Lee, and S.S. Richardson, 21–38. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- . 2012. "Why Be Against Darwin? Creationism, Racism, and the Roots of Anthropology." *Yearbook of Physical Anthropology* 55: 95–104.
- Mc Manus, S. 2017. "Biological Explanations and Their Limits: Paleoanthropology among the Sciences." in *Rethinking Human Evolution*, ed. J.H. Schwartz, 31–52. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Moro Abadía, O., and A.K. Chase. 2021. "Ontology and Human Evolution: Neanderthal 'Art' and the Method of Controlled Equivocation." In *Ontologies of Rock Art: Images, Relational Approaches, and Indigenous Knowledges*, ed. O. Moro Abadía and M. Porr, 91–114. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Moro Abadía, O., M.W. Conkey, and J. McDonald. 2024. "Deep-Time Images and the Challenges of Globalization." In *Deep-Time Images in the Age of Globalization: Rock Art in the 21st Century*, ed. O. Moro Abadía, M.W. Conkey, and J. McDonald, 1–18. Cham: Springer.
- Moro Abadía, O., and M.R. Gonzáles Morales. 2013. "Paleolithic Art: A Cultural History." *Journal of Archaeological Research* 21: 269–306.
- Moro Abadía, O., and M. Porr. 2021. "Introduction: Ontology, Rock Art Research, and the Challenge of Alterity." In *Ontologies of Rock Art: Images, Relational Approaches, and Indigenous Knowledges*, ed. O. Moro Abadía and M. Porr, 11–31. Abington: Routledge.
- Nowell, A. 2023. "Rethinking Neandertals." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 52(1): 151–70. doi:10.1146/annurev-anthro-052621-024752.
- Pilaar Birch, S., ed. 2018. *Multispecies Archaeology*. New York: Routledge.
- Porr, M. 2014. "Essential Questions: 'Modern Humans' and the Capacity for Modernity." In *Southern Asia, Australia and the Search for Human Origins*, ed. R. Dennell and M. Porr, 257–64. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 2020a. "Art, Rationality and Nature: Human Origins beyond the Unity of Knowledge." In *The Pasts and Presence of Art in South Africa*, ed. C. Wingfield, J.

- Giblin, and R. King, 81–90. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research.
- . 2020b. “The Temporality of Humanity and the Colonial Landscape of the Deep Human Past.” In *Interrogating Human Origins: Decolonisation and the Deep Human Past*, ed. M. Porr and J.M. Matthews, 184–207. London: Routledge.
- Porr, M., and J.M. Matthews. 2016. “Thinking through Story.” *Hunter Gatherer Research* 2(3): 249–74.
- . 2017. “Post-Colonialism, Human Origins and the Paradox of Modernity.” *Antiquity* 91(358): 1058–68.
- . 2020a. “Interrogating and Decolonising the Deep Human Past.” In *Interrogating Human Origins: Decolonisation and the Deep Human Past*, ed. M. Porr and J.M. Matthews, 3–31. London: Routledge.
- , eds. 2020b. *Interrogating Human Origins: Decolonisation and the Deep Human Past*. London: Routledge.
- Porr, M., and N. Weidtmann, eds. 2024. *One World Anthropology and Beyond: A Multidisciplinary Engagement with the Work of Tim Ingold*. London: Routledge.
- Povinelli, E.A. 2016. *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Roebroeks, W., and M. Soressi. 2016. “Neandertals Revised.” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 113(23): 6372. doi:10.1073/pnas.1521269113.
- Said, E.W. 1978. *Orientalism*. London: Pantheon Books.
- . 1994. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage Books.
- Scerri, E.M.L., and M. Will. 2023. “The Revolution That Still Isn’t: The Origins of Behavioral Complexity in Homo Sapiens.” *Journal of Human Evolution* 179: 103358. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhevol.2023.103358.
- Schroeder, L. 2020. “Revolutionary Fossils, Ancient Biomolecules, and Reflections in Ethics and Decolonization: Paleoanthropology in 2019.” *American Anthropologist* 122(2): 306–20. doi:https://doi.org/10.1111/aman.13410.
- Schroeder, L., and R.R. Ackermann. 2023. “Moving beyond the Adaptationist Paradigm for Human Evolution, and Why It Matters.” *Journal of Human Evolution* 174: 103296. doi:https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhevol.2022.103296.
- Smith, C., H. Burke, J. Ralph, K. Pollard, A. Gorman, C. Wilson, and G. Jackson. 2019. “Pursuing Social Justice through Collaborative Archaeologies in Aboriginal Australia.” *Archaeologies* 15(3): 536–69. doi:10.1007/s11759-019-09382-7.
- Spivak, G.C. 1999. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Taussig, M. 1993. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge.
- Todd, Z. 2016. “An Indigenous Feminist’s Take on the Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ is Just Another Word for Colonialism.” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 29(1): 4–22.
- Trigger, B. 2008. “‘Alternative Archaeologies’ in Historical Perspective.” In *Evaluating Multiple Narratives: Beyond Nationalist, Colonialist, and Imperialist Archaeologies*, ed. J. Habu, C. Fawcett, and J.M. Matsunaga, 187–95. New York: Springer.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. 2012. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2nd edn). London: Zed Books.

- Vermeulen, H.F. 2015. *Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Viveiros de Castro, E. 2014. *Cannibal Metaphysics: For a Post-structural Anthropology*. Minneapolis, MN: Univocal.
- . 2015a. *The Relative Native: Essays of Indigenous Conceptual Worlds*. Chicago: HAU Books.
- . 2015b. "Who's Afraid of the Ontological Wolf: Some Comments on an Ongoing Anthropological Debate." *Cambridge Anthropology* 33(1): 2–17.
- Will, M., N.J. Conard, and C.A. Tryon. 2019. "Timing and Trajectory of Cultural Evolution on the African Continent 200,000–30,000 Years Ago." In *Modern Human Origins and Dispersal*, ed. Y. Sahle, H. Reyes-Centeno, and C. Bentz, 25–72. Tübingen: Kerns Verlag.