Introduction

Compliance

Politics, Sociability and the Constitution of Collective Life

Will Rollason and Eric Hirsch

Following rules, submitting to demands or requirements and accommodating oneself to others has been a central feature of the lives of vast numbers of people in recent times. This is evidently true for those across the world who have experienced a variety of restrictions on their daily activities as governments, health officials and supra-national organisations have grappled with the novel coronavirus pandemic.

In the United Kingdom, citizens' positive responses to restrictions on their movement and social contacts, first imposed on 23 March 2020, took the government, at least initially, by surprise. Government planning as late as the second week of March presumed that compliance with social distancing would be as low as 50 per cent, with only a marginal benefit (Freedman 2020: 47), and the health secretary, Matt Hancock, voiced his concerns that restrictions would be undermined by 'behavioural fatigue' (Freedman 2020: 61). However, ordinary British people were unexpectedly willing for their lives to be locked down, to the extent that, for many, a functional lockdown was in place long before it was officially required. By 18 March, five days before a national lockdown was first imposed, traffic volumes in London had fallen by 40 per cent (Freedman 2020: 53) and organisations like the Football Association had already cancelled public events (Freedman 2020: 50). Although responses to restrictions have been and remain varied, there was evidently a kind of spontaneous willingness to adapt to the predicament of the pandemic. The sorts of restrictions that ordinary people adopted in their daily lives were also effective. Lawrence Freedman argues that 'changes in behaviour were

having an effect well before 23 March [when lockdown restrictions were imposed], especially in London' (2020: 58). At least initially, public 'compliance' with restrictions was, evidently, not a straightforward response to rules, regulations or UK government guidance.[1]

In April 2021, the Office for National Statistics (2021) published a report acknowledging that 'overall, compliance was high and many participants in the study had a good awareness of … government guidance … and of how the coronavirus spreads'. The guidance in question, 'hands, face, space', referred to vectors of viral transmission, namely from surfaces (hands and face) and as an aerosol (space). Both of these vectors, and the rationales behind them, referred to modes of connection between people – the surfaces they touched, the physical contact they had with others, and the common air they breathed. Restrictions, in turn, were designed to minimise these contacts and manage connections as a means of limiting viral spread. Regardless of whether people complied with the government's guidance, these restrictions thus drew attention to the ways in which people were linked to one another. Similarly, the vicissitudes of the lockdown highlighted the significant role of newly christened 'key workers' in delivering food and goods, providing health and social care, and performing other important services. Such work in mediating and maintaining other aspects of social life rose to prominence and was recognised as people turned out onto their doorsteps to 'clap for heroes' on Thursday evenings in honour of NHS workers, for example. These results suggest a popular awareness of the significance of social relations and their management as the stuff from which lives are built.

It is in this context that we raise the question of *compliance*. Compliance is a pregnant term in several respects. Its Latin root, *complire*, covers the senses of 'to fill up, fulfil, accomplish, complete'. The notion of compliance emerged in English in the seventeenth century as 'compleasance' or 'complaisance', clearly carrying the sense of obligation implicit in the Latin. Thomas Hobbes writes about compleasance in *Leviathan* (1909: 116–17, original emphasis), where it is discussed as 'A fifth Law of Nature: COMPLEASANCE: that is to say, *That every man strive to accommodate himselfe to the rest* … The observers of this Law, may be called SOCIABLE … The contrary, *Stubborn*, *Insociable*, *Froward*, *Intractable*'. In Hobbes' terms, as in the context of the pandemic, compliance is a marker of sociability, an awareness of obligations or duties that aims towards *accommodation* with others. Compliance, in other words, suggests the activity of fitting oneself in relation to others for a particular mode of life, in contrast to the '*Stubborn*, *Insociable*, *Froward*' and '*Intractable*'.

Correspondingly, other near-contemporary usages make 'compliance' mean the ability to bend or physically fit another object, as a cork

'complies' with the neck of a bottle, and 'to comply' could also mean to weave or braid. This sense of physical accommodation is retained in the physical sciences, where compliance denotes 'the property of a body or substance of yielding to an applied force or of allowing a change to be made in its shape; also, the degree of yielding, measured by the displacement produced by a unit change in the force' (Oxford English Dictionary 2021). Compliance, in other words, indicates tractability, being able to live or work with others, or the capacity to fit, yield or take an impression (see also Milton 1667: 603).

From the time of its coining, however, compliance has carried other meanings. Around the time of the trial and subsequent execution of Charles I, John Milton wrote *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1649a). He saw Charles I as a tyrant and was in favour of the formation of a republic. He begins his book with the following sentence: 'If Men within themselves would be govern'd by reason, and not generally give up their understanding to a double tyrannie, of Custome from without, and blind affections within, they would discerne better, what it is to favour and uphold the Tyrant of a Nation'. A few sentences later, he draws on the idea of compliance to highlight the passivity exercised by 'bad' people in the face of tyranny: 'Consequentlie neither doe bad men hate Tirants, but have been alwaies readiest with the falsifi'd names of Loyalty and Obedience, to colour over their base compliances' (1649a: 1). In Milton's terms, compliance stood for falsity, sycophancy and surrender.

This morally questionable character of compliance was also highlighted by later authors. Two centuries after Milton's treatise, compliance was still being used pejoratively. In a speech that addresses local political issues in Boston, and what he sees as an ineffective array of appointed officials, the American abolitionist Wendell Phillips notes that '[a]ll politics necessitates questionable compliances; but this serfdom touches a base depth' (1863: 498). Similar ideas have been voiced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, London mayoral candidate Piers Corbyn was arrested in February 2021 in connection with a campaign flyer equating the United Kingdom's vaccination programme to the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz (BBC News 2021). Such equations are typical of 'COVID-sceptical' politics. From this perspective, compliance with government policy would represent complicity in tyranny. 'Base' compliance, in other words, represents a potential failure of independent thought and action, a 'blind affection' robbing people of freedom and agency, instilling a morally questionable 'complicity'.

Compliance, then, suggests a series of issues for anthropologists. First, it raises questions around meaning. As Milton's 'base' compliance, it invites attention to politics, resistance and agency, especially as they

concern the apparent moral value of subjects as independent agents. However, as Hobbes stresses in his account of compleasance as a 'fifth law of nature', people may also *strive* to be compliant. As such, compliance might itself be thought of as a project or activity of self-shaping (cf. Foucault 1994; Laidlaw 2014). Especially in this regard, compliance points to the quality of tractability in social life, the capacity of actors – human and perhaps also non-human – and their efforts to accommodate themselves to one another's demands in striving to become 'sociable' in Hobbes' terms. In connection with the surprising levels of compliance with COVID-19 restrictions in the United Kingdom, this leads us to approach compliance as an ethnographic question: who complies, how, and with what, exactly?

Anthropology and Compliance

Beyond its topical relevance, thinking about compliance anthropologically is interesting because no generalised, contemporary anthropology of compliance exists. Compliance appears in the anthropological literature mainly in connection with medicine, tax and corporate affairs – all contexts in which compliance is a term used by the people anthropologists study, and which feature in several of the chapters assembled here. There is very little contemporary anthropological material that focusses explicitly on why people follow the law,[2] or why juniors obey seniors in kinship relations, for example.[3] Compliance, in a general sense, has never become an important object of anthropological study. Our aim here is to argue that it should be, and to demonstrate its potential value.

The lack of an anthropology of compliance stands in stark contrast to psychology (famously, Milgram 1963). Psychologists have produced material on compliance in medical (e.g. Radley 1994) and business settings (e.g. Damayanti et al. 2015; Wenzel 2005), as anthropologists have. They have also considered sales strategies (e.g. Burger 1986; Cialdini et al. 1978), kinship (e.g. Sundie et al. 2012), survey responses (e.g. Petrova et al. 2007) and many other topics from the perspective of compliance. The range of contexts in which the term crops up in psychology indicates a key difference between the idea of compliance in that discipline and in anthropology: for psychologists, the question of what compliance is and what it does is generative, in the sense that pursuing it opens up insight and further lines of enquiry about many aspects of human social relations (e.g. Cialdini and Goldstein 2004; Cialdini and Trost 1998), whereas anthropologists, as we argue below, have tended to take (non-)compliance for granted. Given that the question of how social relations work is equally relevant to both

psychologists and anthropologists, why have anthropologists not adopted this standpoint?

An important reason for its neglect as an object of anthropological study is certainly the way in which compliance has been understood and evaluated as a relationship. Here again, Hobbes and Milton stand usefully for two poles of moral evaluation. For Hobbes, compliance is necessary for the conduct of social life; for Milton, by contrast, to comply is to lose a certain independence and, potentially, standing as a moral subject. Their different views of compliance are, in turn, traceable to judgements on the moral qualities of government and the state. Hobbes' argument in *Leviathan* is well known: the power of the sovereign is required to guarantee a peaceful and orderly society; it exists by the transfer to the sovereign of individual people's rights and capacities, especially to employ violence. Hobbes' compliance is therefore readable as a limitation of individual agency. Milton's view opposes Hobbes' directly. In *Eikonoklastēs*, a tract composed for the Commonwealth government that ruled England after the execution of Charles I, and in direct rebuttal to Charles' justification of his conduct before and during the Civil War, Milton contends:

> He [Charles I] confesses a rational sovrantie of soule and freedom of will in every man, and yet with an implicit repugnancy would have his reason the sovran of that sovranty, and would captivate and make useless that natural freedom of will in all other men but himself. But them that yeeld him this obedience he so well rewards, as to pronounce them worthy to be Slaves. They who have lost all to be his Subjects, may stoop and take up the reward. (Milton 1694b)

Milton and Hobbes thus both envisage compliance as a limitation of individual freedom and capacity to act; they differ only in their assessment of its value. For Hobbes, submission is necessary to the orderly Commonwealth, whereas for Milton it represents an illegitimate imposition.

These contrasting evaluations evidently map closely onto conventional and deep-rooted social scientific distinctions between structure and agency. Marshall Sahlins has argued (1996) that they also correspond to a deep mythic structure of Western European thought and culture, articulated in the narrative of the Fall of Man, which he suggests resonates through modern social thought. For Sahlins, the question of the value of individual free will arises from the Fall because it was Adam's wilful act of eating of the tree of knowledge that created want and scarcity. Freedom was therefore sinful for St Augustine (1998) and other early Christian thinkers, and to be minutely managed by spiritual directors given pastoral

responsibility for their flock (Foucault 1995: 139ff.; 2009). Compliance with such spiritual direction was the essence of virtue.

As Michel Foucault (2009) documents, the upheavals of the seventeenth century in Europe – exactly the period of Hobbes and Milton – saw 'pastoral' modes of control, derived from spiritual direction, extended from ecclesiastical affairs to secular matters. At the same time, free will was reimagined. It was no longer necessarily sinful, but a fact of life to be managed (Sahlins 1996: 398). This management was often modelled on the work of spiritual direction and the compliance of the penitent or disciple. It developed into forms of disciplinary practice that sought order in timely and minutely choreographed movements (Foucault 1995; Mitchell 1988). From the late eighteenth century, emerging forms of discipline, applied to soldiers, factory workers and school children, aimed to order the placement and movements of the people they were applied to, rendering their activities transparent and accessible to analysis (Foucault 1995: 143). The purpose of these disciplines was to forge order out of chaos, much as scientists of the so-called 'classical age' sought to tabulate and order species of plants, animals and rocks (Foucault 1970). Compliance here shifts from religious virtue to social order and efficiency.

However, by the end of the eighteenth century, an alternative line of thinking was developing, one which located social order differently and made different demands of the compliance–freedom dyad. In various disciplines, hidden, internal orders were discovered in the phenomena of the world, which seemed to give them an internal, spontaneous order, above and beyond attempts to govern them (Foucault 1970). Capital and the 'invisible hand' (Smith 1999) of the market in economics serve, for Sahlins (1996), as the model for this tendency (see also Foucault 1970). From this point of view, as in Milton's earlier position, free will is inherently good, and the role of government is not to dominate it, as in pastoral discipline, but to liberate it. As Sahlins comments, this was original sin 'bourgeoisified' as 'rational choice', providing 'a more cheerful view of the material opportunities afforded by human suffering' (1996: 397). The moral loads of free will and compliance were thus reversed, and freedom, as opposed to compliance (following 'tradition', for example), became the ultimate source of virtue.

Between these two poles of moral evaluation lies the problem for studying compliance anthropologically. Compliance and its relation to agency does not appear as a phenomenon to be studied, but as the foundational concept for different visions of social life. In the Miltonian idiom that runs through Smith and Milton Friedman, human freedom and agency are the prime movers of social life. People's freedom to act as consumers and investors produces the inherent and efficient logic of the market, which

should be extended to all sorts of services (power, water, rail, education, welfare, child care 'choices', etc.). In this tradition, arbitrary systems of control, such as that proposed by Hobbes,[4] should be limited to guaranteeing the 'natural' operations of markets, to which they should be subservient. Compliance with such systems of control is therefore suspect – the 'slavery' that Milton sees following submission to the King in *Eikonoklastēs* is evidently on Friedrich von Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* (2007).

Conversely, Hobbes' vision of compliance and the limitation of freedom as the necessary price of order against chaos is obviously echoed in eighteenth-century French thought (Montesquieu 1989; Rousseau 1997). Early anthropology is likewise shot through with the notion, especially in speculations concerning the control of 'primitive promiscuity' and the development of regulated forms of marriage and kinship (Gluckman 1965 [provides a summary]; Maine 1977; Morgan 2000). The two streams join in Émile Durkheim's (1915) notion of the collective conscience and Marcel Mauss' (2002) account of the obligations of gift exchange, in which compliance serves, exactly as in Hobbes, to make people 'sociable' and thus to found society. For anthropologists who have inherited this intellectual history, compliance is a necessary component of social analysis, but, as we argue below, it is very difficult to bring into focus as an object of study.

Hobbesean Anthropology

For a long time, anthropology operated in a Hobbesean mode, mediated by Durkheim. In the years 1894–95, Durkheim gave a course of lectures on Hobbes' 1642 book, *De Cive*, originally written in Latin but translated into English in 1651 under the title *Philosophicall Rudiments Concerning Government and Society* (Hobbes 1978), which anticipates themes elaborated in *Leviathan*. The famous phrase *bellum omnium contra omnes* ('war of all against all') appeared first in *De Cive*. Hobbes was of interest to Durkheim because of the latter's abiding concern with the issue of 'social cohesion' (Eloire 2011).

Durkheim had published *The Division of Labour in Society* in 1893 (Durkheim 1984) and was working on *Rules of the Sociological Method*, ultimately published in 1895 (Durkheim 1938). He was concerned to place the then nascent discipline of sociology in historical and philosophical perspective. Durkheim saw in Hobbes' writing a way of scientifically understanding society and of providing an objective point of view on the social. For Durkheim, the fundamental rule of sociology was that social facts must be considered as things, and he understood Hobbes as applying this rule in his writing. But Durkheim also highlighted the contractarianism of Hobbes,

which meant that he could not see that social facts had to be explained by other social facts and was confined to an individualistic reasoning.

According to Durkheim's interpretation of Hobbes, society is not a product of human nature. If the pre-social state of nature had existed, chronic war would have resulted due to the natural equality of men, inhibiting their capacity to organise. Society is therefore the product of reason, obliging individuals together through mutually binding contracts. These inter-individual relations are, in turn, connected with another set of binding relations that unites each individual to recognised power through an independent allocation of rights. Hobbes' theory of the state is of an institution that is not natural but social. The question for Durkheim, then, was one of what relationships between 'social facts' would account for the form of society.

The anthropology that developed under Durkheim's influence, especially in Britain, was concerned with the orderliness or 'cohesion' of 'primitive societies' (Evans-Pritchard 1940), where order was understood as a necessary good (Strathern 1985). Primitive societies were interesting both because their orderliness was a surprise considering their 'savagery' (Malinowski 1926), and because it was thought that in examining the principles of their order, which were assumed to be restricted by their limited scale, a general theory of social life might be possible (Fortes 2017; Gluckman 1965). The problem was to find out what made order possible, necessary and enduring. Considering the various ways in which other people organised their social lives, it was evident, as Meyer Fortes observed, that 'social cohesion … is achieved by specific social mechanisms' (1936: 604), as Durkheim had argued.

Ultimately, the mechanisms of cohesion were to be found in accounts of 'custom' (Gluckman 1965) or, analogously, in rights and obligations defined by systems of descent and kinship (Fortes 2017). Societies were ordered – and ordered differently to one another – because they had different customs. Clearly, for customs to have the effect of producing distinctive social orders, people must comply with them. As Durkheim (1952) had already demonstrated, social regularities could not be explained either by exogenous factors such as climate, or by individual choice, which would produce random and not regular effects. They were rather the product of people's compliance with exterior and compulsory norms (Durkheim 1938). As in Hobbes, sociability involved submission. Since compliance was a taken-for-granted mechanism in Durkheimian theories of society, it was not itself available for study. Even in legal anthropology, the reasons for which people comply and the means by which they are brought to do so were obscured or excluded from the purview of the discipline. 'Why an individual for emotional and intellectual reasons conforms to the code

and discharges his obligations', declared Max Gluckman, 'is a problem for psychologists' (1965: 202), and thus of no interest to anthropology.

The Miltonian Turn

Even as Gluckman was writing, however, the ground was already shifting. Anthropology was taking a Miltonian turn, in which compliance would come to be seen as 'base', morally questionable and academically uninteresting. In 1968, Edwin Ardener (2006) presented his paper 'Belief and the problem of women' at University College London. In it, he argued that 'custom' was understood differently by men and women, and that it mattered from whom anthropologists drew the information on which they based their models of social structure. Feminist anthropologists rapidly developed this and similar ideas, exploring the ways in which cultural and social systems operated not in the interests of cohesion, but as forms of patriarchal domination (Moore 1988 [provides a summary]; Ortner 1974; Rubin 1975; Strathern 1988).

At the same time, 'primitive societies' as the object of anthropological study and the sites of custom were also slipping away. Decolonisation meant that they could no longer be imagined as distinct from the 'modern' states that they were part of (e.g. Epstein 1981) and whose governments were often intolerant of 'tribalism' (Asad 1998). Likewise, scholars from the ex-colonies, as well as the metropole, were developing critical accounts of the violence of colonialism and the connections between knowledge – including anthropological knowledge – and colonial power (Fabian 1983; Robbins 2013; Said 2003). As in feminist accounts, the 'mechanisms of social cohesion' identified by Fortes and other structural-functional anthropologists appeared,[5] in the light of this scholarship, to be inextricably connected to colonialism – both as an instrument of power and a product of the colonial imagination. By the beginning of the 1990s, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1991) concluded that anthropology's location in the 'savage slot' was no longer tenable: 'primitive societies' bound by custom could not be the object of the discipline, or used in the interests of a Western study of social life in general.

Anthropology's response to these developments was halting and confused by the various lines of critique involved, which covered a gamut of issues from authorship to the mechanics of colonial power.[6] However, Joel Robbins (2013) argues that the upshot of the turmoil of the period 1970–1990 was a shift of focus towards the subject and a retreat from the idea of structure (see Urla and Helepololei 2014). Robbins states: 'Anthropology was in the early 1990s changing its relation to those it studied from one of

analytic distance and critical comparison focused on difference to one of empathic connection and moral witnessing *based on human unity*' (2013: 453, emphasis added). Robbins argues that the universality of the human was established through a focus on suffering as a common experience, leading to anthropologists bearing compassionate witness to others as fellow people.

If people were everywhere the same, as evidenced in their capacity to suffer, then it followed that they had to be separable from the very different social and cultural circumstances under which they lived. The unity of humanity therefore tended to establish an oppositional relationship between people and the social and cultural systems they inhabited – one which in many respects echoes Gluckman's (1965) dismissal of the motives and interests of the subjects of anthropological study. Social life varied, but humanity was constant. Logically, then, this 'anthropology of the suffering subject' (Robbins 2013) was one that treated socio-cultural variation as an epiphenomenon to humanity, not constitutive of it.[7] As had been the case for Durkheim (1938), socio-cultural systems were *external* to human subjects, surrounding them as a constraining environment that they negotiated tactically (de Certeau 1984). Agency could be registered only against this background. Correspondingly, as in James Scott's (1990, 1998) influential work, human life as such, and especially the inner lives of subjects, came to be seen as inherently ungovernable and resistant to the systems that were imposed on people (see Mitchell 1990). Where local cultural lives were celebrated, these commonly took the form of a kind of resistant, everyday know-how or *mētis* (Dresch and Scheele 2015; Scott 1998), ranged against larger-scale or dominant systems of power. In this context, anthropologists sought out instances of 'everyday resistance' as evidence of the vitality and agency of their subjects (Abu-Lughod 1990). Resistance was the corollary of common humanity and the *Leitmotif* of a generation of anthropological work (Brown 1996; Ortner 1995, 1997).

The central place that resistance had achieved in anthropology by the 1990s has been extremely durable. This was partly the result of historical events – notably responses to the 2008 financial crash and the Arab Spring of 2011. In the aftermath of these events, Dimitrios Theodossopoulos suggests a retreat from the notion, but not very far: 'The concept of resistance was not that long ago a great source of inspiration for anthropology. More recently, however, anthropological interest has shifted to a variety of related topics: urban protest, insurrectionary movements, anti-austerity mobilization, and the increasing discontent with hegemonic economic policies' (Theodossopoulos 2014: 415–16).

Resistance remains close to the heart of the discipline. Lucas Bessire and David Bond define 'the progressive orientation of anthropology' in terms of 'located descriptions of resistance, suffering, and governance', in which the political consists in 'operations of domination' and 'struggles' (2014: 441) over goods, rights and the significance of things.

A focus on resistance makes it very difficult to focus on compliance. This is because of the way in which conventional, liberal notions of power and resistance distribute agency. Resistance and power, agency and domination, subject and object are opposed in a zero-sum fashion. To resist is to 'shed power' to achieve 'emancipation' (Urla and Helepololei 2014: 433). To be dominated by or fail to resist from this perspective appears as a loss of independent agency. As Marilyn Strathern observes: 'Western culture imagines people as persons existing in a permanently subjective state; this is their natural and normal condition, and a person can dominate another by depriving him or her of the proper exercise of that subjectivity … Thus a … subject can be turned into an object' (Strathern 1988: 338).

As a result, an anthropology committed to defending and advocating for the people it studies finds it hard to talk about compliance. Compliant behaviour is liable to take the form of a background against which ethnographic subjects will appear by virtue of their *non*-compliance, resistance or subversion. Saba Mahmood (2001: 203), for example, observes that agency is viewed by feminist anthropologists in particular as 'a synonym for resistance to relations of domination'. By this metric, people who do as they are told cannot be fully fledged agents or proper subjects – for themselves, and therefore, for ethnography. Similarly, anthropologists began to frame the cultural and social systems they studied as rejoinders to modernity (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993), capitalism (e.g. Taussig 1980, 2002), or Western epistemology (Scott 2013; Viveiros de Castro 2015) in order to circumvent anthropology's tendency to distance and objectify its others as non-agents and non-subjects.

The echoes of Milton in anthropology's turn towards resistance by way of common humanity are unmistakeable. Whereas for scholars like Fortes, following Hobbes, compliance with custom was assumed as the necessary basis of orderly social life, by the end of the 1990s, the polarities of anthropological scholarship had been reversed. Compliance was no longer a 'problem for psychologists' but the 'base' symptom of domination, the background against which political agency took shape and from which it had to be recovered. It was, however, no more accessible to study since the unity of humanity, predicated on subjectivity and agency, defined in advance the relation between compliance and resistance (Holbraad 2014; Mitchell 1990).

Making Compliance Interesting

Our contention in this introduction is that, the history outlined above notwithstanding, anthropologists should be interested in compliance. In their introduction to *Times of Security*, Morten Pedersen and Martin Holbraad argue that all anthropology is, in one way or another, concerned with security, which they define as 'a set of discourses and practices concerned with a given social collective's reproduction over time' (2013: 9, emphasis removed). For them, security is synonymous with the enduring character of social and cultural systems, and the means by which they endure. Pedersen and Holbraad's argument is in many ways analogous with the one presented here. They suggest that anthropologists have been unable to focus on security as an object because the conceptual framework within which they operate defines the relations that constitute security in advance, thus relegating security to the analytical background.

Taking Hobbes as a model, we could equally argue that all anthropology is centrally concerned with compliance as *that set of means by which actors strive to accommodate themselves to others in their collective life*, recognising with Hobbes that such accommodation is the basic meaning of sociability and the condition of association. Compliance in this sense is implicit in both the 'Hobbesean' and 'Miltonian' versions of anthropology outlined above as the unexplored mechanism of custom and the background for resistance and agency, respectively. However, the relation that compliance names – one of subjection and the absence of freedom – has historically been taken for granted by anthropologists. 'Society', both as a benign 'social system' and as a system of oppression, dominates its members.

Pedersen and Holbraad's prescription for bringing security into focus is to attend in each ethnographic case to the nature of the social collective in question and the way in which that collective constitutes the definite time in which it reproduces itself. What, in other words, is being reproduced, and how does that reproduction constitute the time in which it endures? To shift anthropological attention to compliance, we suggest a similar strategy. Who exactly are the *actors* who strive to accommodate themselves to others, and how are they constituted as such?[8] By what means or agencies and in which media do they *strive* and how is this striving registered or rendered visible? What is the *collective life* in question – what is associated to constitute it and by what forms of *accommodation*? To pose questions around compliance in this way is to recuperate some of the generative potential that the notion has in psychology, to make compliance central to anthropological accounts of collective life.

Framed like this, these questions are evidently interlinked. To ask about personhood is at once to raise the question of what people do to

relate to one another, their 'striving', and thus also to bring into view their collective life.[9] Anna Berglund (this volume; 2019) clearly addresses this concern in her discussion of rural Rwandans' compliance with government agricultural policies. These policies, which have often been harshly enforced (Ansoms and Cioffo 2018), have caused peasants' crop yields to decline, resulting in food shortages and diminishing living standards. Nevertheless, in contrast to the Malay peasants described by Scott (1985, 1987), they complied as far as they were able with policy demands (cf. Palmer 2014). Berglund argues that her interlocutors' compliance was not the result of their very real powerlessness but rather a reflection of the ways in which villagers' ideas, values and practices overlapped with oppressive state projects. Villagers understood themselves as poor people – a condition of moral inferiority and shame, as well as material want. Compliance with state policy, for them, was not an imposition, despite the fact that it ran counter to their material interests. Rather, it represented an opportunity to engage with a transformative project through which they could create a position for themselves as people of value in a larger community.

Anna Tuckett (this volume) presents a parallel case. In her chapter, irregular migrants in Italy are depicted as learning to negotiate the demands of the Italian immigration system. What is required of them is a double act in which they must both comply rigidly with the letter of a dysfunctional immigration law and understand how to navigate the uncodified practice of being a good immigrant. Migrants produce a plausible fabrication of compliance *de jure*, while simultaneously creating those legal personae in a way that is equally compliant with the demands placed upon them in exchange for shoring up their *de facto* residence in Italy. As in Berglund's Rwandan example, defining migrants' strategies as 'resistant' is to miss the point. Migrants are complicit not only with the agencies that advise them, but also with immigration officials; everyone involved in this bureaucratic theatre strives to maintain a functioning immigration system and deliver outcomes that, if not just, maintain at least the patina of administrative respectability.

Neither the Rwandan notion of the 'poor person', nor migrants' construction of a defensible legal persona in Italy are generalisable along the lines of Robbins' (2013) 'suffering subject'. Both forms of personhood are ethnographically specific, and both condition relations of compliance. At the same time, these forms of 'striving' to relate to others serve to account for the equally specific forms in which people constitute and relate to the longer-ranged apparatus of collective life. The apparently counter-intuitive way in which rural Rwandans work with a government that works against them serves to map out crucial relations constituting Rwandan social life

more broadly, especially between the rural majority and the powerful and often overbearing apparatus of government (Thomson 2018). This is similar to what migrants to Italy do to regularise their status – their collection of plausible documents is a form of striving that reveals both something of the position of migrants in Italy and the character of Italian state. Crucially, neither Berglund, nor Tuckett, require a recourse to ready-made tropes of oppression in order to support their analyses.[10]

Similarly, to think about the media and agencies through which relations of compliance operate demands that we engage with the persons who are assumed, conditioned, given capacities and connected through compliance – and through accounting for such connections, again, to approach a characterisation of collective life as a whole. Sarah Winkler-Reid's chapter is a case in point. She examines compliance with safety regulations on construction sites in North East England. Her chapter demonstrates how the institution of safety management in construction, as well as efforts to promote safety on site, reach into the constitution of construction workers as ethical subjects. Site managers cajole contractors to work safely on site by emphasising workers' gendered status as breadwinners within households and kinship groups. Here, the work of creating compliance mobilises personhood and domestic life in order to reshape the relations and ethics of work.

Jonathan Stadler's contribution to this volume is similarly focussed on the media of compliance in the case of clinical trials. His essay concerns a 'smart pill box' called a Medication Event Reminder Monitoring (MERM) device, which is designed to improve compliance with a new TB prophylaxis regime amongst HIV-positive people in a South African township. The MERM was a pill container equipped with a microchip. It recorded when it was opened and issued reminders to patients to take medication. Stadler argues that the MERM served to facilitate compliance with the testing regimen, and that the device itself became a focus of attention during the trial. But it also had the effect of constituting patients as persons in multiple ways. For clinicians, it established patients as unreliable, forgetful and dishonest, even as it worked to control these tendencies in them. Patients, in their relations with the MERM device, endowed it with humanness, drawing attention to their own suffering and need for care. In turn, the MERM provided divergent perspectives on collective life as a whole. For the medics running the trial, its technical emphasis on ensuring patients remembered their medication and on preventing their lying about taking it made the political economics of TB and HIV – which are closely connected with poverty – invisible. Conversely, for patients, the MERM, as a quasi-human offering a form of care, reflected local awareness of inequality and constructs of TB as a disease of poverty and pollution.

Seen as an association or accommodation, collective life as a whole can be specified in terms of compliance: the things and people it associates, the nature of the connections between them, and the ways in which these connections are rendered visible or registered (cf. Latour 2005). Although none of the chapters in this volume attempt such a totalising perspective, two contributions to this volume use taxation as a privileged site to examine such issues. Tax is a useful site for this purpose, both because of its explicit language of and interest in compliance, and because of the way fiscal policy is inevitably directed towards questions of collective life at large. Lotta Björklund Larsen and Benedicte Brøgger's contribution is emblematic in these terms. They examine tax compliance policy and practice pertaining to multinational enterprises (MNEs), a fraught and contentious area of policy. Their focus is on 'co-operative compliance' regimes in Norway and Sweden that are underpinned by OECD tax compliance methodologies. These schemes are intended to engage large MNEs with the aim of increasing compliance. Although these Norwegian and Swedish schemes are based on the same OECD template and exist in very similar political and fiscal contexts, Larsen and Brøgger demonstrate that they operated very differently. The source of this difference, they show, lies in the way in which compliance with tax implicates history, culture, institutions and systems of regulation. Crucially, compliance, in these cases, both conditions and is conditioned by relations between corporate executives and government tax administrators and affects the obligations and responsibilities imagined between taxpayers and society at large.

Miranda Shield-Johansson's chapter presents a similar case from the town of Cochabamba, Bolivia. In her case, the Bolivian government explicitly frames tax compliance as central to a social contract, in which citizens trade taxation for development. However, her work with small-scale traders and other ordinary citizens reveals another aspect of tax compliance, one that seeks to uncover 'the institutions, moral stories and social relationships shaped by taxes'. For these ordinary inhabitants of Cochabamba, demonstrating tax compliance is commonly directed to *avoiding* government intervention, as well as securing property and business opportunities in a largely informal and undocumented market. This is not simply a concern with economic relations in the present, but it also reflects Bolivia's history of tense relations between indigenous people and the state. Whereas Björklund Larsen and Brøgger's case elaborates on efforts – more or less successful – to co-ordinate expectations between tax administrators and MNEs, Shield-Johansson's evidence points to indigenous Bolivians' deployment of tax compliance as a means of defending the material interests and networks of relations they seek to defend from state interference.

These two cases present diverse factors that not only bear on compliance but are also mobilised in the ways in which different actors do and do not comply, such that they are made (in)visible and (de)activated in the construction of social life. These cases suggest how the accommodations that compliance entails create the associations that constitute collective life.[11]

Assembling the Political

Attending to compliance in this way thus offers a vantage point from which to generate a picture of collective life. Of course, this is not the only way in which this might be done. All anthropological theories – all social theories, for that matter – aim to model social life in some way. To be compelling, a case for an anthropology of compliance needs to demonstrate that the concept does intellectual work in an efficient way, that it is a useful heuristic (Candea 2019).

Part of the justification for attending to compliance must be topical. Compliance, as we have set the notion out here, seems to offer an effective engagement with the interlinked crises of the environment, politics and health that mark the contemporary era (Latour 2017, 2018). At the time of writing, it is difficult to say with any certainty what, if any, lasting impact the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic will have on anthropology. However, the early indications are that it is prompting renewed interest in interconnections, networks and the co-construction of persons, agencies and bodies (e.g. Briggs 2020; Faas et al. 2020; Hardy 2020; Higgins et al. 2020; Kirksey 2020) of the kind often studied by anthropologists of multi-species engagement and the Anthropocene (Kirksey 2014; Kohn 2007; Tsing 2017), or those influenced by Actor–Network Theory (ANT) and the 'sociology of associations' promoted by Bruno Latour (2005). Anthropology, in other words, seems to be responding to a widely distributed sense of the cardinal significance of relations of all kinds – with both human and non-human entities – to the business of life and of the responsibilities that these connections imply.

Such approaches, however, are often criticised for neglecting politics, especially the kinds of political struggles commonly identified with a paradigm of anthropology focussed (albeit in different ways) on resistance (Bessire and Bond 2014; Gregory 2014; Hornborg 2017a, 2017b; Kipnis 2015; Martin 2014). Latour (2004, 2005) rejects this critique, arguing that the work of association, since it forms collectivities and the capacities of actors, is inherently political (see also Haraway 2016). Latour's (2005) objections to critical sociologists' (and by extension, anthropologists')

'discovery' of ready-made mechanisms of power, oppression and resistance operating under the surface of collective life are well founded. However, it also seems to be the case that the breadth of the notion of politics he proposes means that he fails to engage directly with the kind of 'politics' his critics are pointing to; namely, contests over meanings, rights and values undertaken discursively in a public space (cf. Habermas 2011). There is room to doubt whether that anthropocentric vision of politics is exhaustive (de la Cadena 2010), but it is certainly significant.

Compliance invites us to attend to how and to what extent people strive to accommodate themselves to one another in collective life. Our case is that the people and other actors involved in relations of compliance are, to an important extent, brought into being by the ways in which they comply or fail to do so, along with the means by which they relate to one another and thus the whole of collective life. This perspective offers to bring the straightforwardly 'political' (public, discursive, concerned with policy) into an anthropology focussed on relationships and the constitution of diverse forms of life. It does this by demonstrating the ways in which the government of people, their mobilisation in response to demands, rules or requirements, is variable beyond the limits of taken-for-granted relations of domination or submission.

Steven Sampson's chapter (see also Sampson 2016), which focusses on corporate compliance and ethics departments, effectively demonstrates the possibility of the concept of compliance we have articulated. Since the 2000s, almost all major corporations and large numbers of public agencies have established ethics and compliance departments. This development is the product of the politics of corporate governance, especially in the United States – an area of policy that surged to prominence in the wake of the 2001 Enron scandal, the 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers and the resulting financial crisis, and more recent examples of corporate wrongdoing, such as the 2014 Volkswagen emissions scandal. Business ethics is not new, as Sampson (2016) points out, although calls for ethical business, and against 'amoral' (or 'immoral') markets, always *seem* new as political debates swirl around the question of to whom, exactly, firms should be beholden. The growth of corporate compliance departments is novel, however, in the sense that they respond to states' attempts to legislate for ethical business and, sometimes, to enforce those regulations.

So far, so political: public debate over the meaning and value of corporate action leads to rules that seek to define rights and obligations, and to distribute the costs and benefits of firms' actions. However, the details of the corporate compliance programmes that Sampson describes reveal the relational assemblage (Ong and Collier 2005) *through which this politics of corporate capitalism is actuated*. This assemblage, or 'package', in

Sampson's terms, is focussed on embedding legal and ethical behaviour as part of the business activities of corporations, an internalisation of ethics, and not merely as a constraint. This is achieved by corporations, in partnership with a vast supporting industry that has grown up around ethics and compliance initiatives, through strategies of communication.

Yet, as Dalsgaard demonstrates in his contribution to this volume, translating a commitment to a certain ethical stance into action that is not only auditable, but also meaningful, is extremely challenging. Dalsgaard explores commercial carbon offsetting schemes, highlighting the ways in which offsets depend on dubious practices hypothecating the effects of policy interventions – even when offsetting activity is more than just a sham. While Sampson points out that compliance is ideally transparent and demonstrable from outside a corporation, so a corporation's ethics must also be communicated to shareholders and a public of 'stakeholders' more broadly, Dalsgaard highlights the shortfall between the production of codes of conduct, training courses, and auditable trails of 'ethical' activity, and the real effects of corporate ethics.

Modern capitalism, Sampson observes, 'is constructing its own morality, with its own theory of human agency' (2016: 84). That morality, however, stands at one end of a complex network of relations. Such networks have a crucial mediating role in translating corporate action into moral terms, but have an equal capacity for obfuscating and concealing the manner in which that translation takes place – regardless of the actual ethical commitments of corporate managers. Even setting aside the pressing question of corporations' responsibilities to larger moral communities, these cases make evident how 'politics', seen through the lens of compliance, takes the form of an assemblage or network formed by people's activity in striving to accommodate themselves to one another and in the process constituting themselves and their collective life.

Sincerity, Suffering and Difference

A politics imagined in the specific, situated form of compliance transcends the opposition between Hobbes and Milton by engaging not with moral questions about the value of compliance, but by engaging with what compliance is and does. Thinking about compliance in this way – that is, ethnographically – and placing it at the centre of the analysis allows us to think about 'politics' as plural: it invites a vision of politics as *more than one type of phenomenon*.[12]

The potential multiplicity of politics is implicit in an ethnographic attention to compliance as we have laid it out here because the relations

that it entails cannot straightforwardly be reduced to the questions of power and submission that exercised Hobbes and Milton, and which have haunted anthropology. Rather, it is necessary to specify for each case the kinds of actors who are brought to comply, or not; the relations and media in which they do so; and the collective that they are part of. Such an analysis also precludes taking relations of power as an obviously moral or ethical issue, as scholars of resistance tend to do. In the framework we propose here, terms such as 'politics', 'power' and 'compliance' must be treated in the first instance as heuristics, pointing out family resemblances amongst observed effects, whose precise dimensions and value remain to be specified.

Approaches like this have a long history in anthropology. For Alfred Radcliffe-Brown (Niehaus 2021), the oppressive laws and criminal sanctions of Western states are only necessary because of the particular constitution of Western social life and represent an inherently unjust imposition when applied elsewhere (see also Malinowski 1945). The injustice stems from the fact that, as Radcliffe-Brown sees it, persons, as social entities and subjects of 'law', are socially produced. The powers that they answer to, and the kinds of compliance they can be brought to, are therefore emanations of their particular forms of life, not universal or necessary traits of social life. This concern persisted to the very end of the colonial period. In 1969, Peter Lawrence (1969) voiced his concerns about the imposition of European legal systems in Papua New Guinea (see Demian and Rousseau 2019). Like Radcliffe-Brown, Lawrence was concerned with the suitability of law to a different form of personhood and social life. 'It is inevitable', he wrote, 'that, unless New Guinea society is changed so that the citizen-isolate replaces the kinsman or clansman, Australian Law … cannot function effectively in the country' (1969: 35).

While anthropologists working broadly in the British school worried about the mismatch between European ideas about political order and local social structures, more radical voices were exploring the possibility that political life could have entirely different purposes and possibilities to those ascribed to it in the West. Pierre Clastres' (1987) *Society against the State* is probably the best known of this genre, and argues that Indigenous lowland Latin American societies are organised to prevent the establishment of institutionalised forms of domination. His ideas were enthusiastically adopted by Trotskyist thinkers attached to the Socialisme ou Barbarie group of Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis, who used them as a basis to reimagine socialist politics after they became disillusioned with the Soviet Union (Cova and Sarmiento Barletti 2021).

These two concerns with the cultural variability of politics – that societies are self-determining and that other peoples' lives might hold radical

possibilities – form the basis of the 'ontological' approach in anthropology championed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (2004). For Viveiros de Castro (2015), following Clastres and Gilles Deleuze, another thinker influenced by Clastres (Cova and Sarmiento Barletti 2021), anthropology's role is to establish a 'permanent revolution' in thought. This revolution consists of confronting Western epistemology with versions of the world that it cannot digest (Candea 2019), much as Clastres' account of a politics that is not about power upends Western preconceptions of the meaning of either term. These alternate worlds are imagined as 'ontologies' – that is, as conceptual systems defining their own reality, which are of equal status to Western notions of reality or nature. This establishes a kind of politics founded on difference itself, where the double meaning of 'to differ' – to be different and to disagree – is exploited as the essence of political engagement (Holbraad et al. 2014). In Viveiros de Castro's thinking, the crucial political relationship is therefore not a disagreement over the meaning, values or rights of some definite thing or person, but a radical uncertainty or 'equivocation' about the nature of the thing at stake.

This perspective is diametrically opposed to the anthropology of the 'suffering subject' that Robbins (2013) outlines. This imagines a politics concerned with the common struggles of *humans*, organised around power, resistance and suffering. Politics in Viveiros de Castro's account, by contrast, involves diverse contentions amongst people, who are categorically not 'all of the same type', over the nature of diverse worlds. If the 'suffering subject' defines an anthropology of inequality, this ontological approach is one founded on alterity. By the same token, in this 'ontological' approach, social and cultural systems do not appear to be exterior and regulating in relation to human subjects, but constitutive of them and their worlds. These worlds equally define the forms of politics appropriate to them, rendering politics multiple. As a result, it becomes 'illegal', in Viveiros de Castro's (2015) terms, to suggest – or to look for – any kind of slippage between what people say they do, or what is required of them, and what they actually do (Holbraad 2014).

Compliance as an idea, however, *requires* the possibility of slippage. For someone to comply, there can be no such identity between people and the rules that they follow; compliance must involve the possibility of failure. Thus, Sampson, Tuckett and Dalsgaard, in this volume, all draw attention to a recurrent question concerning both governmental and corporate compliance regimes: are they genuine efforts to 'do the right thing', or simply façades to improve actors' reputations (see also Bolten 2016)? Indeed, Sampson argues that part of the role of a corporate compliance department is to determine where corporations need sincerely to comply with norms or regulations, and where pretence is sufficient. Politics,

in other words, is rendered multiple (Latour 2004) by focussing on the processes and networks of compliance, but it is not thereby rendered an automatic or logically necessary effect of social or conceptual systems.

In this regard, our notion of compliance bears a relationship to Charles Taylor's (1999) reading of Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1974) discussion of following rules. Drawing on Wittgenstein, Taylor is sharply critical of models of rule-following that imply that it is either necessary and automatic, as in structural accounts of social life, or based on an intellectual grasp of the rule and its relation to the situations in which it might be applied, as Viveiros de Castro's approach tends to imply (cf. Bourdieu 1977). He argues, rather, that rule-following is a form of 'dialogical' activity in which agency is distributed in a relationship (cf. Strathern 1988). This relationship is mediated by tacit understandings of the situation and its demands, the 'rhythms' of the exchanges that it involves (Garfinkel 1988; Schram 2018). His model for such relationships, as in Larsen and Brøgger's chapter, is dancing – and one can, of course, dance well or badly. Having two left feet signals the possible failure of compliance and the limits of making politics multiple by appealing to the 'ontologies' or cultures of groups of people. It is not who one is or where one comes from (Amazonia or Melanesia, for example) – in other words, a social or conceptual system 'at a higher level' – that makes politics multiple and problematic. Rather, it is what people do in the business of striving to accommodate themselves to one another – an activity that also forms them and their collective life while allowing for the ethnographically specific struggles, strategies and sufferings that the contributors to this volume highlight.

Conclusion

We began this introduction by raising the question of the surprising popular compliance with restrictions on everyday life aimed at limiting the spread of COVID-19 in the United Kingdom. We argued that this problem of compliance, although pressing, is one that, as a result of its particular intellectual history, anthropology has had difficulty in bringing into focus. Compliance appeared either as a necessary condition of social analysis, or as an unremarked background against which to see human agency.

In order to make compliance accessible to anthropologists as an object of study, we proposed heuristically to define the term as *that set of means by which actors strive to accommodate themselves to others in their collective life*. We argued that this definition raises three interlinked questions: who are the actors concerned, by what means do they strive, and what is the nature of the collective constituted by their accommodation?

The answers to these questions are interlinked, such that asking about any aspect of compliance will call upon the others. Compliance is an optic through which to envisage collective life as a whole. Understanding how and why people complied with lockdown restrictions, therefore, is neither a matter of reading off British 'culture' or 'society' or the 'political context' in order to interpret what transpired. Nor is it a question, necessarily, of power imposed on people who are exterior to it. Rather, the ways in which people imagined themselves as susceptible to the disease (or not), their relationships to one another, the things that they had at their disposal (or not) to protect themselves and the use (or not) of these things and the wider network of employment, neighbourhood, newspaper readership, government and so on that made up their lives must all be mobilised to account for what they did. Or, to put it another way, compliance need neither be automatic, nor a background condition: tracing the *set of means by which actors strive to accommodate themselves to others in their collective life* is itself to delineate people, activity and collectivity, and the way in which these unfold in time.

The value of this approach lies in its moderation. While it is clearly of a piece with relational, multi-species and ANT-inspired analyses, it engages squarely with a straightforward type of politics that concerns policy, government and the management of populations. It is not, in other words, rooted in a singular and universal human subject, but nor does it bypass conventional understandings of politics. Responses to COVID-19 in the United Kingdom were evidently political – and often party political to boot – but the subjects of that politics were modified by the presence of a dangerous airborne virus that, amongst other effects, drew attention to the common atmosphere they breathed. Perhaps for the first time, British politics took place *in the air*.

As a result, mapping the specificity of particular compliances will inevitably serve to pluralise politics, to make politics about something other than ready-made notions of power or interest. This differentiation does not, however, compel us to think in terms of radical difference, or of whole communities of people or 'ontologies' that are irreducibly different from our own. Rather, it is a differentiation that is produced in practice by *people striving to accommodate themselves to others in their collective life*. These are strivings that are potentially connected, just as British people in 2020 almost certainly looked to Italy, Spain and China for their responses to the pandemic, and as their actions were ultimately connected to the international spread of the virus itself. They can also be seen to be unequal – not least in the difference in mortality rates between white and black Britons, or between wealthy and relatively poor people. By showing what compliance is and how it operates in and on social life, we ought therefore

to be able to recover *both* specific forms of suffering and inequality *and* the ways in which social lives are constitutively different.

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Will Rollason is a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology at Brunel University London. His research to date has focussed on Papua New Guinea and Rwanda. E-mail: will.rollason@brunel.ac.uk

Eric Hirsch is Professor of Anthropology at Brunel University London. He has a longstanding interest in the ethnography and history of Papua New Guinea. E-mail: eric.hirsch@brunel.ac.uk

Notes

1. There is more than a slight suggestion, which Freedman acknowledges, that UK citizens were complying with their understanding of other governments' restrictions, since more stringent regulations in force were then in force in Italy and elsewhere and widely reported. By March 2020, a large amount of information about the virus, its behaviour, and measures taken against it in other countries was widely available.
2. Legal scholars have addressed questions of compliance under the rubric of legal consciousness studies (Ewick and Silbey 1991; Halliday and Morgan 2013; Silbey 2005).
3. Such relationships can easily be accounted for in terms of 'power', of course. Explanations that are based on *implicit* rather than observed forms of coercion – as in Max Weber's notion of the state's monopoly on legitimate violence – obscure as much as they reveal, however. Power tends to stand in for or obviate the actual relations that constitute compliance.
4. For Foucault (1991, 2009), of course, this distinction is more apparent than real at an operational level. He shows how the 'governmentality' of modern states is intimately linked to disciplinary regimes of the classical period. Here, we mean only to point to a contrast in the explicit evaluation of compliance between these two schools of thought, which, since Milton and Hobbes were contemporaries, evidently transcends periodisation.
5. Fortes (2017) refers to himself as a structural anthropologist. Similar issues also apply to French structuralism (see Rubin 1975).
6. Correspondingly, the historical sketch we offer here picks out only major themes and trends in the literature. Because of this, it jumps from structural-functionalism to the

neo-Marxism of Scott and his followers, bypassing classical Marxist approaches entirely. In the scheme we present here, classical Marxists have a strongly 'Miltonian' cast inasmuch as they imagine control in terms of false consciousness – an imposition on human being. However, in anthropology specifically, they can be seen as uncomfortably straddling the Hobbes-Milton divide. While the relationship between false consciousness and human species-being is necessarily central to Marxist thinking, anthropological attempts to fit different indigenous lifeways into Marxist class categories (and to use these in explanatory ways) recapitulate many of the intellectual features of structural functionalism. This is perhaps another way of pointing to the difficulties that made classical Marxism relatively insignificant in the development of anthropology: the notion of classes works poorly outside industrial societies, while the notion of false consciousness makes it impossible to take cultural difference seriously.

7. It is notable that Foucault, who as a theorist does insist on the constitutive role of social relations of power in the constitution of human subjects, is commonly understood by anthropologists mainly in terms of his earlier work as a theorist of institutions (Mahmood 2001), and not in light of his later writings on sexuality and ethics (Foucault 1994; Laidlaw 2002, 2014).
8. 'Actors' in this context are to be understood as *things that do something* (de Vries 2016), and not only as bounded, human agents. We use this terminology to disrupt the assumption that compliance must necessarily involve a relationship between human individuals and exterior powers or forces but might take shape in any kind of relationship between things (including, but not limited to, people). The point here is to maintain compliance as a question, rather than a known phenomenon, 'not to decide who is acting and how but to shift from a certainty about action to an *uncertainty* about action' (Latour 2005: 60).
9. The implicit similarity between this framework and Roy Wagner's (1972, 1986) 'obviation sequence' is more than incidental. Each of the questions we propose 'obviates' the others, acting as a point from which an image of the collective as a whole can be generated (see also Bateson 1958).
10. Note that we do not mean to suggest that suffering is of no consequence, or that resistance never happens. Compliance may, of course, be elicited under threat, or withheld in more or less oppositional ways. The point we wish to make and stress is that these terms – suffering, resistance, threat, and indeed, subject – can only be taken as heuristics and never as foundational, existent things insofar as they are seen as proceeding from a definite mode of compliance. The problem of presuming the foundational existence of single phenomena called 'suffering' or 'violence', as Mitchell (1990) has argued, is that it demands a pre-cultural or a-historical human subject, ready-made with the capacities to suffer, resist, be threatened and so on. This subject cannot be accounted for. Our question is therefore not, 'what shall we do about suffering?' but 'through what accommodations is suffering constituted in this way?'
11. The term 'associations' is borrowed from Latour (2005). He uses it to designate the relationships that constitute collective life, but which are not necessarily 'social' because they involve non-human actors. Latour reserves the idea of social relations for what circulates within this hybrid human and non-human milieu. This perspective is evidently similar to Garfinkel's (1996) ethnomethodology. It also bears a strong relationship to Gabriel Tarde's sociology as adopted by Latour (2005; see also de Vries 2016) and Candea (2010).

12. It's important that when we talk of 'multiplicity', we do not mean 'many instances of the *same kind of thing*'. Strathern (1988) critiques the assumption of this kind of multiplicity, which leads to comparisons based on the false premise that all human associations must take a similar form – of society, for example. Two things follow. First, we are not concerned with comparisons of forms or modes of compliance as instances of a class (what Candea 2019 calls a 'lateral comparison'). Rather, we intend the notion of multiplicity articulated by Latour (2004). Understood in those terms, the notion that 'politics is multiple' means that 'politics' does not refer to a stable class of phenomena, for example, those having to do with power. Instead, the political (and the person, and power, and so on) has to be articulated afresh in every case from the accommodations that we label 'compliance'. Second, it follows that the notion of compliance itself should be understood heuristically, as we outline here.

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