A few words for Jim Ferguson: from Liisa, Roberto, George, Jess, Bóris and Márcio

Algumas palavras para Jim Ferguson: de Liisa, Roberto, George, Jess, Bóris e Márcio

ABSTRACT

Here are a few words to pay tribute to anthropologist James Ferguson, who died on February 12, 2025, at the age of 65. Ferguson was a professor in the Department of Anthropology at Stanford University in California, USA. He was trained in Cultural Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Barbara (1979) and in Social Anthropology at Harvard University (1981/M.A. and 1985/PhD). He has had a widely recognized professional career in anthropology, particularly due to his studies and ethnographies on political economy, development anthropology, and international social assistance programs. Ferguson's critical view of these themes, sustained by fieldwork in southern African countries, also extended to works on anthropological theory and methodology. During his postgraduate studies at Harvard, Ferguson met and came to live intellectually and personally with anthropologist Liisa Malkki, since then also his wife, and with his friends, anthropologists George Bisharat and Roberto Kant de Lima, in what they called the "Bacardi School of Anthropology." His early departure surprised and dismayed all of us and, specially and emotionally, those closest to him. In recognition of his professional and intellectual career and personal qualities, Antropolítica immediately welcomed the initiative of our colleague and professor Roberto Kant de Lima to publish a series of texts in tribute to James "Jim" Ferguson.

Keywords: James Ferguson, Anthropology, Tribute.

RESUMO

Aqui, trazemos algumas palavras para homenagear o antropólogo James Ferguson, falecido no último 12 de fevereiro de 2025, aos 65 anos de idade. Ferguson era professor do Departamento de Antropologia da Universidade de Stanford, na Califórnia, Estados Unidos. Recebeu formação em Antropologia Cultural pela University of California, Santa Barbara (1979) e em Antropologia Social pela Harvard University (1981/M.A. e 1985/PhD). Teve uma carreira profissional amplamente reconhecida na Antropologia, em especial a partir dos seus estudos e etnografias sobre economia política, antropologia do desenvolvimento e programas internacionais de assistência social. A visão crítica de Ferguson sobre esses temas, sustentada no trabalho de campo em países da África

Austral, se estendeu também para trabalhos sobre teoria e metodologia antropológicas. Durante seus estudos de pós-graduação em Harvard, Ferguson conheceu e passou a conviver intelectual e pessoalmente com a antropóloga Liisa Malkki, desde então também sua esposa, e com seus amigos, os antropólogos George Bisharat e Roberto Kant de Lima, naquilo que denominaram "Escola Bacardi de Antropologia." Sua partida precoce surpreendeu e consternou todos nós e, de modo muito especial e emotivo, àqueles que conviveram com ele diretamente. Reconhecendo sua trajetória profissional e intelectual e suas qualidades pessoais, a Antropolítica acolheu imediatamente a iniciativa do nosso colega e professor Roberto Kant de Lima para publicar uma série de textos em homenagem a James "Jim" Ferguson.

Palavras-chave: James Ferguson, Antropologia, Homenagem.

FOR JIM FROM LIISA

My love,

When, after hours of working in silence at home, the phone rings, my heart leaps: "*Finally*! *There you are!*" Almost as soon, I understand with a sick feeling that it won't be you. It will never be you again.

We were used to being apart for conferences and presentations, and for fieldwork. But we were always intensely together, regardless. We talked every day. You once told me that Roberto called it being "very married." My heart insists this is just another familiar separation, that all I have to do is to just wait for you. I will always wait for you. But your wallet and keys are still by the bed. Your passport, still valid, is here.

Your eyes smiled their beautiful smile as you told us that you would always be with us, that you would be in the lizards and the birds, the mountains, and the sunshine, and in the sea. You are everywhere. You are in your saxophones and clarinets; I cannot bear to open their well-worn cases. You are in your Peterson field guides and your chess books. The English opening, the Sicilian Taimanov, the Nimzo-Indian: these now bring tears. Most of all, you are in our children, our greatest happiness.

You are also, of course, in all your students and in everything you wrote, and in the projects and institutions you worked to nurture. One day, perhaps, I will be able to write about our lives as colleagues (and fellow students) in love with each other and with our work—and

with life. We were unspeakably lucky.

I will wait for you.

Liisa Malkki[1]

Jim at our summer place in Finland in 2003.

1 Associate professor of anthropology at Stanford University. E-mail: lhmalkki@stanford.edu

TO JIM FERGUSON, MY FOREVER FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE[2]

This note, written on such a painful occasion, is not intended to explain and acknowledge the vigor, intelligence, and simplicity of the scholar Jim Ferguson. All of his virtues are widely known and emerge from his words in his interview with us a few years ago, during one of his trips to Brazil.

So, I'm writing to recall the moments when we built, maintained, and solidified our friendship. Moments that, from the beginning, were interspersed with the tensions that were permanently present in our lives as graduate students and professionals. I met James (Jim) Ferguson in 1979, when I began the two-year residence required for my doctorate. I was part of a group of Brazilians supervised by David Maybury-Lewis in Harvard's Anthropology Department and had a grant through a Brazilian Foundation from the Ministry of Education (CAPES) program for "peripheral universities," (as the Universidade Federal Fluminense [UFF] was classified at the time), the Incentive Program for Teacher Training (PICD). Inflation was running rampant in Brazil and the grant was a supplement to my salary as a 40-hour "Teaching Assistant," my occupation at UFF at the time. So, by December, my salary, converted into US dollars, was worth 1/3 or even 1/4 of what I had received in January. The CAPES supplement was fixed at US $440.00. It wasn't easy.

I shared an office with Jim and George in the William James Hall building, which the Department of Anthropology shared with sociology and psychology. At first, we co-existed in an individualistic and egalitarian way, with the appropriate distances being observed, as well as each person's conveniences. One example of these difficult times was an episode that I narrate in "Anthropology of the Academia: when the Indians are us," about when George introduced me to his brother as his best friend at university. When, in surprise, I retorted that we had spoken only three times during that first year, he replied that I was the only one he had spoken to…

But, little by little, this absurd tension of the first year subsided, we adapted to the intense pace of the university's graduate program, and began to socialize in the few leisure moments we enjoyed. This experience was very important for me because it was only there that I discovered that my ability to learn and express myself through texts and presentations in the social sciences had limits… A very important lesson.

2 Translation into English by Jeffrey Hoff. Technical Review by Roberto Kant de Lima.

It was at this time that our relations became closer and eventually produced the Bacardi School of Anthropology, to which George refers in his note, also published here, an Americanized version of the French Sociological School, and the Niterói Anthropological School. Liisa later joined the school. I was the oldest of the group and the one who, at the time, was most familiar with anthropological and social science theory in France, having already completed a four-year master's course at PPGAS/MN/UFRJ, which involved fieldwork and writing a master's dissertation. I was therefore familiar with part of the course bibliography, and at times could clarify some issues in more detail, especially regarding the French sociological school and the then still recent works of Foucault, Dumont, and Godelier. As for the courses, Mike Fisher introduced us to Interpretive Anthropology, which I was unfamiliar with and which, at the time, provided the positivist anthropology practiced in the USA with a methodological breather that would spread vigorously in the future. We also managed to get one of Nur Yalman's anthropological theory courses to include Freud in its syllabus. Our conversations were also about the contrasts I perceived between my Brazilian academic socialization and theirs. In a way, we were very different, but we were united by a certain dissatisfaction with the world as it was, which ended up being clearly defined in our academic choices.

When I returned in 1984 to write my doctoral thesis and a special paper, circumstances forced me to leave my (meager) salary in full here in Brazil to support my wife and two children, and I had to get by with just a supplement of US$ 440.00. My advisor, David Maybury-Lewis, offered to host me at his home free of charge to help me complete my doctorate.

Studying abroad presented many difficulties, from familiarizing myself with the writing style of academic English to the constant need to adapt to technology, which was developing rapidly at the time. In the first stage, the challenge had been to learn how to write my course papers on a typewriter. When I returned, and was in the library looking for a typewriter to prepare a document in response to a bureaucratic requirement from the department, I was very surprised to find something I had never seen before: a desktop computer. I was completely devastated, thinking of the obstacles I would have to overcome. I was rescued by Jim, to whom I reported my despair. The following week, he gave me a private lesson on how to use the computer and, after that, I acquired the skills I needed to carry out my academic tasks. On another occasion, he and his brother spent an afternoon adjusting a laptop I had bought to write Portuguese characters, which still didn't exist on laptops at the time…

Later, as I was taking a long time to write the thesis and special paper that would conclude my doctorate, and as he needed to receive a guest, a relative, at his home, Maybury-Lewis asked me to leave. George saved me by introducing me to the landlord of his apartment,

a Portuguese man called Manoel, who had lived in Brazil and owned several properties in Cambridge, including the three-story building where George lived, whose apartments were subject to Cambridge's rent control system, of which one I was able to occupy for the remaining period.

George also took me on a cross-country road trip from Sacramento, California, to Cambridge, Massachusetts, with a brief stop in Quebec. We spent 15 days marveling at the landscapes we visited, including a crossing of the Rocky Mountains, which I will never forget.

After finishing my thesis with the invaluable and indispensable collaboration of Chuck Lindholm in 1986, I returned to Brazil, where, unlike Jim and George, I already had a job. In 1990 I returned to the USA to do research in Birmingham, Alabama, and San Francisco, California, with a Fulbright grant. In San Francisco, I did research at the Public Defender's Office, where George was working at the time, and which gave me wide access to the field, and even took advantage of my membership in Rio de Janeiro's equivalent of the bar association, the OAB/RJ. Jim arranged free accommodation for me on the outskirts of San Francisco, where I stayed with two of his friends, one of them on the very pleasant campus of the University of Berkeley. I visited Jim at U.C. Irvine, where he and Liisa worked at the time, and I remember the fun times we had together. On that occasion, Liisa gave me some handmade crafts she had produced, which I still keep in the living room of my apartment in Niterói.

Years later, when I went to teach a course in Canada and took my children with me, I went back to visit my friends, one in Palo Alto and the other in San Francisco. Jim was in Brazil when he gave the interview that is republished here, and he gave a very well-attended talk at ANPOCS about the distribution of government resources to people without jobs, to which he refers in the interview. It was a very timely lecture, which had many repercussions, because it coincided precisely with the implementation of the Bolsa Família program, which was described by its critics as a purely welfare policy that would produce eternal economic dependence for its beneficiaries. This thesis proved to be wrong, by the way, and he demonstrated that this was not the nature of the distribution of resources. I visited again in 2011/12, when I did a senior postdoc with George at what is now the University of California College of Law.

The three of us followed different career paths. Jim was a scholar, excelling in academia and anthropology in the United States and South Africa, where he taught and did research. George, who unbelievably earned his law degree at the same time as his doctorate in anthropology, dedicated himself to teaching law and defending Palestine. I tried to implant an empirical and ethnographic perspective in legal and public safety studies in Brazil, and dedicated myself to the tasks of creating academic and university institutions.

Due to preferences imposed by my work colleagues in the course of consolidating our postgraduate program in the 1990's, I had to create ties in France, Canada, and Argentina, where Isaac Joseph, Daniel dos Santos, and Sofia Tiscornia became loyal friends and institutional partners. That's why I returned few times to the United States, and to my academic beginnings, the continuity of which would always have been my preference.

Jim also hosted at Stanford two of my PhD students in Anthropology from UFF, Marcio Filgueiras and Bóris Maia; and George hosted my supervisees Ricardo Gueiros, Frederico Policarpo, Flavia Medeiros, and Michel Lobo. Here at UFF, I received one of Jim's doctoral students from Stanford, Jess Auerbach, with a "reverse sandwich" scholarship from FAPERJ, a South African who came to study Angolans in Brazil. In a way, our academic relations, more recently, not having transferred to our colleagues, transferred to our students.

Throughout this time, we were always far apart—although a few years ago, George acquired the excellent and generous habit of making regular academic visits to Brazil, taking part in INCT-InEAC's international seminars and other meetings of anthropologists. On these occasions, in addition to offering original reflections on the US legal field, he also entertained us with his extraordinary professional blues performances. But, somehow, we remained linked by those deep ties acquired during our time together at our alma mater. We had been united by our affective interests, intense academic discipline, and, at least in my case, the always painful distance from family and friends in Brazil.

I learned a lot from my friends in the United States, who I think not by chance are both Californians. Above all, I learned a kind of fraternal, supportive love, typical of an individualistic society in which relationships are individualized and everyone has their own non-transferable network, very different from our ever-expanding web of relationships. This is to say that each dyadic duo we formed had a relationship of its own, but one that was encompassed, as Dumont says, by this three-way fraternal relationship, and later four-way, established in the context of a high-performance university conviviality. I found this to be something firm and lasting, because although I know we are very different people, our brotherhood has always been indivisible. What's more, in the contexts in which they were created, it is these relations that shape professionals and sustain people. No matter how far away they are, you always have a friend to rely on.

As I, unlike most of my Brazilian colleagues, have lived in many places in Brazil and attended many different schools and universities, I have also made a few friends along the way. But never with such intimacy, solidarity, resilience, and permanence of personal and professional objectives and purposes as the relationships we built at Harvard and which have

accompanied us throughout our lives.

I miss and will continue to miss my friend Jim. But I'm sure he goes in peace, certain that he has fulfilled his duties with love, dedication, and respect for others. He will always remain in my memories as an example of our process of emotional and intellectual growth and maturation which, as Gil Vicente used to say, makes us "persist, because it's good to persist…"

I send a big, loving hug to Liisa and their children Aila and Elias. Many kisses and much strength! As they say around here, "we are together comrade!!!!!"

Roberto Kant de Lima[3]

3 Professor at Universidade Federal Fluminense and Universidade Veiga de Almeida. E-mail: rkantbr@gmail.com

TO JIM FROM GEORGE

I write these words to remember and honor the life of my dear friend, James G. Ferguson—a brilliant anthropologist, a steadfast advocate for justice, and, above all, a kind and humble human being. He was always "Jim" to me, and perhaps to many who will read this as well.

I met Jim in the fall of 1979, as we entered the doctoral program in anthropology at Harvard together. I had skipped a couple of grades as a youngster and had finished my BA at age 20, and was accustomed to being the youngest, and, at least in my own mind, the smartest in any classroom I entered. That self-delusion came to an abrupt end when I met Jim, five years my junior, and immediately recognized him as one of the smartest individuals I had ever met. There was a new sheriff in town!

But I was soon to learn, a very genial, kind, and frankly, hilarious sheriff, if a sheriff at all. We had glorious times together, both inside and outside the courses we shared. It was not long before we were joined by Roberto Kant de Lima, who, as I recall, was delayed in joining the program by some months.

Soon the three of us were sharing dinners that reflected, as much as our rudimentary culinary skills allowed, the traditions of the regions of our origins and interest. When Roberto hosted us for feijoada, I brought a bottle of Bacardi rum, in my ignorance thinking this would be the culturally appropriate accompaniment to the meal (I had yet to learn about cachaça). Needless to say, this led to an evening of both soaring intellectual discussion and gales of laughter, ending in the certain conviction that, in the future, we would be known as "The Bacardi School of Anthropology." Despite my cultural misattribution, Bacardi rum became our drink of choice at many subsequent gatherings, and each of us acknowledged the influence of The Bacardi School in our first books after finishing our degrees.

Somewhat later, we were joined in the program by Liisa Malkki, who was such a wonderful match for Jim intellectually and emotionally. Jim was clearly smitten, and in a way, it was hard for the rest of us not to be smitten by the relationship and for the two of them. Two incredibly powerful minds joined together for a life of love, wonderful children, and intellectual adventure. What an inspiration!

We were all different. We agreed on many things, and disagreed on others. Jim was

never a pushover, nor just an agreeable person. Gentle, yes. Intellectually deft, yes. Humorous, no doubt. Brilliant, without question. But what I loved him for above all was his moral spine.

Jim was a thinker who believed that ideas should serve people. He dedicated his life to understanding and exposing the structures of power that shape our world—especially those that marginalize, exclude, and oppress. His work was not only intellectually rigorous but deeply ethical, always motivated by a passion for a more just and humane world. He built a brilliant career by not building any career at all.

Jim carried his immense intellect with humility. I never saw him seek the spotlight nor speak to impress. His aims were to understand, to engage, to challenge with the hope of building something better. He listened more than he spoke, and when he did speak, his words mattered. They carried the weight of careful thought, deep compassion, and an unshakable commitment to truth. His contributions to anthropology reshaped how we understand development, globalization, and inequality.

But Jim never saw his work as merely academic. He was always keenly aware that real people's lives were at stake, and that ideas impacted them in sometimes indirect but very tangible ways. His scholarship was a form of activism—quiet but powerful, precise but never detached. He never lost sight of the humanity in the communities he studied, nor of the responsibilities that come with knowledge.

Beyond his intellectual contributions, Jim was a friend who made you feel smarter just by talking to him—not because he showed off his knowledge, but because he had a way of making you think more clearly, more critically, more expansively.

He also had a dry wit that could disarm a tense conversation and a deep well of patience for those still finding their way toward understanding. He believed in people's capacity to grow, to change, to learn. And that belief wasn't naïve—it was hard-won, grounded in decades of observing both the failures and the possibilities of human societies.

Jim leaves behind a body of work that will continue to shape conversations in anthropology for generations. But more importantly, he leaves behind a legacy of integrity, humility, and unwavering commitment to justice.

To lose him is devastating, but to have known him is an immeasurable gift. It still shocks me that I must write these words at all. But as I mourn his passing, I also celebrate the life he lived, the minds he shaped, the justice he pursued, and the kindness he shared.

Jim, thank you—for your wisdom, your friendship, and your belief in a better world. We

will carry forward your work, your questions, and your spirit. You are deeply missed, but never forgotten.

George Bisharat[4]

4 Professor of law at UC Law San Francisco. E-mail: bisharat@uclawsf.edu

PERSPECTIVE AMONG PEOPLE: AN OBITUARY FOR PROFESSOR JAMES (JIM) FERGUSON

Anthropologists like to tell stories, and Jim was no exception. Neither am I, so let me give three short memories that will show, rather than telling, something of how Jim lived and worked.

In the first, I am an anxious student about to finish my undergraduate degree at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, where I now teach. I was invited to present my Honours research at a local conference where the keynote speaker was the legendary James Ferguson. His writing had been a big part of why I majored in Anthropology, and I listened to his keynote with engrossed fascination. Later that day, I took to the podium for the first time and shared my own work—halting and nervous at the beginning but finding my voice as I went. As I relaxed, I found myself able to make a joke, and there was a quick laugh from the back of the room.

I looked up and my legs went weak—the famous anthropologist himself had come to listen to what I and other students were presenting! And he had laughed at my joke! I remember my own astonishment and his grace, and then later that he came to speak to me. Over lunch, he took the trouble to ask my post-graduate plans, and said maybe I should consider a PhD at Stanford. That was one of the most generous offerings anyone could ever have made, but instead of leaping at it, I went home and wrote him the kind of hotheaded email only conceivable at 22, explaining why thanks but no thanks, I would never study under the conditions of US American intellectual imperialism.

One of my deepest lessons in how to teach was Jim's response: far from dismissing it and moving on with his wonderful life, he introduced me to several of his students over email and allowed us to have a conversation about what learning in the 21st century would and could mean. I quickly realized how impetuous I had been, and by the time I arrived to begin my doctorate under his guidance, my ears were a lot more ready for listening and learning.

The second memory is slightly less sun-soaked. The US system requires students to take exams before going to collect data for social science doctorates. Those exams happen over weeks and include rigorous written and oral components that assess one's knowledge of relevant scholarly literature, social context, language, and history. I wrote my essays and defended them in a three-hour oral exam, during which Jim grilled me on Marx. I had purchased all three volumes of Das Kapital but had given up and read the digital summaries of Volume 2.

Jim quickly realized I had no idea what I was talking about in response to a pointed question on productive capital. The committee allowed me to pass the exam comfortably, but I was required to submit a one-page review of Chapter Two of that volume to Jim's satisfaction. There were no short-cuts to working under Jim Ferguson and his absolute expectation was of rigor and excellence.

In the third memory, I am in the field, collecting data in Rio de Janeiro. I was working with the Angolan consulate—at the time notoriously difficult to gain access to. One of the consular staff members had read Jim's work as an undergraduate, and when I showed her a letter from him explaining my project she said, "I know this man, he's a serious person," and opened the figurative door. I emailed Jim that night saying, effectively, thanks for being so famous. Jim's response has stayed with me ever since: he was happy I had access, but pointed out that being a famous anthropologist was like being a "tall little person" and not something to be taken particularly seriously.

*

The biographic details of Jim's career and his profound contribution to the social sciences will and have been written up elsewhere, and there is no need for me to go over them again. What I hope these stories allow insight into instead is the texture of a life that had as its foundation relationships of care and love: firstly, with Liisa, Aila, and Elias, then with the other members of the "Bacardi School of Anthropology" and other colleagues, and profoundly also with students, interlocutors, and the many broad publics who Jim engaged in his work and teaching.

Jim's was a life that was shaped by deep humility and deep curiosity—positions that the contemporary institution of academia is designed to flatten the more senior one becomes. Jim never lost them though, whether he was speaking to a hotheaded undergraduate, an unemployed person unlikely to ever find a job in Southern Africa or California, or someone, in his words, "genuinely famous" ("as in, my kids would know who they are").

Despite being a deeply politically committed person (or perhaps because of the authenticity of these commitments), Jim did his best to avoid the intrigues of Stanford and of Silicon Valley. He recognized systems—and anti-systems—intimately, and was comfortable to name what he saw and call out structures designed to ensure the continuity of unequal world orders. For that, he was widely respected. His last long essay, "*Presence and Social Obligation: an Essay on the Share*" is, in my view, one of the bravest reads of contemporary Southern Africa. Let us give up the illusion of pretending we can create jobs for all, he says, and think

about how, in a post-work world, we sustain one another. I now teach this essay in a business school and find it (like his other texts) a critical portal to opening real, grounded conversations about what is actually happening—not what we are told to think should be going on. I was never able to discuss what Artificial Intelligence has opened for us all, but whenever I reflect on it, yet again, in *Presence and Social Obligation*, Jim was far ahead with insights that can shape how we respond to a world in which work may no longer define us.

The courses he taught at Stanford shaped several generations of PhD students in economic anthropology. Beyond this, they had an outsized impact on students from other fields who signed up for his legendary Anthropology 1 to change not how they thought about other places, but how they thought about themselves. Jim's Anthropology 1 used four topics of relevance to the contemporary United States to explore how humanity was imagined—and what its limits were. Considering immigration, gay marriage, drug addiction, and abortion, he masterfully led students through a process of making visible the boundaries of who was considered an insider and who remained outside. Many of the students who passed through that lecture hall now occupy positions of genuine influence in the world; and in the current global moment, it is a relief to know that at least some of those leaders were subject to his careful questions and thoughtful discussion of what brings us together—or keeps us apart.

Jim never lost his ability to listen, nor to laugh, and I never met a student who was frightened of him—even if we all quickly learned we had better do our homework properly (else suffer the consequences of re-reading Marx!). This made him very much an outlier within American Anthropology, where the diva status is often pursued and performed with astonishing intensity. It allowed him to speak his truth quietly and make his jokes softly too—sometimes it felt entirely for his own amusement—and it allowed him to live with remarkable integrity: no scandals, no drama, just a huge group of fiercely loyal students who continue to do compelling work on the themes Jim cared about in diverse contexts all over the world. He is liked and widely respected in Southern Africa, where most of his research took place, and his ideas—having moved beyond anthropology and into practice and policy—have arguably made a lot of so-called development work much better.

Despite his self-depreciation, Jim is one of the few anthropologists who can actually claim to have changed the world—not only for his students, but for millions of perfect strangers. In that sense, as well as teaching us all, he gave out a lot of proverbial fish. We are all richer and sustained by them, and those of us who knew him personally will miss him with the sharp intensity reserved for those who have accumulated the wealth that Southern Africans have long

known is the only kind to really, really matter: wealth in people. Go well, Jim; thank you for everything.

Jess Auerbach Jahajeeah[5]

5 Professor at the University of Cape Town. E-mail: Jess.auerbach@uct.ac.za

JAMES FERGUSON, THE INSTRUCTOR

James Ferguson's premature departure in February 2025 touched the anthropological community around the world, including Brazil, with whom Ferguson maintained academic and affective relations throughout his career. In our training as anthropologists, especially those interested in political anthropology and the state, which is my case, Ferguson's works became obligatory references. It is hard not to be struck by a reading of his greatest classic, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, whose main questions remain relevant for thinking about the nature of state power and the discourse on "development" that emerges around it. In this short text, I offer a brief account of a lesser-known side of James (or Jim, as he preferred to be called), the instructor, working in the classroom, that fewer people had the opportunity to know. Fortunately, I did.

Before this opportunity, I had had two brief encounters with Professor Ferguson. The first was in 2010, at the Universidade Federal Fluminense, where he gave a lecture. The second was in 2019, when we exchanged emails about me possibly going to Stanford University on a post-doctoral scholarship, with him as my supervisor, which ended up not happening. I finally went to Stanford in 2022 as a visiting scholar, linked to the graduate school of education, and I was able to sit in on the political anthropology course Ferguson taught in the graduate program in anthropology at that university. When I emailed him asking for permission to audit the course, he said: "I'd be happy to have you join the seminar, as long as you're prepared to do the assigned readings (basically one book-length ethnography each week)." I was very excited about the opportunity to attend his classes, but at the same time I realized that the course would require considerable dedication. And indeed, it did.

On the first day of class, James explained the course program, which focused on ethnographies of politics published in the five years prior to the course, with the exception of two (published in 2006 and 2011), which discussed topics such as sovereignty, citizenship, populism, neoliberalism, revolution, and others. As anticipated in the email, there would be one monographic book (an ethnography) per week, and more. All students had other tasks in class. Every week, a two-to-three-page Reading Notes was to be submitted about the text read, discussing the points and expressing a position on them. In addition, everyone had to write down questions about the day's text. After explaining how the classes would work in the first meeting, James emphasized that anyone who wanted to stay in the course would have to abide by those rules, as this would be a commitment that the students in the class, now an intellectual community, would have to each other. There were six students in the class, besides myself. The

class, which ran from 1pm to 4.20pm, worked as follows.

1) In the first forty-five minutes, James began by introducing the topic of the day and making a few comments on the text. It was very stimulating to see and hear James talking about the theme and the texts of the day. The first class was particularly impactful for me, as he began the course by talking about the purposes of political anthropology, focusing on showing how it served to think about the current world and offering definitions about power, prestige, politics, and other topics. He was able to use simple and easily understandable examples to explain complex concepts. In this lesson, he presented the case of a fight over a parking space as a starting point to show how it is possible to exercise power (micropower) without having prestige, strength, wealth, or status, and then raised other situations in which these elements were associated with power.

2) In the second part of the lesson, we had about forty-five minutes in which James asked for our more general thoughts on the text, from which he would make new comments or ask another classmate to comment, usually someone who had not spoken that day (in other words, you were not allowed to just be a "listener" in class, you had to engage with it);

3) After a fifteen-minute break, the class, without the professor present, had fifteen minutes to discuss among themselves the questions that each person had raised about the text and which of them would be raised for discussion with the professor in the next stage of the class.

4) The final part of the lesson, between sixty and eighty minutes long, was dedicated to a discussion of the questions selected by the class in the previous fifteen minutes, with one classmate a day explaining what had been discussed and indicating to the classmates their turn to raise their questions for the debate, in which everyone, including James, took part.

As a professor, James took a genuine interest in the questions and comments we made during class. He would present counterpoints to our comments and ask questions to encourage us to develop the ideas we raised for discussion. An important point of the discussions during the course was to find associations between the texts on the syllabus. James was extremely adept at making such connections, bringing together and distancing the authors we read, and he expected our comments in class to have the same focus.

James' ability as an instructor to deal with ideas that differ from his own was put to the test at the very beginning of the course, in the second class, when we discussed his work *Give Man a Fish*. Although James was kind to all the students, it was only the second class, so there was a certain tension in the class about how to discuss his work. I had spent almost two sleepless nights to finish the reading and write the Reading Notes for the day, and I had many

questions about the text. Although I was sure that it was a privilege to be able to discuss it with the author himself (the renowned James Ferguson!), even more so as an anthropologist trained in Brazil, I was also a little apprehensive about how I would raise some points, especially one question. The book affirms that a type of demand was developing for the sharing of certain economic goods and resources that did not have as a counterpart any sense of social debt, of reciprocity, among those who received the goods or resources demanded. Ferguson calls this phenomenon the politics of the right share, and says that it is developing in a number of societies in the global south (in the case of the book, South Africa and Namibia). It is a very interesting argument and one that runs throughout the book. But, at the time, it seemed to me that the argument was based on ethnographic situations related only to the moments when the actors raised demands, and that such situations could not demonstrate that, after having achieved their objectives, the actors did not gain a sense of social debt to those who granted them the goods they requested. I decided to risk raising this question for debate. As soon as I finished speaking, James gave a slight smile and said "nice catch," and then asked the class what they thought of my observation. After a few people spoke up, James said that perhaps he had put more emphasis in the ethnographic descriptions on moments of demand, but that there was other data in the text that supported his argument that the actors did not feel indebted to those who had given them access to the goods or economic resources they demanded. For me, this brief situation was very representative of how, as an instructor, James was willing to see students debating, questioning, and even criticizing the ideas, concepts, and theories he proposed for the course. After this episode, I felt I had broad freedom as a member of the class to express disagreements about points in the texts we discussed in class, and I felt that my classmates shared the same feeling. As an instructor, James managed to create an environment that was very conducive to critical learning of the course content. Although this is what you would expect from any graduate class, especially in the social sciences, it is not always what you find.

Another characteristic of James' classes was that they combined seriousness with occasional moments of relaxation, which made the learning situation enjoyable. We had the impression of being in a serious environment, carrying out an important activity, but we felt at ease. In one of the classes, when we began the discussion, I asked to speak about how the author of the day used some of her concepts that were always associated with the idea of status. I separated about ten definitions of these concepts that the author used in the text and read them out during the lesson, emphasizing how the idea of status was present in all of them. When I had finished reading the quotes from the text, before discussing my point, James said, with a slightly wry smile, "I wish you could be my editor," making the rest of the class smile with him.

We also had the opportunity to discuss with James our own research questions in the light of the concepts and ideas that the course literature presented to us. James encouraged us to talk about the contexts of our research, seeking to test the concepts under discussion and show how the detailed ethnographic accounts we read could have relevance beyond the specialized geographical areas in which they were produced. He seemed to be quite attentive to what was happening in the contexts that we were studying. In one of the classes, as soon as he arrived, he sat down, looked at me and said: "congratulations." It was the first class after Lula's electoral victory over Jair Bolsonaro. I just thanked him and briefly explained to the class what that election meant for democracy in Brazil.

On my last day at school, I asked the class if they would agree to take a photo with James, because, for me, that experience deserved a visual record. They agreed, but asked me to ask James for permission for the photo. He agreed ("of course!"), we took the photo (see below), and I said goodbye to him and my classmates. I think the photo communicates well the feelings we experienced during the course: *seriousness*, restrained postures and understated clothing in a formal teaching environment; *companionship*, everyone close together, side by side, on the same plane; and *satisfaction*, smiling faces, expressing positivity.

A few days before the first class, I said excitedly to a colleague, also a visiting scholar at Stanford, that I would have the chance to take a course with James, and how much I admired him. He was very skeptical, even though he did not know James, saying that I might be disappointed with James as an *instructor*, an activity that requires its own competence. He said that I knew the author James Ferguson, the professor, not the *instructor*. Fortunately, my colleague was wrong. So, I would like to put on record that, in addition to losing a great author, a renowned anthropologist, we have also lost the equally admirable *instructor* James Ferguson, who enchanted his class with the intellectual work and virtues of anthropology.

From left to right: Benjamin Perez, Daniel Yi, Teathloach Nguot, Ronald Chen, James Ferguson, Shan Yang, Bóris Maia.

Bóris Maia[6]

6 Professor at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro. E-mail: borismaias@gmail.com

TO JIM FROM MÁRCIO

My initial contact with Professor James Ferguson came about when I was a doctoral student and preparing for a study-abroad period at Stanford University, from 2010 to 2011, and I asked my advisor Kant de Lima for references. At the time, Jim was no less than one of the authors I had read to get into the doctoral program in anthropology at UFF, while doing my master's degree. So, in addition to the aura of an author presented to us as a classic, I had the privilege of having Jim as my supervisor when I was a visiting student at Stanford's graduate anthropology department.

Jim combined his introverted manner with a hospitality that was always helpful and attentive. In true field researcher spirit, he responded with a "maybe you need to insist more" to my reports of difficulties with the research interlocutors. In addition, his attendance of my presentation to students and professors of the department gave rise to an interesting perspective of contrast when he was able to point out "advantages" in the Brazilian system for public interest litigation, which allowed me to find the elements for a rich comparison with the US model.

Thus, as registered in his work, his clear political stance on the place of the "other" in the construction of economic development models avoided any kind of "mongrelism" on the part of researchers from the South, such as myself, while simultaneously launching a strong critique of the role of the institutions and countries of the North.

Therefore, I would like to acknowledge that the richness of my study-abroad experience benefited greatly from my association with Professor James Ferguson. And this resulted, above all, from what anthropology has described so well and what Professor Kant de Lima has always drawn attention to, which is how the process of producing knowledge takes place, as does all social life, through real people, living real lives, establishing relationships that become institutionalized and become relationships no longer between people, but between programs and universities.

Márcio de Paula Filgueiras[7]

7 Professor at the Instituto Federal de Educação, Ciência e Tecnologia do Espírito Santo. E-mail: mpfilgueiras@yahoo.com.br