

Introduction: Beyond public reason

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This introduction situates the special issue within longstanding debates on liberal public reason, tracing its Enlightenment roots through Habermas and Rawls to contemporary political dilemmas. It highlights how anthropology has revealed the exclusions embedded in public reason's universalist claims, particularly for those marginalized by culture, race, gender, class, or religion. We argue that liberal public reason has become both a hegemonic philosophy and a globalized pedagogical tool of governance, yet its assumptions about rationality, abstraction, and secularism often obscure or delegitimize alternative modes of political communication and ethical life. This introduction outlines how the essays collected here explore immanent social projects that do not merely critique liberalism from its margins but enact alternative public reasoning grounded in vernacular, embodied, and relational practices. These projects arise both within and beyond liberal institutions, offering political horizons not overdetermined by liberal assumptions. The authors advocate moving beyond frameworks that juxtapose liberalism with its 'illiberal' others, emphasizing anthropology's potential to illuminate diverse forms of public deliberation that exceed these binaries. Finally, the introduction argues that by attending ethnographically to these alternative practices, from community organizing to legal reasoning, from embodied solidarity to spiritual claims, we can rethink public reason as plural, situated, and capable of addressing deep difference without demanding assimilation to liberal norms.

The bourgeois fantasy of white heterosexual fathers reading the morning newspaper has claimed an outsized place in the Euro-American cultural imagination. While the fantasy has come under attack, the legacy and influence of this fantasy remain intact in political rhetoric and policy circles within and beyond its European birthplace, predominantly

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through its imagined outcome: public reason. The struggle to understand what it means to disagree well, or for *reasonable people to disagree reasonably* is one that many societies face. The ethic of coping with difference through public exchange has long been central to the democratic ideal. What are the rules of the game for public deliberation? What are the acceptable political cultures of democracy? Today, debates about diversity and the limits of tolerance, political polarization, mistrust in the public discourse, the production of a 'post-truth' public sphere, and the deterioration in democratic values and basic freedoms in many parts of the world, broadly defined as 'democratic deficit', have put public reason back in the spotlight. How should people talk politics in the modern era? Who should be part of the conversation?

Deriving from mid-twentieth-century liberal theories of the public sphere, largely from the work of Jürgen Habermas and John Rawls, the public reason framework aims to provide a neutral and universal platform for all to participate in the public sphere conversation. The framework draws on a longer genealogy of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Enlightenment thought, which was predominantly concerned with determining the features, the potential, and the limits of human reason in relation to the public good and the social contract (John Locke to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, G.W.F. Hegel, and Immanuel Kant). In theory, because every human is meant to have reason – the power by which humans understand the universe and improve their condition – everyone can speak 'public reason'. In practice, however, many have found that its conditions of participation are restrictive on the basis of culture, gender, religion, race, class, and more. The discipline of anthropology has played an important role in revealing the implicit, exclusionary norms that are often only seen from the perspectives and languages of those whose participation is blocked.

In this collection of essays, we turn again to the generative theoretical potential of the ethnographic to consider the alternatives to liberal public reason at a moment when more and more people are demanding meaningful inclusion in the political process. These alternatives are not only articulating their challenges from outside the nation-state, from the iconic position of the racialized refugee or new immigrant, but also from groups generally considered to be part of the liberal body politic. These groups are resisting the assumed terms of their inclusion, demanding not only discursive representation, but also to reconfigure the public sphere. They seek to participate in a pluralist polity on equal grounds with their liberal interlocutors, in some cases even proposing alternative platforms for reasoning publicly. We highlight immanent social projects from both within and outside the liberal body politics and their alternative configurations of public rationality and communication. We qualify these projects as immanent, drawing on Elizabeth Povinelli's generative language of 'experientially immanent orientation' (2016), where liberal governance is often resisted simply through existing otherwise. In this collection, we stage an intervention by shedding light on those who are currently engaging in alternative public deliberation and praxis, leading us to theorize political horizons that are not overdetermined by the hegemony of liberal philosophy. In addition to this theoretical component, the collective exploration into immanent social projects beyond the liberal grammar also seeks to respond to the call to 'let anthropology burn': an invitation for the discipline to abandon its liberal suppositions which have underpinned many Euro-American projects of cultural defensiveness (Jobson 2020).

Before we set fire to our European bourgeois patriarchs deliberating on their well-read newspaper, we begin our introduction with a brief genealogy of liberal public

reason and its historical crystallization into its current expression as a comparatively stable, self-enclosed philosophy and *techne*. As philosophy, public reason has achieved a high level of hegemony in political science (Wedeen 2016) and as *techne*, it has become a pedagogical package that is actively exported through democracy-building practices (Salvatore 2007; D. Scott 2012). We then outline the body of ethnographic research on the exclusionary effects of liberal public reason, as well as the ways these exclusions have impacted our own field sites through spatial (neighbourhoods and slums), discursive (Abrahamic traditions), and organizational (community organizing, courts) operations. Finally, we explain our intention with this collection to push the anthropological conversation forward by considering immanent social projects that move beyond public reason. While counterpublics have long produced subaltern discourses in the margins, the immanent social projects considered here are experimenting with, and in some cases even attempting to replace, the platform of communicative infrastructure of public reason. We are cognizant of the fact that most scholarly attention to the edges of liberal public reason has been paid to illiberal phenomena, including resurgent racist jingoism and xenophobia, homophobia and sexism, Islamophobia and antisemitism. In this collection, we demonstrate that forms of political life beyond liberalism are not only these dark manifestations, which restrict freedom, but rather, everything else. Ultimately, we seek to use this special issue to open a theoretical and normative space for alternative, non-Western or non-mainstream models of public reasoning. In doing so, we remain open to their challenges, dilemmas, and even the limitations they may present to political engagement in a plural polity.

Public reason

The goal of public reason has always been to enable public dialogue and generate political integration. Enlightenment philosophers attended to the paradox that good people often disagree with each other by exploring the possibilities of public justification to address intractable rifts due to deep moral, religious, and other differences (Turner & Gaus 2017: 1–2). But the twentieth century saw the crystallization and move towards the self-referential concept of liberal public reason through the writings of three thinkers in particular: John Rawls, Jürgen Habermas, and Gerald Gaus. One major year-zero event was the publication of Jürgen Habermas's *The structural transformation of the public sphere* (1989 [1962]). Choosing historical abstraction, an imaginary point of origin, Habermas produces a narrative about the emergence of the bourgeois public sphere in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English coffee houses, French salons, and German literary societies, where he finds the inspiration for mass participation in the democratic state. Habermas was motivated by the question of how democracy might function in the post-Second World War era, reflecting a widespread response to historical challenges among liberal thinkers regarding the potential and risks of mass participation in government (A. Anderson 2019). His conceptualization of the public sphere seeks to locate the social origin of public reason in the bourgeois European middle classes that can counter state overreach. The argument is driven by the desire to unearth the intellectual and social practices of these classes, which can undergird democracy while preventing the horrors of the Second World War from recurring. One of the central assumptions of his work is that this theory of democracy reflects 'the rational content of the norms and practices that have acquired positive validity since the constitutional revolutions of the 18th century, and, as such have become part of historical reality' (2022: 147). In fact, Habermas is explicit that such historical reality

forms part of what he calls the ‘intuitive expectations and conceptions of legitimacy of citizens’ (2022: 149).

The tautology he establishes between citizen intuitions and constitutional order is most explicit in the discursive manifestation of public reason. Habermas continues to develop his theory of discourse ethics in *The theory of communicative action* (1999 [1981]), where he seeks to further elaborate a universal and fair platform for inclusive and noncoercive discourse. In this theory, public conversation should take place in rational moral discourse, which requires individuals to make moral and political arguments in the language of norms and values that *could* be accepted by all (1999 [1981]: 42) given the ‘background of an intuitive constitutional consensus’ (2022: 150). Habermas’s response to the heterogeneity in social and political life is that rational deliberation can lead us to ‘improve our beliefs’ and ‘get closer to correct solutions to problems’ (2022: 152). Significantly, recognizing that many people hold religious reasons, Habermas proposed what is called a ‘translation proviso’, which specifies that religious reasons must be translated into secular reasons before they are made into coercive policy. The process of translation ‘salvages’ the secular content from religious reasons and, in becoming secular he argues becomes neutral and ‘equally accessible to all’ (Habermas 2006: 12), a conceit that the papers in this special issue interrogate.

Shifting from the historical to the juridical and from public access to equality, in *Theory of Justice*, Rawls developed his idea of ‘justice as fairness’, in which he seeks to synthesize the values of freedom and equality (1999 [1971]). In order to achieve this synthesis, he prescribes a thought experiment, called the ‘original position’, colloquially ‘the veil of ignorance’, to fairly consider questions of the public good. To adopt the original position, an individual imagines themselves without any knowledge of their particular characteristics: race, religion, gender, age, wealth, skills, education, status or position in society. If a policy, law, or norm can be considered fair from this formally disinterested position, Rawls claimed that this indicates ‘fairness’ (1999 [1971]: 15–19). ‘Original positions’ create a public discourse in which people are oriented to consider the good of society as a whole rather than a struggle for power between different private interests and factions. For Rawls, reason becomes public when it is generalized, anonymized, decontextualized, and universalized. Katrina Forrester (2019) has argued that *Theory of justice* drastically reduced the previous heterogeneity in liberal philosophy and made Rawls’s version of liberalism hegemonic for political theory, anchoring Euro-American discussions of public reason to this day (Turner & Gaus 2017). This view is corroborated by Amanda Anderson’s *Bleak liberalism* (2019), which has unearthed the intensely differentiated ethos and aesthetics of liberal thought in the 1940s. However, the immanent social projects considered here, many situated in locations where the liberal public is the dominant frame, are not operations to recapture liberalism’s lost heterogeneity. Rather, largely indifferent to liberal theory, they seek instead to transform ideas and practices around reasoning in public in accordance to their own norms and values.

While Gerald Gaus attributed greater significance to the different reasons that motivate people, he nevertheless suggests that we must make our public demands in the reasons of others, if we expect them to comply. For Gaus, like the other liberal philosophers, the liberal moral self relies on the notion of private conscience, the inward moral reflection to arrive at reasons, which are then brought forward and presented publicly. In this, they collectively draw from Rousseau’s idea of man separate from, and prior to, his entry into society and consent to be governed, an act ‘in which each,

while uniting himself with all, may still obey himself alone, and remain as free as before' (Gaus 2010: 1; Rousseau 2019 [1762]). This quintessentially modern subject, building on Enlightenment assumptions of the *cogito*, Hobbes's state of nature, and Rousseau's imagination of the *social contract*, informs a fundamental tenet of liberal public reason: the dialectic between inwardness and publicness. Assuming this dialectic to be empirically valid allows public reason to be understood as the practice of freedom: 'Public reason helps us not only overcome conflicts, but also to live according to common law in a way that secures the freedom of each' (Turner & Gaus 2017: 4). However, ethnographies of social and institutional ordering have suggested that the axiomatic liberal space of law fails to acknowledge that moral positions concerning fundamental questions of freedom, life, death, and citizenship, are always defined collectively and institutionally and territorially, defying this assumed dialectic.

In this collection, we aim to shed light on the inter-connectivity of institutional legal reasoning with other spaces of public deliberation. We further seek to address the Eurocentric historical assumption of a 'common' zone that public reason either occupies or engenders in the above philosophical iterations. As noted by Clifford Geertz in his 1975 critique of mid-century philosophy in 'Common sense as a cultural system', philosophical investigations of ordinary language (Wittgenstein, Austin), the phenomenology of the everyday (Husserl, Merleau-Ponty) or the practice of everyday life (De Certeau) have rested on unexamined assumptions of human intuition, perception, and senses common to all. Even though liberal reason is one of the many blind spots of European ethnocentrism, we contend that it has been remarkably transformative for publics and politics around the world.

Street-level bureaucratic public reason

Though the image of an eighteenth-century English coffeehouse or a French salon hardly sounds like the paragon of inclusion today, it was chosen by Habermas to mark the dramatic expansion of political discourse and the inclusion of 'the people'. And indeed, the idea of public reason has always pursued the goal of mass inclusion. In this special issue we locate the 'people' as both a discursive feature that critically intersects the state and its institutions (Greenhouse; Morningstar), civil society (Cabot; Samanani; Weiss), and neighbourhoods (Boutieri; Everett; Lino e Silva). The history of how 'the people' have been differently conceived over time is a worthy topic in and of itself. The strand of this inquiry that most intimately concerns us here is how the above philosophical norms regarding the people of democracy and their modalities of participation left the ivory tower and have become widely – if not globally – legible.

Public reason was experienced through imperial institutions of education such as the inculcation of colonial subjects to 'civil society'. This was a major objective of the pedagogical project of spreading proper political life to colonized peoples, with little regard for their previous political traditions (Chatterjee 2004; Mehta 1999; Spencer 1997). During the heyday of post-Cold War political liberalism, practices of public reason achieved broad hegemonic acceptance. With the demise of communism, the former socialist and non-aligned subject became a prime target for Western pedagogy in liberal democratic citizenship as part of broader post-Cold War liberalization projects. This included cultural training in autonomous, responsible, tolerant, and self-assured self-hood, intended to transform Soviet social relations into liberal visions of civil society and public discourse (Dzenovska 2018; Matza 2009). In India, Francis Cody shows how 'literacy activism' became deeply embedded within the ideology of

development-as-pedagogy, and intended to create citizen-subjects that will follow the communicative norms and ethics of liberal public reason, in particular transparent self-representation (Cody 2009). Also in India, Matthew Hull describes the ways Ford Foundation consultants promoted specific liberal techniques of 'public speech' putatively essential to democratic functioning, while eliminating existing forms of sociality (2010). Post-war Iraq and Afghanistan became sites of systematic pedagogical intervention in liberal communicative infrastructure and norms based on the idea that public reason is essential to democratic sustainability (Ahmad, Lybaek, Mohammed & Osler 2012; Osman 2003), a policy approach that was continued across the South West Asia and North Africa (SWANA) region in the wake of the Arab Spring (Boutieri 2018). In our special issue, we trace the discursive repertoires of neo-colonial 'good' governance and their erasure of pre-existing vocabularies of public reasoning across multiple geographies.

Locating the residues and/or re-emergence of local forms of public reason offers a different perspective than philosophical critiques of liberal public reason which have questioned the supposed unity of the liberal bourgeois public sphere (Calhoun 1993; Elshtain 2020 [1981]; Fraser 2014 [1994]; Warner 2021 [2002]). While political science or philosophical critiques of public reason tend to focus on state, institutions, and political parties while assuming an abstracted human entity, anthropologists have provided ethnographic data concerning the informal ways that norms of liberal public reason can cast groups as either unworthy interlopers in the public sphere or delegitimize their attempts to participate in public reasoning (Cook, Long & Moore 2016; Ellison 2018; Greenberg 2014; Michelutti 2007; West 2005). There has been extensive anthropological research in the ways liberal governance and liberal values are resisted, often through avoidance (J.C. Scott 2010; West 2005) and/or blended with local traditions and desires, in particular in village assemblies and councils (Banerjee 2021; Comaroff & Comaroff 1997). Below, we focus exclusively on the research that addresses public reason and the public sphere specifically, that is, the ways people attempt to enter into public discussion and debate regarding politics and policy but are blocked. We break these interventions into three (occasionally overlapping) themes related to the modern norms of liberal public reason that anthropologists have identified as sticking points: self-abstraction, models of liberal ethical personhood, and linguistic ideologies. Each of these topics defines the context of limitations against which our interlocutors frame their public interventions.

The imperative of self-abstraction

In political liberalism, in order to partake in public reason, one must enter the public sphere through the practice of self-abstraction. This constraint requires people to make claims and arguments in such a manner that others can understand and potentially accept, and that are stripped of any parochial characteristics of worldview. Partha Chatterjee has famously argued that the 'politics of the governed' is articulated in idioms of community and kinship that patently refuse self-abstraction (2004). As a result, their practices of public reason are often seen as vulgar and improperly partisan. Yet, the expectation to speak for society in general, for the whole body politic, is inaccessible to those who are not imagined, and do not see themselves as unmarked citizens. Based on long-term applied anthropological projects in multiple sites, Adam Seligman and Robert Weller have demonstrated the limitations of the abstract, the general, and the disembodied, especially for the challenge of pluralism, showing that

people often find these discourses alienating and unhelpful for dealing with difference (2012). Erica Weiss and Ayala Fader have shown that religious Jews, in Israel and the US respectively, often deny the possibility of an unrooted and decontextualized moral position precisely because, for them, tradition is the primary source of moral guidance as opposed to an inward and individual conscience (Fader 2009; Weiss 2017). All of these ethnographic examples of inability or unwillingness to speak from the generic point of view regarding the public good depart from Habermas's popularized ideal of 'constitutional patriotism' (1998), which structures the beliefs and dispositions of proper citizens such that primarily allegiance is understood as civic and oriented towards the normative values of liberalism. Rather, we see in this volume that groups are often reliant on their particularist identity and the social relationships for their moral guidance regarding political decision making. Indeed, particularism is the way in which many communities enter public conversation, most notably through their geographical location, language, class, and/or gender. The public/private binary on which public reason rests has also historically barred from the sphere of legitimate public discourse marginalized subject positions, which are based on 'impersonal norms of discourse', that is unmarked positionalities (Cody 2011).

The establishment of the public sphere as an elite space, which has historically been restricted to white European property owners and literate publics, has typically relied on already existing bourgeois cultural practices as the basis of communicative ethics. In this, the ethical function of the public sphere is derived from the bourgeois culture and its aesthetics of respectability. More specifically, public reason is often represented as a civilized and civilizing practice, of newspapers to salons, practices historically associated with upper classes. However, contributions to this collection illustrate that people refract the demands of abstracted conversation through their located, classed, and historical experiences, as well as their local moral obligations, making those experiences central to the act of dialogue. Studying the implementation of international democracy promotion programmes in post-war Serbia and post-revolutionary Bolivia respectively, Jessica Greenberg (2014) and Susan Ellison (2018) have traced how the recipients of liberal discursive pedagogies adapt (in Ellison's words 'domesticate') these global repertoires to contents, tones, and praxis that have more local resonance despite the official judgement of this resonance as unruly, backward, or violent. Their work, situated within neo-imperialist dynamics, echoes earlier anthropological studies that consider the postcolonial situation wherein popular politics exceed the limits of the public discourse.

The convergence of the 'cultures of conflict' in terms of the promotion of democracy (Ellison 2018) and the unruly street masses made up of poorer citizens, highlights the fact that liberalism travels with a set of geographical and class-based aesthetics. The anthropological literature has paid attention to the semiotic distinction made between a public and its more ominous representations, the crowd and the mob, so as to consider the largely class-based nature of this distinction and illustrate the political effects of such aesthetics of respectability. William Mazzarella analyzes the work of Gabriel Tarde who theorized the crowd as 'an outmoded face-to-face phenomenon in an age of mass publics and waxes anxious over the potential of crowds to erupt violently out of relatively civilized publics' (Tarde 1989 [1901], quoted in Mazzarella 2010: 723). Crowds and other outdoor political activities are cast as unruly; 'the street' being understood as a kind of mutant public sphere, excessively embodied, problematically susceptible to manipulation, and unreliable. Likewise, the mass consumption of political content

through means and grammars of communication that are not traditionally part of the repertoire of bourgeois rational discourse also cause concern amongst liberal observers (Mazzarella 2013; Rafael 2003; Rajagopal 2001). The discomfort with the perceived messiness of non-bourgeois political practices betrays some of the class prejudices inherent in the conceptual examples and metaphors of public reason (Lino e Silva 2022). Frequently critical of the institution of academia, Pierre Bourdieu observed that casting issues of the public good as general and abstract political matters is often a privileged position available to the upper class, while for lower classes such issues are understood as particularistic ethical problems (1979).

Anthropology's creative and often critical engagement with various strands of feminist theory, actor network theory, affect theory as well as its relationship to mid-level concepts such as 'sociality' (Amit et al. 2015; Long & Moore 2013) has drastically relativized its perspective on self-abstraction. Specifically, the discipline's curiosity around the boundedness of the person and around diverse types of permeability and connection has displaced the centrality of the Enlightenment human in favour of looking at the person as a complexly aggregated existence – Marilyn Strathern's exploration of the 'dividual' person in *The gender of the gift* (1988) having constituted a particularly powerful intervention in this respect. Attending to public interactions in societies that experience the meeting of liberal governance and non-liberal ways of life, Elizabeth Povinelli has elaborated on the liberal logics of stranger sociality and what she calls the autological subject, which requires the self-authorizing individual, the 'I', to be the only reference and the site of enunciation and address (2011). Referencing Habermas, she argues that this discursive performance of the individual's sovereignty is critical to his understanding of public reason. To this thin stranger sociality based on individual sovereignty, she juxtaposes the perspective and practices of the Belyuen, a small indigenous community in Northern Australia, who live a social life thickened through relationality rather than individuality (2006).

The question of ethical personhood

The archetype of ethical personhood demanded by the liberal order is that of the individual summoned to public reason duty, who, starting only from his own private reason (Needleman 2009) and conscience (Weiss 2014; 2017), contemplates the public good and exchanges their reasons with others. Confusingly, it is this archetype that allows liberalism to deny itself as a tradition. It does this through assertions of universalism based on the notion of a bounded person, which have the effect of covering its historical tracks and its dependence on located inherited norms and values. Capitalist Euro-American personhood relies on a basic dichotomy between individual and society, reason and culture, which Hickel argues 'lie at the heart of the twin institutions of social science and liberal democracy' (Hickel 2015: 216). This model, leaning on an Enlightenment ideal of self-authorizing personhood, serves some political outcomes and ideals more than others.

While Habermas and Rawls seek to avoid the extremes of Enlightenment individualism with a dialogical engendering of public reason, they both preserve an understanding of privacy and interiority when it comes to moral deliberation. In this respect, their articulation of liberal public reason dovetails with what Webb Keane calls 'the moral narrative of modernity' (2013: 160), which he describes as a profoundly melioristic Cartesian and Protestant approach that privileges interiority and public sincerity as key to human emancipation. Specifically, inwardness is privileged as a

practice of self-mastery, wherein we are no longer beholden to tradition, hierarchy, or anachronistic religious ritual, but only to personal reason (2013: 160). This private reservoir of judgement is essential because, according to liberal theory, moral reason is supposedly developed in private and is a form of individual need interpretation (Habermas 1979: 93). Accordingly, public reason is the public use of private reason, and as such, a dialectic relationship between the separate public and private spheres are structurally part of the reasoning process. This assumption has exclusionary effects for those who have sources of authorization other than the self, and those who do not rely on the role of interiority (Taylor 1992).

Relatedly, the fact that public reason is necessarily secular reason is one of modern liberal philosophy's most controversial elements. Talal Asad has demonstrated that secularism is not in fact the neutral platform for the exchange of ideas that it claims to be, but rather, contains inherent assumptions derived from Christianity (2003). The result can be profound misunderstanding and inability to translate cultural meaning within these strictures. For example, Saba Mahmood examined the well-known case of the Danish cartoons scandal in which the Prophet Mohammed was depicted. She finds that from the liberal perspective, Muslims misunderstand the nature of representation and images, and under-appreciate the value of free speech (Mahmood 2009). Thus, through the protests and the commentary, there was no agreement on what actually 'happened' in the publication of the cartoons, or the nature of its harm. Islamo-orthopraxic reasons never enter the public sphere, remaining untranslated and unarticulated ontological difference, while having immense political consequences. As to the intercommunal, specifically Jewish–Muslim, there is a stark difference between what interfaith initiatives do representationally and where deeper structural tensions lie (Egorova 2018, Everett & Gidley 2022; Sheldon 2016).

Similarly, anthropologists note the significance of ontological difference in the legal system, a neglected site of public reason that we highlight in this collection. Specifically, that spiritual and religious understandings of harm and crime, if denied by the legal system as superstition or not 'real' and left unprosecuted, are experienced as an abandonment of the state by believers (Comaroff & Comaroff 2004; Weiss 2022; West 2005). This lack of consensus on the world is inevitable in situations of what Galston describes as 'deep diversity', defined as a social reality where groups share the same political space, yet hold very different underlying justifications and sources of legitimacy for the social order (Galston 1995), as opposed to the comparatively thin notions of difference maintained by liberal multiculturalism. We argue that liberal public reason is unequipped to take up these differences not least because of its demand for secularism. Secularism (in its many iterations, including as a rationalization of Christianity) is a form of cultural regulation that sets severe limits on the role of religion in public, its form, the subjectivities it endorses, and its epistemological claims (Everett 2018; Fernando 2014).

The question of language

Anthropologists have been instrumental in identifying both the various grammars of liberalism (Fedirko, Samanani & Williamson 2021), as well as the shortcomings of liberal public reason as these are experienced by people who chafe against it, are excluded by it, or avoid it. Because deliberative theories of liberal democracy are explicitly logocentric, a significant domain where people fail to measure up to the requirements of public reason is language. Just as the liberal idea of public reason posits

a specific subject, so too does it posit a correct and appropriate semiotic mediation of that subjectivity. Anthropology has launched confident critiques of the ways that linguistic medium, genre, and style of speech of public reason conform to broader ideologies of modernity (Bauman & Briggs 2003; Boutieri 2016; Gal & Woolard 2014; Keane 2009), which tend to exclude those considered 'lower class', the 'masses', or numerous legal, gendered, religious counter-publics from political participation as unbecoming to the political stage. Failure to find resonance with the grammar, genre, or language ideology of public discourse can further produce alienation in the public sphere (Morningstar 2021).

Quite clearly then, public reason privileges discourse over practice, which risks neglecting a vast field of social interaction aimed at the public good. This may range from forms of care that draw on relational responsibility (Tronto 2020), or solidarity (Cabot 2016), to a negotiated existence that exceeds verbal communication (Hage 2021), examples that explicitly displace the centrality of state law as yet another instantiation of logos. Once inside discourse, public reason tends to favour monolingualism and the formalization of the linguistic register – a barrier to publicness that various groups whose reasoning we explore in this collection come up against or push through either through colloquialism or political incorrectness. While public reason theory is heavily invested in the circulation of printed text (B. Anderson 2006), in many contexts we see that other media root public discussions by virtue of accommodating differentiated literacy and education: television and movies in India and Palestine (Bishara 2008; Mazzarella 2013), cellphones in the Philippines (Rafael 2003), and audiotapes in Egypt (Hirschkind 2006). The hierarchy between scripturalism over orality, which becomes metaphysical not exclusively in religious traditions but also in jurisprudence, is compounded by differentiations within scripturalism. Hence the liberal politics of respectable speech differentiates even among printed texts to the extent that it privileges the newspaper political cartoon over graffiti (Alexandrakis 2016; Docuyan 2000; Ellison 2019; Lee 2013; Saunders 2011).

Beyond its registers and media, public reason presupposes and endorses a set of affective dispositions that texture speech. It privileges rational speech and sincerity above emotional raised tones and populist rhetoric (Mizrachi 2016), vulgar political humour (Andrade 2019; Boyer 2013; Mbembe 1992), or the populist use of social media (Bonilla & Rosa 2015; Fischer 2010; Silver 2021), modes that are (deemed excessively) embodied (Kaviraj 1997). It privileges a singular voice over collective articulations (Kenreuther 2008), and 'debate club' style exchanges that bracket the deep-lived inequalities among interlocutors, while, as Charis Boutieri has shown for post-revolutionary Tunisia, modalities of communication, which include the embodied positioned perspective of individuals, are more capacious in deliberating on the affordances of democracy (2021; see also in this collection). Liberal speech privileges sobriety, while Lisa Wedeen demonstrates that Yemenis address, and even decide, their most divisive political issues while chewing the psychoactive drug qat (2008). It privileges legality and obedience over illegality and flouting the rules (Aguiar 2013; Coleman 2009; Dent 2012; 2016; Fisher 2012; Floyd 2008; Kemmer 2020). People's publicness is imbricated in modes of talk and embodied states that often do not fall into neatly demarcated categories of liberal and non-liberal reason (Everett 2020; see also in this collection). What we aim to show, rather, is that liberal perceptions of incommensurability do not necessarily halt or condemn public discussion. The original seventeenth-century problematization remains, good people

often disagree (Turner & Gaus 2017: 1-2). This is where our collection aims to make an intervention.

From critique to immanent social projects

We want to imagine an alternative approach to political communication other than liberal public reason. Until this point, many of the alternative models to the liberal public sphere have been suggested from the disciplines of political science and political philosophy. However, such alternatives are often themselves overdetermined by liberalism's hegemony. While raising legitimate misgivings, they tend to frame issues in dualistic terms, in which the non-liberal subject is an abstract speculation cast in terms of its binary contrast with liberalism (Calhoun 1993). The subaltern appears often as the opposite of the hegemonic white bourgeois man. The silent reading public is contrasted with the crowd or the mob. The subject concerned with universalist dignity is contrasted with that concerned with hierarchical zero-sum honour (Taylor 1994). Individualism is contrasted with communitarianism (Sandel 1981). One of our main claims is that anthropology has a potentially more significant role to play in creating theoretical and normative space for alternative visions. We are committed to showing the range of non-liberal alternatives and non-liberal subjects. While it is surely true that liberalism's hegemony has worldwide reach, we nevertheless suggest that many people live less under the influence of liberal thought than political theorists, be they advocates or critics. This suggests one of the normative interventions of this collection: while liberalism is surely diverse, non-liberalism is more diverse, often in conversation with liberal expectations, but also drawing from a wide repertoire of reasons. While the 'liberal or illiberal' binary is the framework that best characterizes the interpretive possibilities of political science (Zakaria 1997), we highlight many ways of life that are neither liberal nor illiberal.

Ethnography as theoretically generative space can suggest new ideas regarding the potential for reasoning publicly beyond the liberal grammar. Carole McGranahan reminds us that 'theory grounded in ethnography differs from theory grounded in other ways of knowing. Ethnography requires actually being together, not just thinking about it' (2022: 296), promising to break the stale binaries and theoretical aporias often entrenched in academic debates (see also Borneman & Hammoudi 2009). Unlike academics, our interlocutors do not place their allegiance and fidelity in theoretical distinctions and categorizations, and thus are less encumbered by these logics, allowing them to push 'beyond' and not just 'against'. Furthermore, based on the insights of the anthropology of ethics that demonstrate that ethical life is embedded, situated, relational, social, and about living with others (Laidlaw 2013; Lambek 2010; Samanani 2022), we suggest that a single-authored philosophical intervention is less robust than a collectively authored solution that is already being practised and used relationally, if only experimentally such as those social projects we highlight here, using the term immanence to gesture at their immediacy and their incompleteness. Such projects are often less theorized than liberal public reason and we cannot offer fully fleshed out models tested for consistency.

This collection illustrates that the deviations from liberal public reason come from within liberal spaces as well as from excluded or separatist non-liberal communities. As a result, many of these alternative spaces erupt from within or alongside liberal institutional and governmental bodies. Some of the contributions feature imminent projects that emerge from non-liberal spaces (Everett; Lino e Silva), some at the

seam between non-liberal populations and liberal organizations (Boutieri; Samanani; Weiss), others start within the heart of liberal institutions, spilling over into modes of public reason that transcend the constraints of liberalism (Cabot; Morningstar; Greenhouse). Some projects highlight the rejection of liberal governance outright, while others demand the inclusion of their unassimilated and incommensurable difference. This combination reflects our current historical moment in which communities that have long been governed by a defensive and suspicious liberal culture/politics are no longer willing to be managed in the same way. Many people yearn for meaningful democracy, yet they do not find resonance with liberalism, or have experienced liberal democracy and come away disappointed or dissatisfied. These groups are transforming the borders of the public sphere and demanding inclusion with an assertiveness not previously heard. The inclusion sought often exceeds what is being offered, more than multicultural recognition or representation, rather, they insist on new modes of inclusion that normative liberalism has historically rejected.

These experiments suggest insights for the discipline of anthropology as well. The ongoing anthropological conversation is a form of public reasoning as we make claims, arguments, and stage debates on the 'good' and the 'ethical' sometimes explicitly but others through our ethnographic choices and commitments. As Carol Greenhouse has written, ethnography in the 1990s attempted to insert itself directly into the public conversation regarding policy, taking social justice as the ultimate target of academic work (2011: 65). However well intentioned, this move entailed certain losses for the discipline in suggesting there is no cultural difference so deep or significant that it cannot be accommodated and bridged by liberal governance (Greenhouse 2011: 112). Writing in the aftermath of September 11, Andrew Shryock has reminded us that conformism to liberal principles is not just the product of conviction but often of caution given the undue attention and securitization of non-liberal interlocutors during the so-called War on Terror (Shryock 2002). Khaled Furani probes the very process of anthropological reasoning, which, he claims, draws heavily from the legacy of Enlightenment secular science with unexamined 'theological sediments' buried deep in its logical structures that seek redemption through the anthropological project (2019).

Nowadays, the labour to replace liberalism's endemic inadequacies and violences with alternative suggestions, which is our main objective here, is underway. Audra Simpson's calibration of 'refusal' of the terms of liberal political recognition makes refusal the springboard through which to consider radically different pasts and futures for societies that rest on their ostensibly democratic laurels (2014). Similarly, Ryan Cecil Jobson calls out anthropology's continued dependence on liberal suppositions, such as the universal liberal subject and a discourse of moral perfectibility, which are incapable of the kind of repair and abolition needed to confront the multiple existential threats of our time (2020). Nayanika Mookherjee posits 'irreconciliation' not as the rejection of coexistence after conflict, but, instead, as the demand to address the question of violence beyond the liberal framework of peace through discussion alone (2022). We find that in policy and media discourse, this 'day after' is often construed as the failure of liberalism. Yet as Catherine Alexander reminds us, what is from a certain perspective a failure, can also be a moment of opportunity that allows collectivities to embark on new experiences (2023). A last common hesitation to address is the defensive suspicion that once the liberal scaffolding is removed, nothing can be trusted to take its place to avoid chaos and violence, and safeguard civil life and coexistence, especially at the level of governance. We reject such teleological claims. The people we interact with ethnographically for this

special issue are looking for alternatives to liberal coexistence and not to end it. What they ask for, either directly or indirectly, is a way to organize coexistence that is more resonant with their perspectives and their values.

Beyond public reason

Our engagement in this special issue with alternative modes of public reasoning contributes to expanding the imaginable options for 'the day after' the reign of liberal reason. In the classic formulation of 'reasonable people disagreeing reasonably', we wish to reconsider both parts of how this 'reasonableness' equation are explicitly and implicitly defined. One of the issues raised in this collection is to think about where alternative public reason does and can take place. Moises Lino e Silva invites us to consider the public sphere of poor and queer Brazilians, who seek to collectively develop a paradigm of liberational freedoms – queer, evangelical, and narco-trafficante – without individualism as well as to create the conditions of possibility for it to exist. In this we see that the alternative public sphere of Rio de Janeiro's favela can be understood as a decolonizing project. So, too, in Samuel Sami Everett's article, where the work of creating an intercommunal Jewish–Muslim public conversation and mode of coexistence is both outsourced by liberal centres of power and organically taken up as an alternative in a peripheral district in the poor northern urban periphery of Marseille. What he terms peripheral traditionalism is reliant on partially erased and partially extant traditional non-liberal modes of social engagement, implying understanding and solidarity via shared and deeply minoritized and even derided Judeoislamic forms of self-help couched in medieval philosophy and contemporary French ghetto Maghribi codes.

Understanding and solidarity also feature strongly in Charis Boutieri's study of the mixed suburb of Hay Ettadhamun in Tunis. Yet Boutieri pushes us to consider whether open dialogue must always be an ideal, or whether the suspension of discourse and non-dialogical co-presence can itself be considered a form of public reasoning. This article further upsets the temporal understanding of liberal public reasoning, which imagines a linear steady timeline on which debates unfold and evolve. It is in dwelling together rather than being in dialogue that residents with apparently incommensurable moral perspectives maintain an openness to alterity. Their openness grounds itself in an expansive revolutionary perspective that goes beyond the discursive and material foreclosures of liberal democracy. Boutieri is not alone in suggesting that activities that are often not considered public reason should be re-evaluated as such. Heath Cabot's article suggests another form of non-dialogic public reasoning, doing the social labour of medicine distribution in austerity-stricken Greece. Cabot asks us to consider that this labour should be understood as presence in the public sphere. By looking at how the feminized labour of (so-called) non-'politicized' solidarity is, in fact, constitutive of these public interventions, Cabot pushes us to conceive public reason beyond stance-taking.

The stretching of public reasoning beyond its recognizable liberal proportions is illustrated in the articles by Farhan Samanani and Erica Weiss as they consider social projects that try to include patently incommensurable claims about the world in the public sphere. Samanani considers how modern practices and fractal logics of community organizing in London simultaneously recognize this incommensurability while refusing to let it delimit public life. This approach to community organizing allows for the plurality of reasons which act to amplify each other rather than to work

in competition with one another. This logic insists on a highly dynamic and ever transforming understanding of the public sphere that is always actively animated by the labour invested in (temporarily) holding together plural reasons. Weiss's article likewise examines the way that these social projects challenge the grounding of liberal democracy itself, long theorized to be rationally motivated consensus, which is unattainable in many places. Featuring two civic organizations engaging Israelis and Palestinians with non-liberal subjectivities who are often held at arm's-length by the centres of political power, she considers how these groups seek to accommodate incommensurable and untranslated cosmological claims. Here the social contract is found to be underwritten not by consensus on reasons, but rather by other social forces including trust and moral credit.

Two contributions draw attention to the institutional settings of social reasoning that also transcend the normative liberal grammar, and in particular the courts (Greenhouse; Morningstar). While the anthropological literature often privileges the media as a site of public reason, John Rawls at the conclusion of his discussion of public reason in *Political liberalism* (1993), argued that the courts should be regarded as the 'exemplar of public reason' because in the judicial system comprehensive ethical, philosophical, or religious doctrines, which should always be excluded from public reason, are more formally bracketed through the legal mechanisms of constitution and precedent. Yet the articles here show deep cracks in this formal artifice and apparent constraint and highlight the ways the discourse of the courts spills over, beyond liberal reason, back and forth across the highly porous membrane between the courtroom and the mediated public discussions on these decisions. Carol Greenhouse demonstrates the territorial limits of liberal justice and its universalist claims by considering how legal reasoning was able to cast the shooting of a Mexican teacher by a US border agent as a non-event. Here we see that belonging to the liberal body politic relies on a highly illiberal notion of 'membership', which harbours a long history, and present, of racial exclusion. Greenhouse highlights the moments in which voices, inside and outside the courtroom, spill over beyond Rawls's liberal constraints and introduce deeply held ethical convictions, despite their lack of precedent. Natalie Morningstar similarly highlights moments in which the liberal, illiberal, and non-liberal converge over matters of law. She compares the US Supreme Court case law concerning abortion with the Irish Citizens' Assembly to consider the same topic, finding that while the American case smuggled illiberal reasons into the ostensibly liberal legal process, the Irish case incorporated liberal and non-liberal voices in a deliberative process that is more cognizant of its partialities.

The articles in this issue start from a collective attentiveness to the challenge presented by, on the one hand, the diversity of human difference, and on the other, the ways the ostensibly neutral techne of democracy often fails to meaningfully accommodate these differences and creates highly consequential exclusions. In our respective fields, we note that these exclusions carry an intolerable cost, not only because they are morally indefensible (festering and creating resentment amongst included and excluded alike), but also because they do not position us to face the local and global challenges that are shared by everyone. The excluded, after all, do not disappear. The essays featured in this collection all shine a light on the diverse ways in which publicness can be approached and achieved. We consider how groups struggle with what it means to participate in public life, to consider others, to share space with them, in a way they find meaningful and credible. This collection demonstrates that, given the inherent

interdependence of social life, showing up in public with others and for others is a destination reached by many roads. Good people disagree. These essays show that questions of freedom and coexistence can be settled, and often settled well, in languages and spaces that are marginal or, in some cases, abhorrent to the norms of liberal public reason. From wherever our interlocutors locate their utterances, be they minoritarian or majoritarian, they are all interested in ethical horizons pointing to alternative futures.

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Introduction : Par-delà la raison publique

Résumé

La présente introduction vise à situer ce numéro spécial dans les débats de longue date sur la raison publique libérale, retraçant l'évolution de celle-ci de ses racines au siècle des Lumières jusqu'aux dilemmes politiques contemporains, en passant par Habermas et Rawls. Elle montre comment l'anthropologie a révélé les exclusions cachées dans les prétentions universalistes de la raison publique, en particulier à l'égard des groupes marginalisés du fait de leur culture, de leur race, de leur genre, de leur classe sociale ou de leur religion. Les auteurs font valoir que la raison publique libérale est devenue à la fois une philosophie hégémonique et un outil pédagogique mondialisé de gouvernance, mais que ses présupposés de rationalité, d'abstraction et de laïcité occultent ou délégitiment souvent d'autres modes de communication politique et de vie éthique. Cette introduction expose la façon dont les essais présentés ici explorent des projets sociaux immanents, qui ne font pas que critiquer le libéralisme depuis le bord du terrain mais mettent en œuvre un raisonnement public différent, ancré dans des pratiques vernaculaires, incarnées et relationnelles. Ces projets prennent naissance dans les institutions libérales et au-delà, ouvrant des horizons politiques qui ne sont pas déjà tout tracés par des présupposés libéraux. Les auteurs préconisent de transcender les cadres qui juxtaposent le libéralisme à ses pendants « illibéraux », en mettant en avant le potentiel qu'à l'anthropologie d'éclairer différentes formes de délibération publique par-delà cette perspective binaire. Enfin, cette introduction soutient que l'attention ethnographique portée à ces pratiques différentes, de l'organisation des communautés au raisonnement juridique, de la solidarité incarnée aux affirmations spirituelles, peut nous conduire à repenser la raison publique comme plurielle, contextuelle et capable de concilier des différences profondes sans exiger une assimilation à des normes libérales.

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