

**The Comitas Phenomenon:
100 Ph.d's in Applied Anthropology**

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INTRODUCTION

The following pages are written as a tribute to one of the most unusual professional careers in the history of anthropology: the career of Prof. Lambros Comitas of Teachers College, Columbia University. Known to his students as “Lambros”, his research, publications, and professional awards have already been documented [elsewhere](#). What is in danger of being overlooked is his extraordinary – arguably unique – productivity in terms of the mentoring of students to a Ph.D. in anthropology. The database underlying this report is a spreadsheet of the names, years, and dissertation titles of students who successfully completed the Ph.D. under Comitas’ guidance.

By coincidence the spreadsheet had exactly 100 students and their dissertation titles. The final Ph.D. on the list, produced in 2014, was Lambros’ 100th Ph.D. The number 100 is generally a milestone marker triggering a celebration (unless we are dealing with a serial killer). Though nobody currently on planet earth apparently has reached their [100th wedding anniversary](#), a handful of people do reach their 100th birthday, an achievement which is often celebrated in local town newspapers. Early in their careers, college professors (without realizing it) routinely assign their 100th grade, or grade their 100th paper. Later they will (also unbeknownst to themselves) teach their 100th class (most of them recycled, formerly through yellowing file cards, now through more easily upgradable Power Point presentations).

But how many anthropology professors have mentored 100 students to the Ph.D.? No data are available. A [study](#) was done in the 1990s of anthropology [departments](#) that had produced over 100 Ph.D.’s. The number was 14 (5 of which had produced more than 200 Ph.D.’s); and the members of this elite group tended (and still tend) to hire each other’s students, who were labelled “stars” because of their graduate-degree origins and occupational destinations. (“Non-stars” are apparently those who never quite make it into these elite academic inner-circles. These “non-stars” may understandably construct competitive and perhaps equally fictitious operational definitions of stardom.)

The mentoring of a student all the way to the Ph.D. can by no means be dismissed as a fictitious achievement. Senior professors may be proud of having produced 20 or 30 Ph.D.’s. Lambros Comitas has produced 100; on that criterion, he may possibly belong to a star category with an N of 1. It is certainly worthy of documentation and proclamation via a trumpet which Lambros himself may feel disinclined to sound.

He started mentoring graduate students in Teachers College Columbia in the early 1960’s and reportedly still boards NYC buses and subways each day to his office in 2017, more than a half century later. Rounding it off, during that half century he has produced an average of two Ph.D.’s per year. The average length of time from the B.A. to a Ph.D. in anthropology is a (horrendous) seven years. This means that at any given time during this half century Lambros has been the committee chair for 14 students. Whether fellow academics react to this situation with admiration or horror (few would envy the associated workload) we are in the presence of a phenomenon – the Comitas phenomenon – that may be unique in the annals of anthropology. And what is astounding is that the Professor, nearing the age of 90, is still active as of this writing (2017).

Many of us who received our doctorates under him have long since retired; some of our classmates already have been honored with obituaries. Lambros, however, now in his 90th year of life, continues his commutes to his TC office. In terms of the number of Ph.D.'s he has mentored, the variety of countries and territories in which his students did their Ph.D. research, the direct in-situ guidance which many of them received, the variety of applied research projects in which Lambros himself has been involved, and Lambros' own professional longevity still in progress, it is a unique saga, worthy of empirical documentation.

The essential features are already available on-line. (E.g.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lambros_Comitas; www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZL5tB541nE;

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MB2e-6fR_SO; The following pages will summarize and supplement the material already publicly available with information on the worldwide research sites of his doctoral students and the variety of the research topics which they have pursued

STUMBLING INTO SCHERMERHORN

Lambros Comitas was born in 1927 and raised in NYC in a Greek immigrant cultural and linguistic milieu that was rich in anthropological diversity. He entered Columbia College in the wartime world of 1943. But just one semester before graduation in 1946 he was, quite fortunately, yanked and drafted into the army. Fortunately? WWII had already ended; he was therefore discharged about a year later, (quite honorably, let it be said) and he now had access to the GI Bill of Rights and to a veteran status that would eventually permit him to afford graduate studies. (His veteran status would also keep him at home when the Korean War broke out.) He finally landed his B.A. from Columbia in 1948.

Anthropology was not yet in the cards. He was still unaware of, and quite unconcerned with, the academic anthropology that was being taught on the Upper West Side by Franz Boas in nearby Columbia U. and, on the other side of Broadway, by Ruth Benedict in Barnard College. He entered instead the Foreign Service program at Georgetown University, which he tolerated for about two semesters. He soon realized that he had little of the pin-striped diplomat in him, a decision that was fortunate for the rest of us. (As ambassador to Anywhere his Greek bluntness could easily have triggered off WWII.)

He returned to New York City, took a few courses here and there, while doing humdrum work at a steamship company which in his biographical notes he writes off simply as "non-Greek" (a most damning indictment.) At about that time he married a young woman whose Barnard credentials were less exciting to him than her Greek-American background. To the probable dismay of many a WASP clergy-person, they managed to stage the first-ever Greek Orthodox wedding at the staid Episcopalian bastion of St. Paul's Cathedral on the Upper West Side – two bearded Greek Orthodox priests parading around in strange extraterrestrial garments, surrounded by acolytes waving candles, spewing incense into the air, kissing icons, and chanting in some ungodly un-American tongue. (The cathedral quickly reverted to more civilized forms of worship.)

His veteran status unexpectedly liberated him from the steamship office and catapulted him back into the Ivory Tower. As an afterthought, he had competed for – and (to his surprise) eventually landed – a N.Y. State War Veteran's Scholarship that allowed him to enter Columbia again, now as a graduate student. A Brooklyn-born, former Columbia College classmate of his, Marvin Harris, had gone directly

from the army into anthropology at Columbia and was by then a junior member of the faculty. He lured Lambros toward anthropology and toward Schermerhorn Hall, the building in a Northeast corner of the campus off of Amsterdam Ave. which an earlier university president had reluctantly conceded to anthropology. (That president disliked anthropology and its anti-establishment orientation as practiced by Franz Boas and his extraordinary student Ruth Benedict – who was denied the expected position of chair.) Lambros thus undertook graduate studies in anthropology (as would many of his students) without ever having taken an undergraduate anthropology course (back then there were few to be had). He entered anthropology, however, with a street-wise and earthy intolerance for the stuffy pomposity of conventional academia. .

Though he took the standard fare of courses, he was most deeply influenced by three experiences as a student, all of them compatible with his maverick orientation. The first was a methods course taught by Margaret Mead, who despite (or because of?) her popular fame was an adjunct rather than tenured faculty member in Columbia's anthropology department. In her methods course she adopted the then-pathbreaking practice of having students, as part of their course requirements, actually go out in small groups, observe, and take notes. Note taking became a *Comitas* passion.

The second was a seminar on the Caribbean organized by another maverick anthropologist, Vera Rubin. Rubin, of New York Russian-American origin, had done a then-unusual Columbia Ph.D. dissertation on an Italian immigrant community in the NYC area. The successful import business of her Russian-American husband – child of refugees from East European pogroms – permitted him to establish a foundation which supported Vera's projects. She was passionate about the Caribbean and was intent on having students, including Lambros, do research there.

The third was a spinoff of the Rubin seminar: an all-expense-paid 3-month period of supervised summer fieldwork in a fishing community of Barbados. Such early fieldwork training, unrelated to the dissertation research, was practically unheard of in anthropology. It was to have a profound impact on the program that Lambros himself would design.

Not only was early fieldwork maverick. So was fieldwork in the Caribbean, which – unknown then to Lambros – would become his area of research instead of his beloved Greece. The Caribbean had initially been looked down upon by anthropologists as not having a "real culture"; the indigenous population had died out; the descendants of the liberated slaves had become "culturally contaminated", neither fully African nor fully Western. Herskovits' 1937 book on a Haitian community argued for the "survival" of Africanisms. The bona-fide survivals that were uncovered were at most camouflaged, deracinated, "reinterpreted" survivals. To make matters anthropologically worse, unlike Malinowski's Trobriands or Mead's Samoa, the Caribbean islands were littered with Coca Cola signs and tourist traps.

Nonetheless, by the time of Lambros' graduate studies, the region had been anthropologically "re-validated" by a path-breaking island-wide community studies project in Puerto Rico, initiated by another professor at Columbia, Julian Steward, and five of his students. And at any rate, anthropologists had long since ceased their search for the "uncontaminated real McCoy" – i.e. the culturally pristine world of "primitives".

Lambros went to the Caribbean (so he thought) as a brief summer stint pending research in the country he loved, Greece. His ethnic background, his fluency in Greek, and his pride in things Greek made the choice of a field site somewhat obvious: Greece. There were no indigenous tribal or other “uncontaminated pristine” groups in Greece of the type among whom earlier anthropologists had earned their fame. But by then anthropologists had begun studying communities, usually rural, that were integrated economically, politically, and linguistically into nation states. The study of “peasants” began to displace the study of “tribalists” as a research focus in anthropology.

Lambros’ interest in Greece fit in well with this emerging “community studies” approach that had been pioneered in Ireland by one of his Columbia mentors, Conrad Arensberg. Lambros’ dissertation proposal envisioned a study of migration and land tenure in Greece. He was told off the record by high level sources that the Social Science Research Council (a private agency founded in 1923 to advance social science) had approved his proposal for the study of migration and land tenure in Greece. To his dismay, that option went kerplop. The funding was given at the last minute to somebody else, leaving Lambros in the lurch.

Vera Rubin and some Caribbean scholars, were (secretly) delighted. A Fulbright scholarship through the U. of the West Indies was practically foisted on Lambros to study fishing cooperatives in Jamaica. He acceded. In retrospect, after visiting Greece in later years, he is happy that the Greek option fell through when it did. Lambros instead became involved with the fish of the Caribbean. Though less abundant than in the Aegean Sea or the Mediterranean there were schools of them still swimming around the Caribbean. He did a dissertation on a fishing community in Jamaica, whose meager maritime yield forced people to “scuffle” and find non-fishing sources of income as well. (Lambros would eventually invent the term “occupational multiplicity”, which had more lexical dignity for the journals than “scuffling”.)

Recently returned from fieldwork, with page 1 of his dissertation yet to be written, Lambros was walking the corridors of Schermerhorn with a Jamaican colleague (M.G. Smith) wondering about an uncertain future. Conrad Arensberg, then chair of anthropology, was in a bind: a semester about to begin with some uncovered courses. He opened his office door, stuck out his head, saw Lambros in the corridor, and waved him into his office. “Would you be willing to accept a teaching position here at Columbia?” Is the Pope Catholic? “Good. You start teaching next week.” (Disclosure to potential anthro applicants: Full time teaching positions rarely come that way anymore.) It took three years to write his dissertation while teaching at Columbia. Ph.D. in hand he was routinely promoted to Assistant Professor.

The fates continued summoning him onward, however, this time to academic Siberia. Siberia was actually only about a block away from Schermerhorn, on the north side of 120th St, in Columbia’s Teachers College. T.C. was by then the pre-eminent and most highly respected teacher’s training school on the Eastern Seaboard and perhaps in the country. John Dewey had long ago made the place famous. Margaret Mead had long been an active contributor there. (But she was an “adjunct”, not real Columbia faculty.) In any case, the training of high school and grammar school teachers was a bit – um, how shall we put it – too pedestrian for the tastes of a certain type of Ivy League academic. Barnard, across Broadway to the west, had more academic pizzazz. But Teachers College, north of 120th street, was too “applied”. There was a full-time anthropologist there (Solon Kimball), who had been brought in to inject some anthropology into the teacher training program. Unlike Barnard anthropologists, however, he was never invited to cross the street to teach courses in the elite corridors of Schermerhorn. He kept largely to himself in Siberia.

Though Columbia anthropologists had little interest in teacher training, TC was becoming increasingly interested in anthropology. Kimball was authorized to bring in another anthropologist. The then-active old-boy network kicked in. Was Lambros interested in crossing 120th St. to help train teachers in anthropology? Today they'd have to convene a committee and advertise a formal international search encouraging applications from X, Y, and Z underrepresented groups etc. But this was the 1960's, the incestuous bad old days.

Lambros, who had his tenure track position in Columbia proper, hesitated nary an instant. Encouraged (again) by Marvin Harris (by then chair of anthropology at Columbia) to become a "missionary" for Columbia style anthro, he accepted the offer and crossed over into what was considered the academic boondocks on the north side of 120th street. Soon after Lambros' arrival at TC, Solon Kimball quickly departed. (No causal relationship is implied.)

This left Lambros in an unusual situation. Anthropology was becoming known and TC wanted a full program. However, he still felt himself to be junior, with much to learn. He asked TC to hire a senior anthropologist from whom he could learn. "You *are* our senior anthropologist," he was told by his unit's chair. "We brought you in at the rank of Associate Professor." He continued to request a senior hire. During his first routine evaluation after a few years at TC, the chair of his unit came in and told Lambros that he had passed the review with flying colors. "Not only that. As of now you are a tenured Full Professor. Is that senior enough?" (Further disclosure to would-be anthro Ph.D.'s: This informal meteoric tenure-and-promotion procedure is also part of the vanished past.)

THE PROGRAM: APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY

Lambros was now in an anthropologically unusual – perhaps unique – situation. Most new hires in academic anthropology – even incoming chairs – plug into slots in pre-existing programs with established priorities, requirements, and routines. Lambros in contrast had a green light to design his own anthropology program. TC wanted anthropology. But nobody outside the field knew what it really was. (No surprise, since many inside the field seemed confused as well.) Something to do with mysterious insights into exotic cultural patterns via "participation observation" rather than the questionnaires then favored in sociology (and rarely if ever used then in anthropology). Comitas had a free hand to define what the new TC program in anthropology would be. He would eventually be free to hire additional anthropological faculty.

Right from the outset he was adamant that this program would be unapologetically oriented toward, and publicly labeled as, "applied anthropology". That was, back then, still a controversial label. Anthropologists had for decades served as consultants for government agencies. The British social anthropologists had advised Her (or His) Majesty's government on the tribal practices of their colonies. American anthropologists had advised the U.S. government, not only on management of Native American reservations, but also on the "culture and personality" of wartime or Cold War adversaries and on the governance of Pacific territories, acquired from the Japanese after World War II. The Society for Applied Anthropology had been founded in the early 1940's. In the late 1940's anthropologists from the U. of Chicago had experimented with "action anthropology" in a community of 600 or so Fox Indians. (They ended up, by their own admission, doing more social work than ethnography.) In 1952

anthropologists from Cornell had initiated a project in a former hacienda in Vicos, Peru, in which they would eventually become the “patrones” of the hacienda and engineer positive economic and social change.

The Fox and Vicos projects were controversial and heavily critiqued in a discipline whose major figures still advocated for “scientific detachment”. Applied anthropology was, in most anthropological circles, a bit *infra dig*. (Today’s in-house critics are more likely to decry applied anthropology, not for its lack of scientific detachment, but for its presumed ethical contamination from opportunistic involvement with the villains of one or another hegemonic World System force. The Noble Savage as principal object of study has long since been replaced, at least in cultural anthropology, by the Oppressed Victim. Where there is a victim, there is by implication a villain whose machinations have to be exposed and hotly denounced. Applied anthropologists are often chided by fellow anthropologists for colluding with these villains.)

Lambros, with a street-wise disdain and cynicism toward academic pomposity, jumped enthusiastically into the mission of devising a program explicitly oriented toward the training of anthropologists for applied work. The Schermerhorn anthropologists eventually acquiesced. It would be a “joint program” in applied anthropology. Those students interested in such mundane applications could apply to the program across 120th street. Students interested in exposure to the discipline in its purer form would remain safely quarantined in Schermerhorn. In either case, the Ph.D. would be a Ph.D. in anthropology from Columbia University. The program which Comitas launched would of course evolve over time. The following synchronic snapshot highlights the essential features of Ph.D. program as it reached its maturity in the late 70’s and early 80’s.

1. **Applied focus.** The TC program, in stark contrast to the Ph.D. program across the street at Schermerhorn, encouraged the pursuit of anthropological research on topics with potential problem-solving applications. Students were encouraged either to pursue academic careers which could serve as a base for applied research and contract assignments, or to seek full time employment as anthropologists outside of the academy.
2. **Traditional training.** Lambros insisted, however, that the students would be trained as bona-fide anthropologists as defined by the then-entrenched four field tradition of American Anthropology. A core program assumption was: You cannot be an applied anthropologist until you are first an anthropologist. Coursework in biological anthropology, archeology, and linguistics would be taken in the Columbia department. In choice of research topic, students were emphatically not steered toward analysis of programs, projects, agencies, or other “clients” in need of practical suggestions. Students generally did research, not in clinics or schools, but in the same ordinary human communities where “non-applied” anthropologists carried out research. If the long-term goal is to adapt service-delivery systems to local human cultural systems, one must first become trained in the anthropological analysis of such ordinary cultural systems before inundating the world with “recommendations” as to change. We will examine below the variety of traditional field research topics which Comitas’ student pursued.
3. **Familiarization with various strains of anthropological theory.** As part of their anthropological training, students would be immersed in a variety of theoretical traditions, including not only current trends but also Durkheim, Weber, Marx and other foundational figures. When authorized to hire two additional anthropologists, Lambros intentionally broke with the old-boy system and

hired faculty trained elsewhere in diverse theoretical traditions. Having been deeply influenced in Jamaica by M.G. Smith, a Jamaican anthropologist with a Ph.D. from University College London, Lambros introduced perspectives of British social anthropology into the program. William Dalton, with a Ph.D. from Manchester, stayed with the program until 1973. On his departure, George Bond, with a Ph.D. from the London School of Economics, then joined the program, where he stayed some forty years until his death in 2014. Educational and psychological anthropology were represented by Charles Harrington, who had joined the program in 1969 with a Harvard Ph.D. and would teach there some 46 years until his retirement in 2013. Students received a thorough immersion in theoretical trends through two required year-long professional seminars in which all three of the core faculty participated.

4. **Get to the field and take notes, notes, notes.** At the same time, Lambros was militant in his insistence on rapid immersion of students in fieldwork. During their first summer, students were required to do fieldwork and to prepare a professional quality report on that fieldwork during the first semester of their second year. Their work was read and critiqued by peers and faculty. Schermerhorn students were never encouraged to disrupt their important coursework with picayune fieldwork. Dissertation fieldwork was usually their first exposure to the field. Not so the T.C. students. During the early years, when funding was available, Lambros would himself personally accompany teams of students to some overseas field site and provide hands-on supervision. Daily note-taking was promoted. Students were warned: those who were avid observers and note takers from the outset would blossom in anthropology. The prognosis was less promising for those who wandered around hands-in-pockets immersed in their own thoughts or navels.

Some of us entered the TC program via the Columbia department proper and asked Lambros to chair our committee because of our interest either in the Caribbean or in applied work (or in both). We did not benefit from the organization of the TC program but are in a position to compare. In the Columbia department, we had access to a diversified roster of outstanding cultural anthropologists. But it is no professional discourtesy to these revered ancestral figures, many now duly honored with obituaries, to point out that the catch-as-catch-can laissez-faire anthropological training program which we entered in Schermerhorn paled in comparison to the organization, integration, and thoroughness in both theory and fieldwork to which the TC anthropology students were exposed. Rumor has it as well that their performance in the graduate courses which they took in Schermerhorn was often superior to that of students of the purer brand of anthropology.

The human dimension of regular, relaxed contact between students and faculty in the TC program was another feature. Students would get to know all the faculty and – via the two-year seminar – vice versa. The faculty offices were not along a corridor, but arranged in a compound within TC. When not in conference with a student, Lambros' door was often open; he would freely saunter out into the main compound to banter with any students who happened to be there. It was a breath of human fresh air, quite different from the more traditional closed-door corridors of Schermerhorn, knock-by-appointment-only-please.

THE 100 PHD STUDENTS

The unusual origin of the TC applied anthropology program, product of Comitas' entry into an unusual window of opportunity to design a program from scratch, is itself interesting. But equally worthy of documentation are the research topics and venues of the 100 students whom Comitas himself has mentored into the Ph.D. during the past half century. (The program itself produced more Ph.D.'s, many guided by Comitas' colleagues Charles Harrington and George Bond, who also had an impact on the program's evolution during their decades of service.)

Those of us who have taught in large undergraduate programs are familiar with the "wandering lost soul" phenomenon, the student who has been excited by an anthropology course and, through unsure of future career goals, announces a possible desire, *a faute de mieux*, to do graduate studies in anthropology on some topic of which they have not yet decided. Such students are often advised to spend some time in the "real world", overseas if possible, before committing to anthropology. Such advice was rarely needed for applicants to the TC program. The typical applicant entered with a record of post-college work or volunteer experience, often in some other country (as with the Peace Corps or with a religious organization), usually with undergraduate degrees in some other field. They choose anthropology in hopes of placing their personal experiences in a broader conceptual framework and for developing the professional skills to provide service to "Third World" communities, or to migrant or other economically or socially marginal groups in the U.S. The platform for such involvement can be either an academic position or full-time employment with governmental agencies or NGOs. Many students enter anthropology programs around the country with such service aspirations, only to find their service aspirations debunked as somehow suspect, of less worth than writing about the functions of structure or the structure of functions. The TC program from the outset legitimized applied aspirations as valid.

Table 1 below gives an idea of the diversity of Comitas' students along simple dimensions that can be coded from a spreadsheet containing three variables: Name of student, year of Ph.D. and title of dissertation. About 60% of the students have been female, 40% male. (The dozen or so foreign names whose gender was unknown to this anglophone coder were assigned half to each group.) If we divide the students into 15-to-20-year cohorts, as in Table 1, we see an impressive demographic trend toward the increasing prevalence of women in the field of cultural anthropology. This trend reflects national trends, rather than special features or unique recruitment policies on the part of the TC applied anthropology program (https://decasia.org/academic_culture/2009/09/12/gender-imbalance-in-anthropology/). It is a clear reversal of the "bad old days", in which female anthropologists, such as Margaret Mead or Ruth Benedict, despite their fame, were a small and marginalized minority in a field dominated by men. (Mead remained an adjunct at Columbia. Ruth Benedict was never given the chairship at Columbia for which her mentor Franz Boas had prepared her.)

Table 1
Comitas' Ph.D. students
by cohort, gender, and ethno-national status

Years	# Ph.D's	% female	% international./ethnic
1966-1979	27	44.4	7.4
1980-1999	42	59.5	28.6
2000-2014	31	77.4	41.9

The evolving preponderance of women in the Comitas student data seems to parallel a simultaneous trend toward an increasing diversity in the nationality and/or ethnicity of the program's students. Here the figures in Table 1 are at best approximate, many of them rough guesses. Students whose surnames were not of obvious Anglo or West European origin were coded as "international / ethnic". There is obvious slippage here. "John Smith" could be from the U.K. or from central Harlem and would get miscoded as an American Anglo. "Akiko Fukuyama", with her Japanese name, could be a fourth generation monolingual American miscoded as "international".

These pitfalls of simplistic onomastic coding notwithstanding, Table 1 gives evidence of an impressive trend over the past half century toward an increasing diversity, in terms of nationality and/or ethnicity, among those entering cultural anthropology, at least in the TC program. The actual figures for ethnic minority status, which would include African Americans with standard American surnames, would undoubtedly be larger. A dual reversal is in process. Gender diversity in the field of American cultural anthropology appears to be strongly decreasing. The 6/4 male-female breakdown in the earliest Comitas cohort has been replaced by a 2/8 breakdown in the most recent cohort. (Former advertisements on "diversity hires" often encouraged applications by women. Current diversity ads do not however explicitly encourage application by men – a curious phenomenon that falls outside the scope of this essay. It should be remembered in that light that these figures concern the gender composition of a body of graduate students, not of hired faculty.) At any rate, whereas gender diversity is declining in the graduate student population, the field is becoming internally more heterogeneous in terms of the ethnic and nationality status of its would-be practitioners. In any case, because of his voluminous output of anthropology Ph.D.'s, the Comitas data, when broken down diachronically, may be affording us a picture of demographic trends affecting the entire field of cultural anthropology in the U.S.

COUNTRIES OF RESEARCH

Even more revealing than the gender and ethnic status of the students is the geographical spread of the field sites where Comitas' students have carried out their Ph.D. fieldwork.

Table 2

Ph.D. dissertation research sites of Comitas' students

<i>Region</i>	<i>N of students</i>	<i>Countries / Islands / Territories</i>
Caribbean	25	Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Guadeloupe, Saint Martin
North America	24	USA (mostly urban)
South America	16	Brasil, Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Perú
Asia	11	Nepal, Tibet, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Vietnam, China, Japan
Europe / Eurasia	9	Portugal, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Greece, Switzerland, Russia, Azerbaijan
Mexico/Cen. Amer.	6	México, Honduras, Costa Rica, Panamá
Middle East/N. Afr.	3	Morocco, Egypt, Israel
Africa (Sub. Sah.)	3	Kenya, Ghana
Micronesia	2	Papua New Guinea
Total	100	

As can be seen in Table 2, Comitas' students have done dissertation fieldwork in nine regions around the globe, in a total of 39 countries, islands, and territories. Nearly half these field sites are in the Western Hemisphere, accounting for the research sites of 71 of his 100 students. The remaining 29 students did research in 16 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and Micronesia.

The most frequently researched regions, the Caribbean and North America, have drawn students consistently throughout Comitas' 50+ years' career. There are, however, some minor diachronic trends. The three studies done in Sub-Saharan Africa occurred before 1990, whereas most of the 11 Asian studies were done after the year 2000. (We shall see this pro-Asian trend reflected in our job market analysis below). The consistent importance of the Caribbean and the Eastern Seaboard of the U.S. as research sites makes perfect sense in terms of Comitas' fame as a Caribbeanist and the location of TC in the Upper West Side of Manhattan, with its heavy concentration of Caribbean migrants.

It should be noted that the data in Table 2 cover only the dissertation research sites. Many of the anthropologists have gone on to do studies, many of them applied research studies, in dozens of other countries that do not appear on this list. Lambros' research fingerprints can be found in most parts of the globe.

RESEARCH TOPICS

Research sites are easy to tabulate. It is trickier to tabulate research topics on the basis of dissertation titles. A dissertation documenting the evolution of agrarian systems often entails discussions of religion and politics. A study of migrants can include discussion of ethnicity, social class, gender, and language. A study of informal markets inevitably raises questions of gender roles. Topics overlap; the dissertation titles often contain two or three topics; and the document itself may cover topics not reflected in the title.

That notwithstanding, several emphases emerge in the work of Comitas' students. Teachers College imposed no research requirement to focus on schooling. However, education and children (usually in the school setting) appear frequently (14 times) in the research foci of the students, whereas they have practically disappeared from current job advertisements in cultural anthropology (see below). Most of these studies deal with education overseas: pre-school language education in Japan, primary schooling in Bangladesh, public education in Tibet, educational inequalities (one study in Vietnam, another in Israel), education in the Dutch and French territories on Saint Martin in the Caribbean, Jamaicans' educated overseas. Three dissertations dealt with educational issues in the U.S.: alternative schooling, cooperative education in community colleges, multi-ethnic dynamics in an inner-city school.

The topic of migration has statistically equal prominence in the inventory, drawing the attention of 16 of Comitas' students. The focus is less on the mechanics of migration itself than on the adaptation of migrants to their new setting or the impact of emigration on the sending communities. Among the topics are labor migration in Colombia, the causes and consequences of Dominican migration to the U.S., migrants in Western Kenya, return migrants to Puerto Rico, the impact of migration in a community in Nepal, the changes that emigration has caused in an Andean community in Peru, Jewish immigrants to Japan, and cyclical labor migration in New Guinea.

The topics then diversify, each one declining in frequency from education and migration. Nine dissertations focused on religion: One was on a Hindu Ashram in the U.S. Others were on Pentecostalism in Puerto Rico, Rastafarians and other spirit healers in Jamaica, religious perceptions of Pakistani women, and the role of Vodou in rural Haiti.

Issues of agriculture and land tenure dominated the research in 8 dissertations, most of them in Latin America and the Caribbean. Three analyzed agrarian reform programs (Honduras, Bolivia, Peru). Two analyzed surviving haciendas (Costa Rica and Peru). Three analyzed agriculture on the island of Hispaniola: one in the Dominican Republic (sugar production and labor mobilization) and two in Haiti, both of which documented linkages between agriculture and Vodou (the evolution of rural land tenure and irrigation). Only one agrarian study was done outside the Western Hemisphere: Agrarian strategies of Ghanaian farmers. That was done some four decades ago (1978) before Africa dropped off the map of Comitas' students.

Another eight dissertations focused on the situation of women in various countries. (Only one of the titles mentioning "gender" explicitly included men. "Gender" often functions as a de-facto synonym for

“women” in some of the titles, as is still often the case in academic discourse at large.) One dissertation studied women in the U.S. and the American feminist movement. Another studied the political orientation of women in Barbados and Greece, their reproductive behavior in Jamaica, their health seeking behaviors in Nepal, their subjection to honor codes and virginity norms in Morocco, and their special-purpose associations in the Basque region of Spain.

APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY TODAY. EVOLUTION OF THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL CAREER.

In the absence of follow-up data, the information on the careers pursued by Comitas students is anecdotal. Right from the outset, however, an unspecified number of Comitas’ students broke from the traditional career track of new Ph.D.’s in anthropology, in which plan A is the search for a tenure track position. Failing that, work outside academia is plan B. For at least some of Comitas’ students, however, plan A was the non-academic route: government employment, international development, or some other non-academic career. Many had come into anthropology from development work or some other career track and immediately entered non-academic employment after achieving the Ph.D.

Precise details would entail follow-up of 100 careers, but it would appear that the majority of Comitas’ students did go into academic positions. Many however, have used their academic position as a base from which to do applied research and consultation outside of academia.

Those that went the non-academic route were confronted with a dual dilemma, which must be clearly recognized: their positions (1) do not usually specify or require a degree in cultural anthropology, and (2) do not on the whole require a PhD. The “terminal degree” required for practicing engineers, business executives, and many other applied professions is the Master’s Degree. A PhD would be seen as overkill, appropriate for those who want to go into academia. The terminal M.A. in anthropology, in contrast, was traditionally (in Ph.D. programs) a concession made to Ph.D. students who were dropped from programs because of substandard performance or who decided to drop out themselves. There are some programs now offering a terminal M.A. in applied anthropology. At the moment, however, the pursuit of an M.A. in anthropology is, with total honesty, likely to be discouraged by a Ph.D. program in anthropology as an unwise decision in terms of future employability. The Joint Program in Applied Anthropology at Columbia, in its most active decades, has consistently (and wisely) emphasized the pursuit of the Ph.D. and Plan A for most of the graduates has been to land a tenure track academic position in which applied anthropological assignments would be relegated to summers or sabbaticals.

Conclusion: the Comitas phenomenon.

The purpose of this essay has been to trace the 50+ year career of an anthropologist whose productivity in the mentoring of Ph.Ds. in cultural anthropology places him in a unique category. The major indicator of uniqueness is the magic number 100. But the information presented above on the geographical and topical diversity of the research that he has mentored also indicates qualitative as well as quantitative uniqueness. If Lambros Comitas were beginning his career today, he would be entering an academic and anthropological world quite different from that of the Schermerhorn corridors of the 1960’s. It

would be difficult for any anthropologist today to replicate the Comitas mentoring achievements of the preceding half century. In an afterword, we will examine some aspects of this anthropologically challenging Grave New World.

But career achievements unfold – and have to be evaluated -- in a specific time period and a specific environment. Lambros stumbled into the world of anthropology from the sidewalks of a New York City Greek immigrant subculture, quite different in its cultural tone from the prevailing elite detachment of the dominant academic world. Several niches suddenly opened; he energetically entered these niches and created an applied anthropology program that was compatible with his own personal and intellectual orientation. In doing so, the number of Ph.D.'s that he has mentored over the past half century place him in a special N-of-1 category.

Lambros would be unwilling to personally trumpet this achievement. But it is a unique achievement that is worthy of empirical documentation. Those of us who entered the world of anthropology under his guidance should be aware of the unusual achievement. We are all beneficiaries of the Comitas Phenomenon.

AFTERWORD: THE EVOLUTION OF THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL JOB MARKET.

General trends

In this afterword, we will examine a separate topic: the evolution of the academic job market for cultural anthropologists as reflected in current faculty position advertisements. Plan A, even for most of Comitas' students, appears to have been the academic path from assistant to associate to full professor. The plan worked for decades. Anthropology was on the academic rise. Programs in anthropology were being introduced into the academy either as joint programs with sociology or as independent departments. There were tenure-track slots available though, unlike Comitas, few anthropologists have been offered their first full time teaching position unexpectedly in a corridor by a department chair with vacant courses to be covered.

However. Plan A is becoming increasingly unrealistic. Now, in the year 2017, the rules of the game have changed.

1. A major trend is an increase in the phenomenon of the underpaid adjunct. In a worst-case scenario, job security is tenuous or non-existent, the teaching loads are heavier, salaries are lower, health and retirement benefits are absent, and one's general professional status is lower than that of the tenure-track faculty in the same department.
2. Even in the case of tenure-track positions, the entry level requirements are heavier than in the past. Many of us landed our first tenure track jobs as ABD's (still working on the dissertations). Today the ABDs are explicitly told not to apply unless they'll be a DIH (dissertation in hand) by X starting date. There is also an increasing understanding that a refereed publication track record is required even for entry level tenure-track positions.
3. However, there are cases of recent Ph.D.'s with impressive publication and stellar grant-getting records who still collect a pile of rejection letters with not a single job offer. In some cases this may reflect the operation of latent hiring criteria not discussed in polite circles, but the

underlying causal factor that generates an annual inundation of rejection letters is a growing disparity between the number of fresh Ph.D. job applicants and the number of tenure track academic positions now available for these applicants.

4. Three letters of recommendation are now required, a practice that used to be relegated to tenure decisions. During the apogee of the old-boy networks, a phone call to a friend or colleague would suffice. Better departments today request letters only from those candidates who make the short list. Other departments have instituted the burdensome and odious practice of the three-letter requirement for application itself, specifying precisely the areas on which the referee should comment. If the application is discarded immediately, the letters never get read.
5. The applied anthropological career that operated (quite comfortably) as an adjunct element in a tenured academic appointment is now becoming a thing of the past. Non-academic employment is no longer an option; it is a requirement for many fresh Ph.D.'s who wish to avoid entrapment in the exploitative, demanding, lower-status adjunct slots that have become the only academic option for many. Applicants will also notice that very few jobs are specifically earmarked for Ph.D.'s in cultural anthropology and that they are therefore competing for jobs with applicants from many disciplines.

The current academic job market

To present a balanced picture, it must be pointed out that the academic job market for cultural anthropologist is not totally dead (though talented young scholars with nothing but rejection letters may beg to differ). One unofficial but reliable site advertises 92 tenure track slots, most in the U.S., open for those with Ph.D.'s in cultural anthropology beginning in 2017. (Note: these are tenure-track jobs, not temporary replacement or adjunct slots.) Nearly 7 out of 10 of the positions actually require a Ph.D. in cultural anthropology for hiring by an Anthropology or combined Soc/Anthro Department; the jobs in other programs specifically list cultural anthropology as an option.

It has been traditional to advertise "geographical" and "topical" preferences in job listings for cultural anthropologists: The geographical criteria are both shifting and dwindling. Asia has recently increased in anthropological popularity. It received more job-search mentions (15) than any other world region. The Middle East and the US followed, each with 8 mentions as preferred research regions. The ads listing the US hastened to specify Native American or diaspora populations. (Apparently mainstream populations are unworthy of anthropological research.) Furthermore, more than half of the ads either explicitly or implicitly leave the geography issue open. Those that do list geographical preferences usually list several and hasten to assure applicants that it is not a strict requirement.

Topical preferences, however, are still *de rigueur*, and they do not bode well for specialists in applied anthropology: 87 of the 92 ads had topical requirements. In a few cases, applicants may have had to google Wikipedia to figure out on what exactly was being requested. One department wanted a specialist in "nonrepresentational theory". (Is that opaque theory that avoids representing anything concrete?) Another wanted a specialist in "environmental racism" (trees looking down on grass?), and "the non-human in the humanities" (poetry written by werewolves?). Most of the prioritized research topics, however, are quite familiar to cultural anthropologists. The topics mentioned, as well as those not mentioned, give a revealing snapshot of contemporary American cultural anthropology.

Topping the list are topics that deal with identity issues: Race gets 22 mentions, ethnicity 19 (always in conjunction with “race” in the same add) and gender 15 . Medical anthropology and environmental anthropology are statistically tied with 20 and 19 respectively.

From these specializations, the topics requested in the job ads plunged. Immigration and migration received only 10 requests. Topics that were formerly high on the list of anthropological research topics are vanishing, or have vanished, from the list of anthropologically “in” topics, as measured by highly revealing job recruitment ads. “Religion” received only 8 mentions, “kinship” (anthropology’s former forte) a mere 2. And children? Psychology has subfields of child psychology and school psychology. Not so current anthropology. In the 92 job ads, “education” received a measly 2 requests and “school”, “children” or “childhood” 0.

Expertise in research methods is requested in only 6 of the applications. A few listings say the applicant will be asked to teach “methods and theory.” Methods is most often qualified with the terms “qualitative” or “ethnographic”. The one job listing that most heavily emphasizes statistical expertise opens it to Ph.D.’s in many disciplines, anthropology being the final one mentioned (though anthropology begins with “a”). The quest for scientific rigor in anthropology is visible in the cultural anthropology program of the National Science Foundation and in certain journals, but it is emphatically not valued in the current cultural anthropology job advertisements. A controversial decision was made some years ago by the American Anthropological Association to explicitly remove the word “science” from its mission statement. Despite subsequent rescinding, this anti-scientific gesture by the highest official body of the discipline was a revealing indicator of a trend that continues to inform the menu of jobs available in cultural anthropology.

In terms of the status of applied anthropology, can we not optimistically classify the 39 job advertisements for medical and environmental specialists as advertisements for “applied” positions? No, not unless we dilute the term “applied” to mean any study that deals with a human problem. (Malinowski and Mead would thus qualify as “applied anthropologists”). An “applied psychologist” or “applied economist” is generally someone who is employed outside of the academy, or who is at least called on as a consultant by non-academic institutions. In that light, one reasonable operational definition of “applied anthropologist” would similarly entail being contracted by one or more non-academic entity for some program design, evaluation, or problem-solving task. Forensic anthropologists and archeologists often meet this criterion. This operational definition – income generated outside the academy – would unduly eliminate anthropologists who actively provide regular pro-bono support to community groups. Some of them may also be engaged in program-related “applied anthropology”. Medical anthropologists who use the journals to critique disparity in health care or environmental anthropologists who critique processes of global warming are doing valuable work, but not necessarily applied work as defined above. “Critical anthropology” is not necessarily “applied anthropology”.

We can end by returning to the Comitas Phenomenon. On reading this, Lambros apologetically pointed out that the 100 Ph.Ds on the 2014 spreadsheet have by now (2017) become 103. And though RISM has shut its doors after the death of Vera Rubin, Lambros has created his own institute for funding the training of graduate students doing applied work. . (See <http://cifas.us/> and <http://cifas.us/field-school/>.)

This type of applied focus that prepares students for work outside the academy is becoming increasingly urgent. A tongue-in-cheek but empirically impressive report concerning the shifting number of Ph.D. anthropologists in the U.S., based on NSF, AAA, and NCES sources as of 2009, is available at <http://tinyurl.com/y7nlg5ad>. The results are sobering. Rounding to the nearest thousand, there are *minimally* 19,000 Ph.D.'s in Anthropology (including archeology and biological anthropology), 45,000 Masters degrees, and 261,000 B.A. majors. More than half of these were acquired after 1992. The above-mentioned inventory of 90+ academic jobs currently available for cultural anthropologists suddenly becomes a ludicrous drop-in-the-employment-bucket.

The Comitas pre-adaptation

The Comitas approach was a “pre-adaptation” to this dilemma that would explode a half a century later. Already in the 1960's Lambros mentored several Ph.D.'s for whom Plan A was employment outside the university—quite unusual in the discipline. What was back then, however, unusual has now become a requirement. Perhaps unknown to himself, Lambros Comitas was a pioneer in a trend that has now become essential for the economic survival of new Ph.D.'s in anthropology. Unlike non-academic economists or psychologists who occupy slots earmarked for those with degrees in their field, most of the Comitas cohort who went the non-academic route occupied slots that were not earmarked specifically for cultural anthropologists. That will continue to be the case in the future. As pointed out above, Anthropology Ph.Ds. will be competing with job seekers from many disciplines.

In the anthropological heyday of past decades, when anthropology programs were expanding, the preparation of Ph.D. anthropologists for academic positions was a logical and practical undertaking. Now that the academic job market has dwindled, the logic of continuing to crank out Ph.D.'s for non-existent academic positions has changed. Unfortunately, however, the evolution of the Weltanschauung of academic anthropology, focusing now on the production of eloquent and indignant analyses of the villains and victims of the neoliberal West, has not kept pace with employment realities.

One could argue, in defense of the academy, that it is the duty of the students, not their professors, to be concerned with the job market. The argument rings shallow and self-serving. It is essential, of course, that the university not descend to the status of adjunct to the shifting job market. On the other hand, students do enter an expensive graduate program – and often go into heavy debt -- in hopes that the program and its professors have the ability to guide them toward a viable income-generating career. If they are being guided or badgered, however, into the role of professional social critic, they are being misguided. At a minimum those departments that produce Ph.D.'s or M.A.'s in anthropology could be expected to modify their training to endow their students with two assets: (1) a general orientation that assumes and values a career outside the academy, *explicitly informing students that academic jobs are an unlikely minority option*, and (2) specific skill sets that make the landing of such employment more likely. Lambros Comitas and his Joint Program in Applied Anthropology have been pioneers in that undertaking.