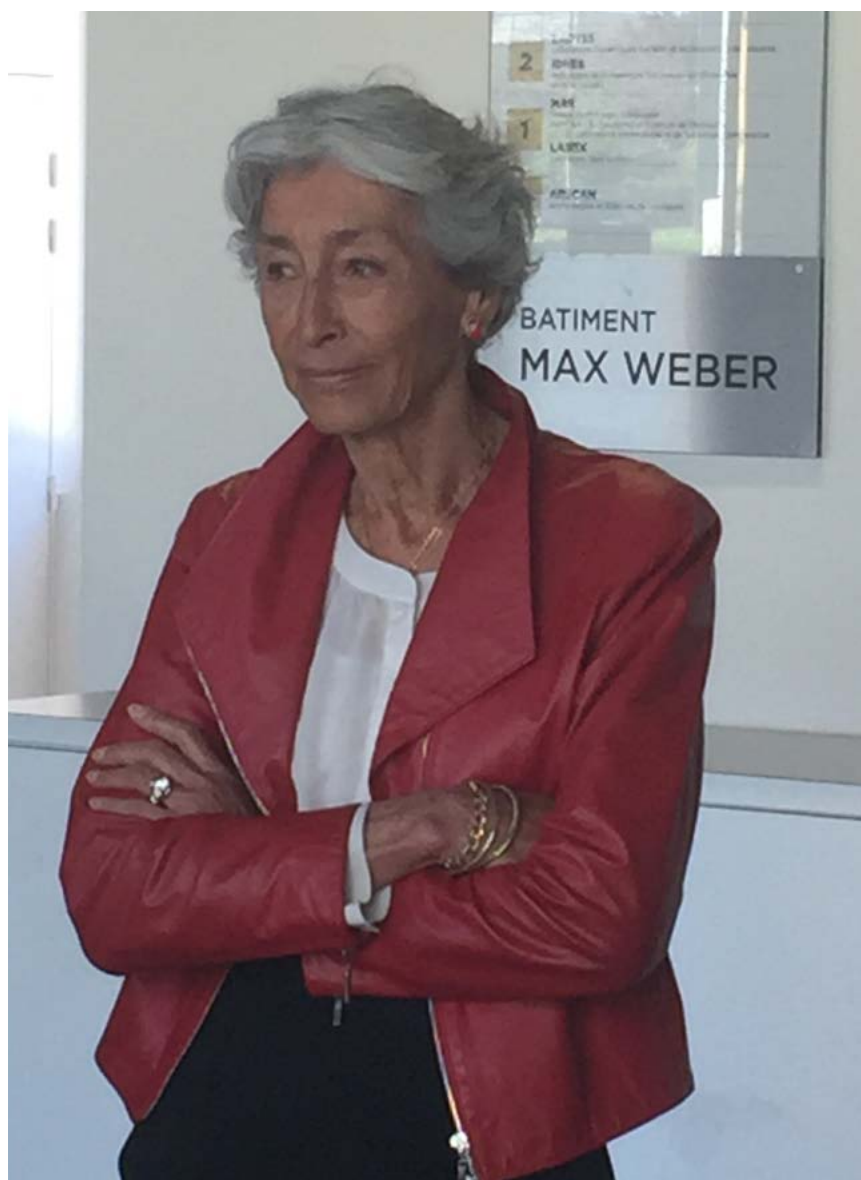


In memory of Martine Segalen: a long anthropological career

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On 23 June 2021, amidst so much news about the Covid-19 pandemic, we were struck by the news of the death of Martine Segalen (1940–2021), one of the great figures of social anthropology in Europe. Although her name is associated above all with the study of kinship and family, her fields of study were many more: ethnological heritage and museology, rural societies, the study of contemporary society, the care and assistance, nuptials and alliances, family transformations, old age and youth, transmissions between generations, domestic spaces and ethnology in general. Always open to new perspectives, Segalen has had a profound influence on anthropology, also in Catalonia. Her research has deeply marked several generations of anthropologists who, to a large extent, have forged our thematic interests following the trajectory of Martine Segalen. Her name is associated with many things, but above all the National Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions, the University of Nanterre and the magazine *French Ethnology*.

I could start with personal memories resulting from an excellent intellectual relationship with her, always kind and ready to share her knowledge. Her last visit to Barcelona was in 2016 to deliver a lecture at the Museum of the History



Martine Segalen at the farewell ceremony as director of the journal *Ethnologie Française*. Nanterre, 3 April 2017. XAVIER ROIGÉ

of Catalonia as part of the activities of the exhibition "T'estimo? A story of love and marriage", which I commissioned. She really enjoyed visiting the exhibition – which I must say was very inspired by her research on love, marriage and family history – with numerous comments on the multiple spaces

and the different cultural meanings of marriage. It was an unforgettable visit because she combined her passion for museums with the study of family history and anthropology. She left messages on a wall that was there for visitors to define what love is, and she loved taking pictures of herself in a set that

simulated an old-fashioned marriage. I also remember her in long meetings in Paris on the Editorial Board of the magazine *Ethnologie Française*, which she directed and maintained for many years. She corrected each of the articles line by line, proposed topics and even prepared the coffees and lunches for the meetings. She was a tireless worker, but, even so, she always attached great importance to her family life, and she spoke about it very often because she believed that, in a certain way, anthropologists choose the topics based on our trajectory, from our human concerns. She was, as was said in many reminders after her death, "une grande dame".

Born in Pornichet (Loire Atlantique), it did not seem that she should dedicate herself to academic life. She graduated from the Institute of Political Studies in Paris in 1960 and, in the same year, married Renaud Segalen, from whom she took her surname (born Martine Tony Appel) and with whom she had a son and two daughters. She spent seven years working in commercial distribution, between Paris and New York. As a result of a trip to Mexico, she decided to leave the business life and continue her studies. At that time she also continued with another of her lesser-known facets: that of a runner of marches and marathons, at a time when women still could not participate in many competitions. Even at the age of 76, she ran her last athletic march in Paris, accompanied by three generations of her family: she said then that her life had been based on "work, family and foot races".¹

Her career as an anthropologist has two clearly marked phases. First, she was a CNRS researcher (1971-1996) at the Centre of French Ethnology and as such, for almost three decades, she was linked to the defunct National

Museum of Popular Arts and Traditions in Paris, better known as ATP. This emblematic museum, created by the father of the new museology, Georges Henry Rivière, and by key figures such as Van Gennep, developed a museological model of ethnology and a series of very innovative museographic proposals. There she directed the Center of French Ethnology (1986-1996). In an interview with the *Journal of Anthropology*², shortly after her appointment as director (1990), explained the foundations of this centre and the need for ethnologists to study the societies and cultures of today's world, analysing the subjects traditionally studied by folklorists, but starting from a contemporary view: "Ethnologists try to understand contemporary societies and cultures, that is to say, the phenomena that were classically studied, such as kinship, religion, illness, medicine, but in the current context with all its complexities". In this centre the *Mission du Patrimoine Ethnologique*, which – as she said herself in the aforementioned interview – "played a key role in guiding research on a series of topics that the CNRS did not want or could not carry out".

Afterwards, and until her retirement (1996-2015), she was a professor at Nanterre, a university in a peripheral city of Paris from which Segalen continued to maintain contacts with cultural management (she was director of the DESS "Consultant culturel, projet culturel et environnement social"), but she dedicated himself more to research on the contemporary family, with the study of rituals, childhood, old age, grandparents and what she calls in a book "the new spirit of the family". After retiring, in 2015, she continued as professor emeritus with a remarkable activity, focusing especially on the direction of the magazine *Ethnologie Française* (until 2017), and also in new

articles and publications that she was writing until a few days before he died.

Segalen's contributions are so many that it is difficult to summarise them here. During the seventies and eighties, her works are marked by the imprint of ethnological studies on rural societies. Her work, and that of many other researchers at that time, represented an adaptation to the study of the classical themes of folklore, but from a fully ethnological research and with a strong interrelationship with historical demography. Segalen studied aspects related to marriage (*Nuptialité et alliance. Le choix du conjoint dans une commune de l'Eure*, 1972), the life cycle (*Le cycle de la vie familiale dans les sociétés européennes*, along with Jean Cuisenier, 1977), gender differences in peasant society (*Mari et femme dans la société paysanne*, 1980), love and marriage (*Amours et mariages de l'ancienne France*, 1981), and especially inheritance and family systems in an area of foreign inheritance (*Quinze générations de bas-bretons*, 1985). All these works started from historical anthropology research, which combined ethnography with the emptying of archives, notarial documents and numerous demographic sources. This last book, in particular, is a little gem of kinship research, with an excellent application of the genealogical method with the analysis of historical documentation, which had a great influence on anthropology and family history.

From these works, of a monographic nature and of local studies, Segalen threw herself into more ambitious studies, with works that are still today a benchmark for university teaching, especially *Sociologie de la famille* (1981). Conceived as a manual, this book is perhaps one of the seminal works in the knowledge of kinship. It stands out for its interdisciplinary character:

if in French it is called "sociology", in the Spanish version it is titled *Historical anthropology of the family* (1992), as it is in English. The work is fully up-to-date and has been updated by its author: the last editions (2013 and 2018) were published together with Agnès Martial. Its consultation is essential for any study that is carried out both from the perspective of anthropological theories about kinship and also from the historical and demographic evolution of the family, and also as an analysis of its contemporary transformations. A few years later, in 1985, together with André Burguière, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber and Françoise Zonabend, Segalen directed the two volumes of the *Histoire de la famille*: one dedicated to "distant times" and the other, to the "clash of modernities", about the contemporary transformations of the family. Both works mark the intellectual maturity of Segalen and the anthropology of kinship in France, with the first reflections on the transformations of the family that would constitute the bulk of her later research.

In the 1990s, Segalen turned her attention to urban societies with *Nanterriens : les familles dans la ville, une ethnologie de l'identité* (1990), in which she applied the analysis techniques already explored in previous works to a peripheral city of Paris, seeing how kinship acted as a cushion of welcome and social support. She also explored new lines of research by analyzing generations or contemporary rituals with works like *Les cadets* (with Ravis-Giordani, 1994), *Les enfants d'Achille et de Nike, Une ethnologie de la course à pied ordinaire* (1994) and *Rites et rituels contemporains* (1998). The most outstanding work of this period, however, is the direction (with Marianne Gullestad) of *La famille en Europe. Parenté et perpétuations familiales en Europe* (1995), in which the authors proposed



Martine Segalen at the farewell ceremony as director of the journal *Ethnologie Française*. Nanterre, 3 April 2017. XAVIER ROIGÉ

the idea of the existence of a specific kinship system in European societies that continued to be perpetuated in the form of a strong intergenerational interdependence, while making a comparison of how the different political systems affected family diversity.

Based on these observations, she began to be interested in old age, with a whole set of works that analysed the phenomenon of ageing and the importance of the role of grandparents in French and European society. *Grandparents, La famille à travers les générations* (with Claudine Attias-Donfut, 1998), *Le siècle des grands-parents* (2001, also with Attias-Donfut), *Le nouvel esprit de famille* (with Nicole Lapière and Claudine Attias-Donfut, 2002), among others, are works in which she insists that, despite the alleged disintegration of the family, this institution is based on solid intergenerational ties, and highlights that the ageing of the popu-

lation is one of the fundamental facts of family changes, more important than other aspects such as the reduction in the number of marriages or the increase in divorce. Outside the field of kinship, Segalen returned to her museological origins when writing *Vie d'un musée* (2005), in which she rewrote the history of the ATP museum that closed that same year and moved with a new format to Marseille (Musée des Civilisations de l'Europe et la Méditerranée).

Active until the end of her life, Segalen became involved in her last years in new themes that marked her last publications. Also with Attias-Donfut she wrote a beautiful work on twenty-year-olds: *Turning 20 in 2020: Le nouveau fossé des générations* (2020), made from interviews and published in the middle of the pandemic. Among her many articles, we highlight one in Spanish on "French youth and the pandemic in a digital society", in the work edited

by González-Alcantud and María Jesús Buxó on the pandemic and confinement (Universidad de Granada, 2020). On the other hand, from a position opposed to surrogacy, she wrote different articles and books. Highlighted should be *Les marches de la maternité* (with Nicole Athea, 2021), a piece of work that has already seen the light posthumously in November 2021 and that raises the debate that exists in French society among those who ask for the authorization of this practice for the right of those people who want to have children through this procedure and the more feminist positions that oppose it, analysing its multiple social, medical, legal, ethical and psychological dimensions. Certainly it is a sensitive and controversial work, on which she worked intensively during her last weeks of life. As far as we know, a final book is still pending about her family from Eastern Europe, immigrants to France, who were desperately trying to naturalise as French.

Who knows how many more projects Martine Segalen was working on. In any case, her work—wide and diverse—has not only marked French and European anthropology for many years, especially studies on the family and kinship, but also stimulates us to continue to advance in research on the complexity of our societies. Anthropologists, she told me in one of the last meetings we had, must work on adapting our research procedures to central issues in our society, we must leave the periphery and academic marginality to be able to contribute much to the great contemporary debates. Throughout her life she explored with emphasis many themes and addressed very different research procedures, which continue to challenge our discipline. *Au revoir, Martine!* ■

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NOTE

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"La dernière Parisienne de Martine Segalen", *Le Monde*, 11/11/2016. <https://www.lemonde.fr/sport/article/2016/09/11/la-derniere-parisienne-de-martine-segalen_4995852_3242.html?xtref=acc_dir&fbclid=IwAR1SyVjw5upzP-WRKgXNIUWiwlvwCXGuAgj7YURNi6cas5M-wW-CaY2m6dA8-w>

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Interview conducted by José A. González Alcantud "Of ethnology in France. Interview with Martine Segalen", *Gazeta de Antropología*, 1990. <<http://www.gazeta-antropologia.es/?p=3751>>