

60. Pouvoir critique et critique du pouvoir des anthropologues / Critical power and critique of the power of anthropologists

Convenors:

Quentin Gausset, University of Copenhagen

quentin.gausset@anthro.ku.dk

Robert Gibb, University of Glasgow

r.gibb@socsci.gla.ac.uk

Discussant:

Andrew Spiegel, University of Cape Town

mugsy@humanities.uct.ac.za

Les anthropologues étudient les rapports de pouvoir chez les autres, mais sont souvent peu disposés à porter le même regard critique sur leurs propres pratiques. Certains départements d'anthropologie, le plus souvent dans les pays anglophones occidentaux, sont considérés (sur quelles bases ?) comme constituant une élite, et leurs membres exercent une influence déterminante sur le développement intellectuel et institutionnel de la discipline à l'échelle globale. Associations professionnelles, revues anthropologiques, comités de lecture, et commissions scientifiques distribuant postes et fonds de recherche sont dominés par un nombre relativement restreint d'anthropologues. A quel point cette domination étouffe-t-elle la créativité intellectuelle ? Le manque de réflexivité des anthropologues traduirait-il une insuffisance conceptuelle et théorique du regard qu'ils portent sur le politique ? L'autocritique serait-elle une condition préalable aux critiques anthropologiques du pouvoir ?

Cet atelier vise d'une part à stimuler une discussion des limites de la réflexivité des anthropologues vis-à-vis de la production et reproduction de structures de pouvoir (sociales, intellectuelles, institutionnelles, éditoriales, linguistiques) au sein de leur propre discipline. D'autre part, nous aimerions réfléchir sur les fondements et limites du pouvoir critique et éthique des anthropologues. A quel point notre éthique serait-elle définie par nos conceptions du relativisme culturel et de la tolérance ? Dans quelle mesure serait-elle définie par notre engagement politique ? Enfin, les divergences d'opinions dans des domaines controversés comme la sexualité, le sida, le multiculturalisme, l'environnement, l'autochtonie, les minorités reflètent-elles une absence de consensus disciplinaire sur ces questions ?

Independence of Dependants: Polish and Western Anthropology Today

Michal Buchowski, University of Poznan

mb2378@columbia.edu

For decades various Western ideas have been influencing Polish anthropology. Recently Poland has also become a subject of extensive study for foreign scholars studying 'post-socialist transformation'. Mutual relations between the Centre and the Periphery have assumed a new dynamic. The flow of Grand Narratives has continued while exchange of expertise, when it comes down to the local ethnography and its interpretation, is few and far between. Native and foreign scholars define their research agenda differently. They form virtually independent discursive realities and use dissimilar metaphors of cultural and social developments in the country. Cross-references in published ethnographies about Poland are negligible and lack of mutual

intellectual inspiration is conspicuous. This raises questions about the historically shaped social context that produces a rift in the perception of changes in Central Europe. One should consider the dilemmas, if, on the one hand, on the part of Poles it is perpetuation or even creation of native anthropological tradition, possibly intentionally resistant to dominant anthropologies (similar to the deliberate raise of post-colonial studies), or, simply a case of ignorance? On the other hand, if on the part of the Western anthropologists, is it an instance of plain ignorance or unintentional reproduction of 'colonial reasoning'?

Anthropology since 'anthropology since the sixties'

Kirk Dombrowski, City University of New York

kdombrowski@jjay.cuny.edu

Is there a relationship between the way that anthropology imagines itself to engage the world and the way that the discipline has been differentially situated in the institutions of the academy? The obvious answer is no, simply by the fact that there is nothing very distinctive about the unevenness of the anthropological situation when compared to, say, literature on the one side or physics on the other. Calls for greater reflexivity implicitly acknowledge as much, and as a result can only go so far in their criticism (piously noting that, given the nature of anthropological inquiry, we should be more aware of these more local injustices...and by implication, more morally bound to remedy them, or at least be more openly ashamed of living with them). Against this, I will argue that there is a connection between the way we normally understand the sorts of things that knowledge makers do (which anthropology shares more broadly with a number of fields) and the current political topography of the academy (of which, again, anthropology remains only typical). In so doing, I will engage arguments put forward by Roseberry, Ortner, and Wolf on the movement of the field politically and intellectually in the last two decades.

Cultural relativism and the politics of environmental anthropology

Quentin Gausset, University of Copenhagen

quentin.gausset@anthro.ku.dk

A common criticism of anthropology is that cultural relativism (one of its corner stones) legitimises cultural practices that reinforce phenomena that are globally undesirable (AIDS, underdevelopment, corruption, deforestation, the loss of biodiversity, etc.) or that are 'morally abject' (wife beating, female circumcision, rape, murder, racism, etc.). Is this criticism founded? Can political engagement for more social development and justice be reconciled with the anthropological duty to understand things from within and to withhold value judgements? Based on West-African case studies, this paper looks at the problems encountered within environmental anthropology, and argues that placing culture at the centre of the debate leads to ethnocentrism. This is true both for anthropologists who blame some cultures for ecological vandalism and for those who argue that other cultures are the solution to environmental problems (an example is the debate on the impact of religion, gender or capitalists/indigenous societies on ecology). Anthropologists who engage in 'culture blaming' focus on the wrong target and contribute to reinforcing injustice by diverting attention away from the real political and ethical problems, which are centred on the distribution of rights, access to resources and power. The fight against environmental injustice can, and should, be conducted without fighting for or against cultural difference.

Postures et impostures «critiques» des anthropologues dans les débats publics sur le racisme et le multiculturalisme en Scandinavie

Robert Gibb, University of Glasgow

r_a_gibb@hotmail.com

Les anthropologues sont souvent les grand(e)s absent(e)s des débats publics sur le racisme et le multiculturalisme qui divisent les sociétés européennes contemporaines. Si l'on pense à la controverse actuelle autour du « foulard » en France, ou au débat récent sur le racisme « institutionnel » en Grande-Bretagne – et les exemples pourraient être multipliés, on ne peut s'empêcher d'être frappé par le silence presque total des anthropologues sur de telles questions. Dans des pays scandinaves comme la Norvège et la Suède, cependant, des anthropologues (faisant ainsi en quelque sorte figures d'exception) se sont régulièrement trouvé(e)s, depuis le début des années 90, au centre d'importants débats portant sur les immigrés, les minorités ethniques et le racisme. Cet article se propose donc d'examiner comment les anthropologues en question se sont positionné(e)s, et ont été positionné(e)s (et parfois mis en cause personnellement) eux/elles-mêmes par leurs interlocuteurs, dans ces débats. Ceci conduit à mettre en évidence les différentes postures – et impostures – « critiques » adoptées, et à s'interroger plus généralement sur les fondements et les limites du pouvoir critique des anthropologues dans ce domaine.

Beyond speaking truth to power: anthropological entanglements with multicultural and indigenous rights politics

John Gledhill, University of Manchester

john.gledhill@man.ac.uk

Professional anthropologists conspicuously disagree about the kind of practical engagement we should have with multi-culturalist and indigenous rights politics. Disagreement is not simply about whether academics should act as advocates for the specific interests of their research subjects but about the desirability of this type of politics in itself. Although the latter is often presented as a matter of academic conscience, where, for example, strategic essentialisms prove more politically effective than our preferred scholarly accounts, other actors inevitably see it as political. That the professional 'we' often excludes anthropologists not based in North America or Western Europe further complicates the issues. I argue that retreat to the study to compose analyses that 'speak truth to power' is quite ineffectual in a world in which forces we wish to denounce have themselves become skilled players of multiculturalist politics. For all its difficulties, more active engagement in the messy realities of concrete situations is the only way forward. That entails the rejection of some of the intellectual trends that have dominated the discipline in the past two decades and the kind of re-evaluation of our professional role that has to date been sidestepped in efforts to contain ethical controversy.

Immigration, integration and the resurgent right: the politics of anthropology in the New Europe

Winnie Lem, Trent University

wlem@trentu.ca

This paper reflects the role played by anthropology and anthropologists in a context in which the politics of the right and racism is resurgent in the New Europe. It questions the contributions that anthropology can make to current debates on citizenship, immigration and assimilation in European nation-states in the light of a paradox that underlies our discipline. The paradox is that on the one hand, anthropology is a

discipline that is based on humanist principles and as such, it promotes, intercultural understanding, tolerance and universalism. On the other hand, part of the intellectual project of the discipline is to define cultural boundaries and this is done through an effort to determine the particular. I suggest that this paradox lies at the heart of our discipline and that its existence promotes a considerable degree of ambiguity for the insights that anthropology has to offer in a political climate where intolerance and racism directed at 'immigrant' groups prevail.

Ivory hierarchies and the disciplining of anthropology

David Mills, University of Birmingham

d.mills@bham.ac.uk

The growing stratification of UK Higher Education has meant that individual disciplinary lecturers work within institutions of very different status, negotiating a complex set of values and rewards that are accorded different aspects of academic work. I use research carried out with junior and temporary lecturing staff in the social sciences (including social anthropology) to explore how they reconcile the increasing institutional imperative to separate and 'professionalise' their teaching and research practice with an older disciplinary ideology that emphasises their indivisibility. I suggest that as different aspects of scholarly work increasingly diverge, so too will academics' sense of their own disciplinary professionalism. In this situation a singular disciplinary identity – such as the notion of a 'band of brothers' that has characterised social anthropology (Mills 2003) – is increasingly unable to justify or disguise the status hierarchies and value conflicts visible within and between universities.

Les anthropologues citoyens: De quelques dimensions du pouvoir dans la pratique de recherche

Barbara Waldis, University of Neuchâtel

Barbara.Waldis@unine.ch

Mon terrain actuel à la république de Maurice et au département d'outre-mer de la Réunion porte sur la notion de la citoyenneté: Que signifie-t-elle dans des contextes sociaux différents, pour des acteurs sociaux différents, et comment est-elle mise en pratique dans des sociétés multiculturelles et post-coloniales où les idéologies et les doctrines politiques originaires de l'occident sont confrontées à des systèmes politiques locaux et à des formes syncrétiques de culture politique nationale. Depuis le début du projet, la question de la motivation pour la participation citoyenne m'accompagne. De ce point de vue je traiterai de la question du pouvoir, soit dans les relations avec les collègues des institutions de recherche, soit avec les interlocutrices et interlocuteurs sur le terrain et chez moi. Interpellée par la question de l'influence de l'engagement politique sur les résultats de la recherche, je proposerai des réflexions sur les points suivants : Quelles conséquences ont les surestimations chez les autres ou chez moi-même pour le terrain? Quelle est la place, la légitimation que j'accorde à la dissonance cognitive dans ce champ ? Quelle est la place depuis laquelle je parle ?

