

Plenary Session I

Re-defining Europe: Perspectives from Socio-Cultural Anthropology

Convenor:

Andre Gingrich, Austrian Academy of Sciences

andre.gingrich@oeaw.ac.at

Europe is going through complex and contradictory processes of transformation and re-definition. The current phase of globalization thus inspires creative creolisation and re-invention, as much as protective reaction and active adaptation. On this basis, recent developments - ranging from the war in Iraq to negotiations with new incoming EU member countries, on to debates about a European constitution- have indicated widespread concerns about the possible future of identities not only in Europe, but also of Europe in wider contexts. These concerns go far beyond the political sphere, they also relate to science and technology, education and the arts, gender roles and social status, minority rights and nationhood. It is thus high time that social anthropology considers anew some of the crucial fields in which Europe is being re-defined, and re-defines itself.

Europe, the Scientific Citizen, and the Anthropologist

Marilyn Strathern, University of Cambridge

ms10026@cam.ac.uk

‘Science and society’ debates are to be found across Europe. But what does it mean to say that science is entering into a new contract with society? Among the many scales of social life that they juggle, Europeans tend to attribute the rapid information flows that accompany developments in science to a globalised world while invoking ‘society’ when it comes to thinking about ethics and the involvement of the public. Biotechnology is a case in point. Here society may emerge as specifically bound by national interests, not just in wealth creation but in efforts at regulation designed to protect local citizenry. How countries have dealt with GM crops is a case in point. What differences, and what continuities, lie in assumptions as to what a democratised and educated society means? And what is the anthropologist to make of the way the role of ‘the public’ as judicious consumers combines with what some would see as a new role in the validation of scientific knowledge?

What’s News: Media Circulations and the Politics of Truth in the East of Europe

Susan Gal, University of Chicago

s-gal@uchicago.edu

The re-creation or re-definition of Europe is being accomplished, in part, through new routes of circulation and the restriction of old ones. Indeed, “freedom of movement” for people and goods

is one of the salient mottos of the European Union. "Circulation" is a semiotic process, involving decontextualisations and recontextualisations that change the cultural meanings of moving objects. Yet while migration and commodity exchange have been studied in depth, we know far less about the borrowing, buying, stealing, appropriation, translation, echo and adoption of texts and ideas. By what routes do they travel? How does intertextuality work in the social world? How are such circulations legally and socioculturally regimented, how do they make boundaries, create and structure identities and politics?

I take as my case study the current circulation of ideas and practices of "news" "transparency" and media "truth" in Hungary. These terms have an important history in the Cold War. The west then claimed for itself the virtues of media truth, openness and transparency, while charging that the east had duplicitous and censored media that made "reading between the lines" a necessary practice of literacy in state socialist regimes. This image of the censored and closed society was one which weighed heavily against the eastern states in international politics. Dissidents longed for a "politics of truth." Since 1989, by contrast, newspapers and magazines in Hungary have been bought by western media conglomerates. Much of what is printed is re-printed by acknowledged or pirated translation from English, German and French publications. Readers and journalists report that this corporate control constrains what can be written and published in a much more stringent way than the socialist state ever managed to do. The need to "read between the lines" has by no means disappeared, but now takes different forms. With their history of scepticism towards the media, Hungarians are creating new practices of reading and writing; new forms of publics. My paper considers several telling moments from the history and current operation of a Hungarian news magazine to show the contradictory changes in ideas about media transparency, truth and news, as these have circulated into Hungary in the last decade. The view from the east provides, I believe, an implicit critique of these notions as they circulate in the rest of Europe.

The World Inside Out or What is at Stake with the Deconstruction of the West

Jean-Loup Amselle, L'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales
jean-loup.amselle@ehess.fr

The paper will first focus on the three related intellectual trends which aim at the deconstruction of the very idea of European democracy, namely postmodernism, post colonialism and subalternism. Then it will deal with the reappropriation of subalternism by African and African American scholars and examine the way postcolonialism itself is challenged by some Third World intellectuals. Finally, the paper will try to define new forms of universalism or humanism stemming from postcolonialism and subalternism.

Transnational Politics and the Reconfiguration of Europe

Andre Gingrich, Austrian Academy of Sciences

andre.gingrich@univie.ac.at

This presentation discusses the EU-wide phenomenon of a new wave of nationalism through a medium-term anthropological perspective. After identifying some of the main differences and commonalities between these and earlier historical forms of nationalism in Europe, it will be attempted to up-date established anthropological concepts of nationalism for present purposes. While distinct neo-nationalist parties have managed to establish themselves inside and outside of Europe in governments and parliaments, and while they also suffered a number of setbacks, that first round does not exclude a second round: the wider, underlying factors cannot be reduced to specific parties and to charismatic agency alone. Those underlying factors are related to the current phase of globalisation, accompanied by individualisation and ensuing fears of losing status and identities. For these reasons, it would also be one-sided to conceptualise the present phenomenon exclusively in terms of “right wing” political labels that are derived from politics in the mid- 20th century. Leaving aside the fact that “left” nationalism also has a notorious legacy inside Europe and beyond, it is the constant blurring of traditional liberal, left, and right programmes which makes neo-nationalists so successful, and so unpredictable. European enlargement, and Europe’s contested search for its international role, may in fact create an environment which could favour a second round in the rise of neo-nationalism.