

# Between Boundary-Work and Cosmopolitan Aspirations A Historical Genealogy of EASA (and European Anthropology)

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents a historical genealogy of EASA and European anthropology. Performing a heuristic exercise of *ethnographic epoché*, it critically examines European anthropologists' writings on European anthropology and EASA as they appear in different statements and accounts, especially in the Association's newsletters and reports of its conferences, understanding these documents as praxeologically embedded in anthropologists' everyday production of knowledge. Drawing on the sociology of critique and the concept of boundary-work, it argues that EASA created its own 'space of critique', funneling previous discussions on European anthropology, and becoming a platform for its production and its contestation as a site for the production of 'hierarchies of knowledge'. Those contestations reflect an original and longstanding tension between EASA's inclusive cosmopolitan aspiration and the exclusionary practice of boundary-work.

## KEYWORDS

boundary-work, cosmopolitanism, EASA, European anthropology, hierarchies of knowledge, power, space of critique

## Introduction: An Old Dispute

In 2014, I attended the 13th Biennial Conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) in Tallinn (Estonia). The Association was celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary, and Adam Kuper gave a talk as part of one of the Plenary Sessions. In his talk, Kuper (2014) synthesised the intellectual context of EASA's emergence, arguing that the Association's creation aimed to provide 'a fresh theoretical project' for social anthropology. EASA, Kuper claimed, had successfully provided that theoretical project and a common ground among European intellectual traditions, leading the field towards a 'multi-centred' and 'more cosmopolitan discipline'. I left the Plenary Session convinced by Kuper's account. During the conference,



however, my talks with some local researchers made me think that I should not take that narrative for granted, at least not so easily.

One local researcher, Alex,<sup>1</sup> told me that some people at the Local Organisational Committee were dissatisfied with how the Association's Executive Committee treated them. (S)he outlined the negotiation process and complained that all local decisions had to be supervised and approved (or not approved) by the Executive Committee. For him/her, the way the Executive Committee – which she/he depicted as the anthropological elite – dealt with disagreements in the organisation of the conference had 'a bit of colonial stink' and was somewhat paternalistic towards them. During the conference's Farewell Party, I also met Carol, another local researcher, who complained about something different, but which (s)he formulated similarly. I went outside, where I joined a group of local scholars, including Alex. We were commenting on the conference when Carol joined us. (S)he was a bit too excited. Outraged, (s)he mentioned an ad-hoc session organised by some EASA members about the recent crises taking place at the time in South Sudan, Palestine and Ukraine. (S)he was especially upset with how what (s)he first defined as 'Westerners' and later as 'Spanish and British anthropologists' had treated the Ukrainian situation: they had said that 'Brussels' should get involved, when for Carol it was a local question that needed a local resolution. While the question (s)he was upset about was a political one, his/her rage and frustration was directed towards how these anthropologists felt they had the right to define and propose solutions for local problems when they did not know the local context. Like Alex, (s)he said they treated Eastern Europe 'paternalistically'.

What I found interesting is that they both framed their dissatisfaction with specific events of the conference by echoing the argument of 'hierarchies of knowledge' put forward by Michał Buchowski (2004) ten years before. The difference this time, however, is that they had explicitly included EASA in the equation. In these conversations, I could observe how they perceived the conference as the stage where European anthropologists who claimed to be anti-colonial and cosmopolitan reproduced those very hierarchies. Twenty-three years before that, Portuguese anthropologist Miguel Vale de Almeida (1991) had developed a similar argument referring to the first EASA conference in Coimbra. Almeida (1991: 20) also portrayed that conference as the stage where 'asymmetrical knowledge-power structures' were at play, reproducing 'a "core-periphery" effect in European anthropology'. The unidirectional flows of knowledge resulting from those

asymmetrical structures – he claimed – were directed for a long time towards Southern Europe. Nevertheless, he continued, ‘Eastern Europe, now within vision of the centres, may fare similarly’.

Yet his argument was not new. Almeida was, in turn, echoing Josep Llobera’s (1986) critical position over the presence of Anglo-American anthropologists in Southern European countries, which he articulated through the language of ‘cultural imperialism’ in the production of the Mediterranean as an area of study.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, as with the Tallinn researchers, he added EASA to the equation. Beyond the differences between their statements, both Almeida and the Tallinn scholars used a metonymy that connected the category of EASA with some form of ‘Western European anthropology’ that represents an anthropological elite which not only dominates the intellectual agenda but also takes the decisions in terms of organisation and of constructing the narratives about Southern and Eastern Europe. They portrayed themselves as being at the bottom of a hierarchy of power and knowledge, articulating their discourses under a postcolonial frame, where EASA was seen as a tool in the hands of the colonisers.

I left the conference wondering what the threads were of this yarn that connected, under a specific articulation of arguments, these disputes over inequality and anthropological knowledge production in the European context and what role was played by EASA in maintaining these disputes. Aware of Kuper’s argument on the crucial role of EASA in the emergence of a transnational community of European anthropologists (D. O. Martínez 2016), I wondered why people in different periods, and different political and geographical contexts, articulated their contestation of ‘hierarchies of knowledge’ in European anthropology through a contestation of EASA. In this article, I unravel some of these threads. Yet there is a big epistemological challenge in this endeavour. Anthropologists, producers of highly reflexive knowledge, are nonetheless the main actors in these disputes. In order to understand the disputes beyond the meanings anthropologists themselves give to them, I will perform a heuristic exercise of what Jason Throop (2012: 84) has called *ethnographic epoché*, that is, a suspension or bracketing of my ‘previous assumptions and habitual modes of interpreting’ anthropologists. Drawing on the sociology of critique (Boltanski 2012; Boltanski and Thévenot 2006), I locate the discussions on European anthropology and EASA within the realm of moral critique. Finally, I place the concept of ‘boundary-work’ (Gieryn 1983) within the frame of the recent practice turn in the study of social knowledge making (Camic et al. 2011).

This heuristic bracketing of the concepts that anthropologists use and the claims they make will allow me to critically examine them, ‘rather than being viewed as more or less biased sources of data’ (Hammersley and Atkinson ([1983] 2007: 130). Therefore, I will shift my attention to how the concepts and claims are productively used in the discussions on EASA and European anthropology, allowing for the articulation or criticism of a specific project. To do this, I have considered a selection of these discussions as they appear in different written sources, especially in EASA newsletters, reviews of EASA conferences, different statements and accounts by EASA regular members and members of its governing institutions (Executive Committee, journal editors, etc.), book chapters and journal articles written by anthropologists. The analysis of these sources, finally, follows the Comaroffs’ (1992: 34) call to understand the objects produced by people as praxeologically embedded in their everyday production of knowledge (see also Ortner 1995: 174), something especially relevant in a social context such as the anthropological field, inherently defined by the generation of written documents.

The article takes the form of a historical genealogy of EASA and European anthropology. I demonstrate how EASA’s project of European anthropology emerged in the late 1980s understood as a pluralistic and inclusive platform that would counterbalance the influence of US-American anthropology. I then focus on that project’s exclusion of some anthropological traditions by practices of boundary-work, to later deal with the emergence of European anthropology’s ‘space of critique’. I finish by focusing on the recent attempts to create a synthesis, with the emergence of concepts such as ‘ethno-anthropology’ and different formulations of alternative cosmopolitanisms ‘from below’. All in all, I argue that EASA funnelled previous disputes on European anthropology, becoming a platform for its production and its contestation as a site for the production of ‘hierarchies of knowledge’, and that those contestations reflect an original and longstanding tension between EASA’s inclusive, cosmopolitan aspiration and the exclusionary epistemological practice of boundary-work.

## **A Project for European Anthropology**

There is no better way to learn about the sociohistorical and intellectual conditions in which EASA emerged than reading the accounts on the state of anthropology during the 1980s by some of its founders. In

*Anthropology and Anthropologists*, Kuper (1983: 192) observed an increasing weakening and ‘parochialism’ of the ‘British School’, while social anthropology expanded and institutionalised in other European countries – including in those where their established ‘traditions of ethnology had stagnated’ (Kuper 1996: 191–193), such as Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Norway (Eriksen 2008; Kuper 1973: 229) and Sweden (Hannerz 1982), and furthermore in Southern European countries (Comas d’Argemir and Prat 1996; Pina Cabral 1992), where ‘new departments of social anthropology were established in the 1970s and 1980s, often by scholars who had been trained in Paris, Britain and the United States’ (Kuper 1996: 192). Despite the development of social anthropology in these countries – as also observed by Archetti (2003: 103) and Kuper (1989) – there were no learned societies or associations for social anthropologists there.

The process of European integration was also opening the space for an increasing identification with a sense of Europeanness (Silverman 2002: 104), therefore providing ‘a fresh impetus for effective interaction’ (Kuper 1989: 28) among social anthropologists working in different European countries. That ‘effective interaction’ was very much needed for the then young and middle-aged social anthropologists. They felt marginalised in their own countries and felt the need to find support and communication outside their national borders and traditions, as Kirsten Hastrup and João de Pina Cabral later recalled during a Panel on ‘The Founding and the Need of EASA’ (Deseke et al. 2009: 7–8).

There was, it is essential to add, ‘a slight US-sceptical undertone’ – as Andre Gingrich put it (Girke 2014: n.p.) – among the Association’s founders. In other words, they shared an intellectual discomfort with the increasing relevance of cultural idealism and interpretivism in US-American anthropology, and the widespread perception of its increasing global hegemony. This theoretical dissatisfaction with US-American anthropology was due to its ‘deflationist’ tendency, that is, ‘the belief that truth is not a valid category’ (Pina Cabral 2010: 156). This ‘epistemological relativism’ – Pina Cabral (2010: 154–155) later theorised – was found to be ‘a dead end for our discipline’,<sup>3</sup> a dissatisfaction which has been at the basis of the intellectual projects of most, if not all, of EASA’s founders (e.g. Gingrich 2007; Kuper 1992, 1994). The cultural idealism of the postmodernists, Kuper (2015: 137–139) argued, was directly influenced by the late Clifford Geertz’s distancing from the social science project and approach to an interpretative framework situated in the realm of the humanities; their anthropological programme was genealogically linked by Kuper (1994: 539; 2000: 10) to

the 'Counter-Enlightenment' project of German romanticism through the migratory experience of Franz Boas from Berlin to New York.

As Kuper (1989) stated, 'Contemporary trends in American anthropology seemed to many of us foreign and unappealing, but hard to resist without the support of a larger community of our own'. As a way to counterbalance the influence of US-American anthropology in Europe, he envisioned a European organisation (Gibb and Mills 2001: 214). In January 1989, he gathered a group of twenty-two anthropologists from different Western European countries, who shared that diagnosis and widespread interest in the internationalisation of anthropology, in Castelgandolfo (Italy) to discuss the possibility of creating an Association (Kuper 1989).

As opposed to 'the "danger" represented by postmodernism, the attacks on anthropological writing, on conventional grand theories and on fieldwork' (Archetti 2003: 104), EASA's founders shared an intellectual commitment to the 'distinctive European tradition in social anthropology' (Kuper 1989: 28), and an epistemological commitment to renovated visions of realism, such as the 'minimal' or 'new' realism later advocated by João de Pina Cabral (2005), or Gingrich (2007) respectively. Following this, EASA's project of European anthropology, Kuper (1994: 551) defended, should 'contribute a comparative dimension to the enlightenment project of a science of human variation in time and space'.

In that meeting, EASA was created. A year later, the first EASA conference took place in Coimbra. More platforms of socialisation (thematic networks), communication (the EASA newsletters) and publication (the journal *Social Anthropology/Anthropologie Sociale* and the EASA book series) were created, contributing to a large extent to the creation and development of transnational networks of anthropological knowledge production. With a plan to offer a reliable alternative to a perceived weakening of anthropology, the founders of EASA imagined the Association as a platform for European anthropologists that would go beyond the different national traditions, encompassing them all (Kuper 1996: 192; Silverman 2002) in a cosmopolitan and pluralistic 'European school' (L'Estoile 2008; Kuper 2004). However, something else was at stake at that time.

### **Boundary-Work**

As Silverman stated in an interview (Girke 2014: n.p.), 'the question of whether to admit researchers from Eastern Europe was a topic of

considerable concern at the meeting'. In his report of the meeting, Kuper acknowledged that among the various European anthropological traditions, only social anthropology would become the basis for the Association's new project.

This is one area in which, it must be confessed, a certain chauvinism made itself felt. Social anthropology is a very specific discipline in Europe, not to be confused with folklore or European ethnology. (Kuper 1989)

This was not, in any case, a clear and straightforward decision. Different opinions on the issue gave place to a lively discussion among the meeting's participants as to whether ethnology and folklore could become part of EASA's project of European anthropology. The final decision was to exclude both from the project. '[T]he Eastern European ("socialist/communist") colleagues were deliberately not welcome', Rolf Husmann told Girke (2014). Sydel Silverman (2002: 105–106) explained the reasons for this exclusion in more detail:

The Eastern countries posed a problem: No one wanted the folkloric tradition to be included or those who were 'functionaries' rather than active researchers. There was concern that if those doors were opened, the association's identification with social anthropology and with scholarship would be diluted.

It is important to note that not all non-social anthropologists were directly excluded from the project. As we previously saw, the Castelfandolfo meeting consisted of a varied group of people from different European countries, including those countries with previous traditions of ethnology and folklore, and therefore with different understandings of what anthropology was. They agreed to be open regarding who could be defined as a social anthropologist in order to become a member. The definition of social anthropology that appeared in the first EASA constitution was broad enough to include 'specialists in social and cultural anthropology and ethnology' (Silverman 2002: 106). However, it is worth mentioning that what they had in mind at the time as an example of who to include in the Association was not Eastern European ethnologists or folklorists, but the 'converted' Western European ones 'who had transformed their traditional object into a social anthropology of contemporary Europe' (Kuper 2004: 152).

We could then ask why the Eastern European ethnologists or folklorists were excluded while the 'converted' Western European ones were welcomed. The concept of boundary-work might help us understand that. With this concept, historian of science Thomas Gieryn (1983)



redefined the classical problem of *demarcation* between science and non-science through the lens of practice theory. Stressing the futility of positivistic approaches that assume the possibility to differentiate scientific activities from their counterparts, Gieryn reinterprets demarcation as a conventional, everyday practice of scientists to differentiate their intellectual productions as scientific against those of their competitors.

Instead of looking at epistemological criteria of demarcation, Gieryn's concept facilitates the observation of practices where scientists create the boundary that defines what is scientific and what is not. This practice-oriented approach highlights the strategic character of boundary-work since scientists use it in search of professionalisation with at least three different professional goals: 'acquisition of intellectual authority and career opportunities; denial of these resources to "pseudoscientists"; and protection of the autonomy of scientific research from political interference' (Gieryn 1983: 781).

The very origin of EASA and its project of European anthropology came after strategic boundary-work between social anthropology on the one side and folklore and ethnology on the other. This intra-disciplinary demarcation of the territory of European anthropology situated social anthropology inside the boundary as a social science 'closely allied to sociology and social history' (Kuper 1994: 551), and the other traditions outside, as its non-scientific competitors, not only for having 'little theoretical content or comparative range' (Kuper 1996: 192) but also for being dependent on political interests, because they were seen as connected with the nationalist projects of the states where they were developed.

Boundary-work, in conclusion, initially excluded from EASA's project people (especially, but not only, from Eastern Europe) trained in the traditions that did not fit into the prescribed model but welcomed those individuals (primarily, but not only, from Western Europe) who had been influenced by the epistemological model of social anthropology, transforming it into a 'social anthropology of Europe'. EASA's project was, therefore, kept initially within the 'intellectual sterling zone' (Hannerz 2008: 220, paraphrasing Gellner 1992). The goals of this demarcation were the *expansion* and *monopolisation* of the professional authority with regard to others (folklorists, European ethnologists, cultural idealists) who might claim that authority over anthropology, and to keep EASA's project safeguarded from political interference (Gieryn 1983: 791–792). Soon after the Castelgandolfo meeting, however, an important historical event changed the priorities of the Association.



## Common Grounds? EASA as a ‘Utopian Experiment’

The Inaugural General Assembly of EASA took place on 14 January 1989. Just a few months later, the series of events that led to the collapse of the Iron Curtain changed the political landscape of Europe and the perspective that the Association’s founders had on how its new project of European anthropology might develop. Silverman (2002: 106) mentions that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, ‘any effort to maintain an academic boundary between East and West would have been obsolete even before the association was consolidated’. As Kuper (2004: 153) put it, ‘folklorists, expelled through the door, came back through the window’. EASA members were aware of how this political event would change the priorities of the Association to provide platforms for Eastern and Western European anthropologists to meet (Eriksen 2002).

This change of priorities was present already at the Coimbra conference (Baumann 1991; Eriksen 1991), but it was not until the publication of the first issue of *Social Anthropology* – the Association’s flagship journal – that the change was officialised. That first issue served as a programmatic statement (Archetti 2003: 107), with an Editorial by Jean-Claude Galey (1992), acknowledging the existence of a ‘common project’ of European anthropology, and defending the role of EASA as an inclusive platform for the synthesis of its different European traditions. The main objective of the Association, he told Eduardo Archetti (2003: 106) some years later, ‘was to recuperate the “local” traditions in anthropology and not “re-integrate” them in the mainstream British and French schools’. Acknowledging Galey’s aspirations and drawing on the World Anthropologies framework (Ribeiro 2014), Benoît de L’Estoile (2008) argues that EASA’s project is an example of *pluralistic internationalisation*. He opposes this model to that of *hegemonic internationalisation*, whose primary example is for him the American Anthropological Association. *Hegemonic* forms, he says, emerge as the outcome of the attraction of less dominant players to the dominant intellectual centres, defining the terms of the debate. Designed in opposition to that model, claims L’Estoile (2008: 121–123), EASA was ‘set up as a tool to promote diversity and dialogue between non-hegemonic traditions’, modelled as a ‘utopian experiment’ with the aspiration of becoming a ‘meeting ground between representatives of various European traditions, where they could meet on their own terms’.

Some have argued that despite this philosophy of inclusion and the efforts made in the Association to accomplish it, there is still

a long way to go in that direction. Chris Hann (2012: 42–43), for instance, lamented that the hopes placed upon EASA as a meeting platform were not sufficient for an actual reconciliation between social anthropologists and folklorists. The reasons for such a ‘failure to break down barriers’ were that EASA was mostly supported among those – especially younger – Eastern Europeans who were open to influences from ‘Western socio-cultural anthropology’, but was not supported by those – especially senior – who already had an international association (SIEF, the International Society for Ethnology and Folklore) and saw EASA as a new ‘threat’ (of Western ‘scientific imperialism’ and English as the language of communication) rather than as a ‘liberation’.

We could complement Hann’s argument by reading it in the light of the concept of boundary-work: while EASA’s priority after the fall of the Berlin Wall was to be an inclusive association open to the different European traditions, the original boundary-work was yet at play, with its epistemological model still then limited within the scope of social anthropology. As such, the project included those who were trained in this tradition in Britain or France, or in other Western European countries where this model had expanded, or later, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in countries of Eastern and Central Europe, but still excluded folklorists or European ethnologists who continued doing work that was considered to have no theoretical relevance and/or to be dependent on political interests. As Rolf Husmann said concerning this, if during the Castelgandolfo meeting ‘the Eastern European (“socialist/communist”) colleagues were deliberately not welcome’, after 1990 ‘EASA was opened to all those Eastern European colleagues who stood for a Western-style anthropology’ (Girke 2014: n.p.).

Therefore, I argue that EASA’s project of European anthropology emerged from tension between the inclusive cosmopolitan aspiration of pluralistic internationalisation and the exclusionary practice of boundary-work. This might help to explain how for some of those trained in the traditions of *folklore studies*, *ethnology* or *Volkskunde*, EASA can be perceived as ‘the colonial project of a powerful neighbour-discipline claiming and invading a new territory (Europe)’ (Schriewer, in the Forum section of this issue). I contend that it is precisely this original tension that made EASA vulnerable, opening up the space of criticism, and funnelling previous discussions on ‘cultural imperialism’ in the production of the Mediterranean as an area of study, and the following discussions of ‘hierarchies of knowledge’ between

Western and Eastern/Central European anthropologists into a discussion over EASA and European anthropology.

### **European Anthropology as a Site for the Production of ‘Hierarchies of Knowledge’ and as a ‘Space of Critique’**

European anthropology has long been an object in – and of – dispute. Its criticisms have originated primarily in its two main ‘peripheries’, namely the South and the East, which have been simultaneously defined as the two main study areas (Klekot 2007), and in some German-speaking contexts where the tradition of *Volkskunde* was present. In recent years, especially after the economic crisis of 2008, some Southern Europeans have reactivated some of the terms of contestation (Papataxiarchis 2015). While criticisms have come mainly from these two different areas and were produced in different periods, the arguments articulating the criticism have been similar. Framed as a reinterpretation of the postcolonial critique, these contestations portray the British and French as the dominant traditions, and their spread through European countries where anthropological traditions were different as a kind of intellectual colonialism (Hann 2012: 39–40).

It is striking to read how the various arguments are articulated so similarly in the two study areas, in works as far apart in time as, for instance, Josep Llobera’s critical account of ‘Fieldwork in South-western Europe’ (1986), Almeida’s (1991) review of the first EASA conference, and in the more recent critical discussions on the relationships among Western and Central and Eastern anthropologists (e.g. Buchowski and Cervinkova 2015; Kürti and Skalník 2009). These references are just a few among many but can be used as illustrative examples of a broader discussion that cannot be covered here in its full dimensions. We can, nonetheless, extract the main arguments.

Critics claim that this ‘intellectual colonialism’ creates power dynamics that produce ‘hierarchies of knowledge’ between ‘dominant’ and ‘peripheral’ anthropological traditions, where anthropologists in the former produce primitivist, exoticist and/or orientalist representations of the latter and their countries, cultures and/or societies (Almeida 1991; Buchowski 2006), excluding ‘native’ anthropological knowledge as irrelevant, or including it but only as a ‘second-class’ kind of knowledge (Čapo 2015a; Kürti and Skalník 2009: 14). This, so the criticism goes, leads to local anthropological knowledge being

mostly ignored and excluded from the international discussions of those very countries, societies or cultures (Buchowski and Cervinkova 2015: 10; Kürti and Skalník 2009; Llobera 1986).

Language plays a significant role in this critique, with English seen as the dominant one – it replaced German, becoming the *lingua franca* only in the post-World War II academic world – giving the privilege to those who master it as a mother tongue to define the terms of discussion. All these questions, claim the critics, go in the opposite direction of creating a transnational European anthropology that is inclusive (Gregory 2015).

Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (2006) have developed a fine-grained framework for doing ‘empirical research on the way persons use their sense of justice to engage in critiques, justify their actions or veer towards agreement’ (Boltanski 2012: 36). Following their framework, we can turn these criticisms of European anthropology into objects of analysis, seeing anthropologists beyond their dimension as knowledge producers, also as creators of a ‘space of critique’ of European anthropology where the claims about what is considered unjust are articulated through the ideals of fairness and equality (Boltanski 2012: 6). And what is the role played by EASA here? I contend that this ‘space of critique’ started before the Association was created and is broader in terms of geographical scope. However, the Association funnelled these discussions as soon as it was founded. The tension between the all-inclusive utopian aspiration of pluralistic cosmopolitanism and the exclusive practice of boundary-work gave strengths and vulnerabilities to the Association, making it at the same time the new articulator of the disputes and the object in dispute. This is in line with Eriksen’s observation that EASA has become a field in which European anthropology is created, but also the condition of possibility in which it is contested (2019: 220), with the Association increasingly becoming the equivalent to European anthropology, and therefore also the object of contestation in itself.

The ideal of a cosmopolitan and pluralistic community of European anthropologists is, I argue, the articulating principle, the criterion of convergence by which European anthropology as a project and idea is both produced and contested. Both the critics and those who are criticised, in the end, have the same moral horizon when making their arguments. This hypothesis explains why most of the recent attempts to achieve the synthesis made official by Galey (1992) and later theorised by L’Estoile (2008) are trying to re-appropriate the concept of cosmopolitanism.

## **Anthropological ‘Cosmopolitanisms from Below’**

We are witnessing new attempts to overcome the boundaries that, according to the critics, were at the basis of European anthropology’s ‘hierarchies of knowledge’. The three parts of the ‘Forum Rethinking Euro-Anthropology’ (Green and Laviolette 2015a, 2015b; F. Martínez 2016) perfectly illustrate these attempts. In the introduction to Part Two of the Forum, Sarah Green and Patrick Laviolette (2015b) observed how the contributors portrayed the divisions among folklore, ethnology and anthropology as tensions in the past, but possibilities for collaboration in the future. Michał Buchowski and Hana Cervinkova (2015: 8) and Jasna Čapo have made similar arguments. Čapo (2015a, 2015b) urges the need for reaching that common ground, wondering what is still separating the two anthropological associations with a European scope – EASA and SIEF. Ethnologies in the different Central and Eastern European countries, they all argue, were more diverse and open to external influences than was represented in the ‘Western’ literature, preferring to talk about ‘ethno-anthropology’ as a way to reflect this diversity and encourage this desired convergence (Čapo 2015a: 53).

Buchowski and L’Estoile emphasise the role EASA can play in contributing to the creation of these common grounds. L’Estoile (2015) stresses the difficulties of reaching that utopian aspiration given the context of ‘hegemonic gravity’, and Buchowski (2015) highlights the ‘moral duty’ to move towards a ‘post-hegemonic anthropology’. In the end, he says in another piece together with Cervinkova (2015: 10), the disputes over ‘hierarchies of knowledge’ in European anthropology were productive as they ‘helped to bring the views of Western and Eastern or Central European researchers closer’, raising awareness among some Western anthropologists who did research in Central Europe. Among them, they mention in particular Chris Hann and Katherine Verdery. Indeed, Hann (2009, 2012) has recently become one of the leading advocates of the unification of anthropology and ethnology, after participating (Hann 2005) in an intense debate with Buchowski (2004, 2005) which came to harshly represent the tensions and main arguments used in the critical discussion of European anthropology (Cervinkova 2012: 161–162).

EASA’s Annual General Meeting of 2009, which took place in Poznań when Buchowski was President of the Association, clearly illustrates this new phase in the search for common grounds. Four years after the intense debate mentioned above, Hann was invited

to give the keynote speech, which he titled ‘Poznan Manifesto for a Public Anthropology in the European Public Sphere’. He made a call to unite ‘the anthropological and ethnological sciences’ in a context where a collective voice in the European public sphere was called for. Further, he proposed creating departments that would ‘combine in one academic unit options to specialise in the local (folk) culture and comparative *Völkerkunde*’ (Hann 2009: 8). The arguments deployed in the Poznan Manifesto are an excellent instance of my previous claim that EASA funnelled previous disputes on European anthropology, becoming a platform for its production and its contestation as a site for the production of ‘hierarchies of knowledge’. The Manifesto was delivered in one of EASA’s platforms of socialisation and published in one of its platforms of communication, and recognised the Association at the same time as ‘part of the problem’ identified by Hann – a fragmented and therefore socially and politically irrelevant field – and as part of the solution. Indeed, he suggested that a solution to overcoming the tensions and creating a united voice in the European public sphere would be to fuse EASA and SIEF into one single Association.

Hann’s proposal goes in the direction of other scholars I have mentioned. This trend has moved the debate towards a reinterpretation of classical anthropological cosmopolitanism as ‘cosmopolitanism from below’ (Ingram 2016). EASA’s cosmopolitan project of European anthropology has been criticised, among others by Papataxiarchis (2015: 333), because, he argues, ‘in practice [it] worked as an urgent plan of integrating the “national ethnologies” of Eastern Europe to Western European “social anthropology” after the fall of the Berlin Wall’. However, this project, he concludes, ‘has exhausted itself’. Others, like Čapo (2015a: 52), argue that the concept of cosmopolitanism was used to justify the practices of boundary-work in European anthropology.

For these reasons, critics propose going beyond the original formulation that articulated EASA’s original project of European anthropology. The addition of new adjectives is giving place to emergent formulations, such as ‘true’ (Čapo 2015b), ‘doubly rooted’ (Hann 2012), ‘federal’ (Papataxiarchis 2015) or ‘peripheral’ (Buchowski and Cervinkova 2015) forms of cosmopolitan anthropology. This reinterpretation of cosmopolitanism, highly influenced by the World Anthropologies framework, aspires to the construction of a non-hierarchical platform where it is possible to find the long-desired common ground (Čapo 2015a, 2015b; Eriksen 2019). It is, in the end, nothing different than what L’Estoile (2008) described as EASA’s model of pluralistic

internationalisation. This aspiration, we can conclude, is the horizon that articulates both the project of European anthropology and its different contestations.

### **Conclusion: Towards a Historical Ethnography of Current European Anthropology**

In this article, I have chronicled discussions about the status of European anthropology. I have argued that these discussions can be traced back to at least the 1980s and have continued over the years, transforming into disputes over the unequal relations between Western and Central/Eastern European scholars. I have shown how the emergence of EASA, with a specific project to unite European anthropologists, funnelled these discussions and the Association became, at the same time, the condition of possibility for a new articulation of the discussions, and on many occasions also the object of discussion. EASA became an object of discussion in itself because it emerged as the result of tension between the all-inclusive principle of cosmopolitan pluralism and the exclusionary practice of boundary-work. This tension made the Association vulnerable, and therefore the very object of discussion. Nevertheless, at the same time, its cosmopolitan aspiration made it strong, becoming in itself one of the platforms for the production of – and discussion about – European anthropology.

The concept of cosmopolitanism has become critically important in the discussions. EASA's project of European anthropology aimed at being pluralistic and cosmopolitan. However, it came to be criticised as a tool to encompass 'national ethnologies' as part of its project, not as an equal partner, but as an exotic, orientalist other. Recently, scholars from different European anthropological and ethnological traditions have defended once again the need to find common ground that can host the different sensibilities and ways of practising anthropology beyond traditional hegemonic hierarchies, and some people now seem more optimistic. A reinterpretation of anthropological cosmopolitanism has emerged: from below, horizontal, multi-centred, federal. These discussions have created their own 'space of critique', a moral order where an ideal of *justice* is the guiding principle and the search for *equality* is the final aim. The aspiration of a pluralist cosmopolitan platform is the moral horizon that articulates not only the project of European anthropology but also its different contestations as a site for the production of 'hierarchies of knowledge'. Gerd Baumann (1996) argued



that contesting culture is one of the many ways of producing culture. Extrapolating Baumann's argument to the anthropological field, which is the object of study here, I argue that precisely by contesting European anthropology as a site for the production of 'hierarchies of knowledge', anthropologists are producing it on a daily basis, as part of a broader reflexive and critical epistemology and ethos.

While this article puts a great deal of emphasis on the original tension that gave birth to EASA, and the criticisms of its project of European anthropology, I have also tried to put as much emphasis on its many accomplishments in creating a transnational European anthropology, and its continuous pursuit of making it more inclusive and diverse. It is not my intention, furthermore, to deny the possible limitations of this article. The history of current European anthropology is a highly complex and important subject. While trying to provide a general overview, the article consciously covers a small part of this history, and as such it is a brief and limited account of the field.

It is precisely because of this complexity that I think that these very recent phenomena in the history of anthropology need to be studied with the tools provided by the history and sociology of science and anthropology itself. The findings of this article point to the need to think further on these issues, by also doing ethnographic research on anthropologists, so it is possible to understand further questions such as the increasing blurring of the different classical anthropological traditions (D. O. Martínez 2016) trending towards a 'meta tradition' (Pina Cabral 2005); the spread of different models and theories around the globe, and how they are critically contested and creatively adapted in different contexts and periods; the re-emergence of folklore and ethnology; how the emergence of the World Anthropologies paradigm has influenced the discussions on knowledge hierarchies in different geographic and academic contexts; the critical role played by EASA in this ongoing process, especially in creating a transnational community of European anthropologists; and the broader political context of crystallisation of the European Union where EASA emerged. Answering the above questions could be the basis for a historical ethnography of current European anthropology as a transnational project.

### **Acknowledgements**

The research and writing for this article were supported by the Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity and

the Sonderforschungsbereich 923 *Bedrohte Ordnungen*, University of Tübingen. I would like to thank Andre Gingrich, Jan Hinrichsen, Monique Scheer and the UnKut crew in Tübingen for their invitations to discuss this project and their useful suggestions, and Francisco Martínez, the editors of *AJEC* and the anonymous reviewers for helping me make this article better.

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### Notes

1. The names and background information of these local scholars have been changed to protect their anonymity.
2. Llobera's argument was not shared among all his Mediterraneanist and Europeanist colleagues. See, for instance, the critical response received by his provocative article – published in vol. 7 (issues 1 and 2) of the journal *Critique of Anthropology* (1987a, 1987b) – from a long list of anthropologists from different European countries and the US, including, to mention a few, James Fernandez, Christian Giordano, Michael Herzfeld, Peter Loizos and João de Pina Cabral.
3. This scepticism towards postmodern US-American anthropology was prevalent among the founders at the beginning but later changed to a more open and sympathetic understanding (see Eriksen 2019; Hannerz 2008; and Andre Gingrich's interview in Girke 2014). There is an article yet to be written on this question.

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