Preface

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As the new century unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that contexts in which anthropology is practised as an established discipline, scholarly enterprise, applied endeavour, profession and intellectual pursuit keep changing, altering and transforming. The general aim in putting together this collection of essays was to test the state and condition of the relationship between anthropology and society in a number of countries where anthropological discourses and ethnographic activity have had a tangible presence in academia and beyond. Adopting a comparative approach – anthropology's long-term companion – that we hoped would once again allow us to highlight where things have developed differently and where they seemed the same (or indeed were only equally illusorily), we asked leading practitioners from Austria, Brazil, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, Russia, South Africa and the United States to ponder the same, rather broadly posed, set of questions:

- What was historically, and what is now the role of anthropology in your society?
- What does the general, non-academic public know about anthropology in your society – that is, how is anthropology viewed by a layperson in your society?
- What is the stereotype of the 'anthropologist' in your society?
- To what degree does anthropological knowledge penetrate the broader society beyond the walls of academia in your country?
- What is the status of anthropology among other social science/humanities disciplines in your society?
- What meaning is attached to the terms 'anthropology', 'ethnology' and 'ethnography' in your academic tradition?
- What are considered privileged and less-privileged spaces within anthropology as a research terrain in your academic tradition?

Being not in any way novel but rather recurrent, these questions provided both a convenient point of departure for building a discussion, and an invitation of sorts to rethink matters that somehow tend to settle in the taken-for-granted domain. Every once in a while we, as practitioners, encounter these questions, muse on them and speculate about them, yet they reveal that every time there is more to uncover and less of what one might hold ‘obvious’.

For one thing, the reflections presented here demonstrate once again that, leaving aside the question of whether there can or should be one social science here and another one ‘across the Pyrenees’, we live today in a world where there *are* different social sciences which, like ways of life, are marked by varying styles, agendas, vocabularies and ideals. The essays themselves, as the reader will see, vary quite interestingly with regard to their genre and length, their mood and focus – is this a reflection of the authors’ different personalities and writing preferences or also an effect of the cultural difference between the various traditions? Our disciplines differ both in the way they are set up and in the way they are practised – contexts influence activities, and activities reflect back to contexts.

It is always instructive to look at particularities of the institutionalisation of anthropology, which have set specific directions and inertias that up to the present day account for many of our professional biases and reflexes. Compare, for example, the case of the United States, where despite dramatic changes the four-field approach seems to have retained its influence on both institutional and individual professional trajectories, and the case of the former Soviet Union/Russia, where ethnography has been long held to be a lower-status sub-discipline of history rather than either an independent social science discipline or, for example, a methodological domain of anthropology.

It is certainly no less important to compare current institutional frameworks and academic as well as non-academic contexts within which anthropology locates or moulds its identity and forces specific identities onto its practitioners. These frameworks and contexts, as many of us have rediscovered recently, may exert powerful influences on what we do, what we teach and what we

learn. Whether they constitute a global trend of sorts or remain peculiarly bound to situations in particular societies (or indeed represent a mix of both) is still a question that needs more attention and examination. There have been many worrying commonalities lately in factors influencing university agendas and curricula in disciplinary traditions of different countries. Compare, for instance, the tendency towards instituting ‘outcome-based teaching’ in South Africa and the shift towards introducing formal criteria of ‘social relevance’ in the United Kingdom, which certainly echo similar developments in the United States and elsewhere. Examples of the responses of the younger generation to rising pressures and instabilities of the job market have been rather dissimilar. Consider the increasing importance of self-fashioned activism among younger anthropologists in the United States, the rising trend in the activity of freelancers in German-speaking countries and the tendency towards the relative alienation of younger scholars in Russia.

Relationships with neighbouring fields, which remain an ever-shifting territory, and patterns of involvement and work with non-academic agencies, such as political/governmental institutions and the media, are of course among the topics that many of the contributors chose to focus on as extremely important. Consider, for example, different patterns of political engagement, of which Brazil is certainly an interesting case, or problems and vicissitudes of engaging the United States media in anthropology’s desire to ‘go public’, or ambivalent attitudes towards anthropology in the Netherlands media.

After decades of profoundly revealing critique and discussions in this area, the accounts of the perception and construction of the ‘field’, of paradigm shifts, and of terminological vocabularies are still fascinating. Consider, for example, the rather odd differences in the meaning invested in such terms as ‘anthropology’, ‘ethnology’ and ‘ethnography’ today in various scholarly traditions. Consider, too, the norms and patterns of charting the ethnographic ‘field’, with those distinctive ‘bring-the-field-back-home’ trends that have marked research development in the United States and many European countries, as well as the ‘field-in-our-backyard’ syndrome so familiar to Brazilian, South African and Russian anthropologists.

In addition, of course, what perhaps remains significant above all is the much discussed problem of outreach and feedback, which is in many ways a problem of understanding whether we communicate meaningfully what we have to say to others who (as these essays indicate) might not even know who we are or, perhaps in a still more frustrating scenario, firmly believe that we are not who we actually are. Testing the state of such an understanding is undoubtedly one of the aims of the present collection which, as we hope, can add to our awareness of why it is so crucial and consequential to preserve (to take only slightly out of context Penny Harvey's subtle expression) the 'precious little common ground between the public and the professional imagination'. We hope that the essays presented here will enable us to see more clearly how all the above-mentioned constituencies come together and participate in, or contribute to, the shaping of particular patterns of relationship between anthropologies and societies that are produced and reproduced in our different countries, divided and united by our different yet still common ways of life.

It is in the nature of the exercise that this collection offers no conclusions, general or otherwise. Rather, it highlights issues and trends that we will need to revisit from time to time. From different directions, including the increasing focus on transferable skills and the apparent gradual erasure of the *anthropos* from some areas of anthropological inquiry, contemporary trends are in danger of turning anthropology into one of those disappearing worlds that were once – and to a large extent still are – its primary metier. At the same time, Europeanist anthropology appears to be gathering strength. The reinvention of the discipline east of the former Iron Curtain and the 'discovery' of European ethnology in the United Kingdom are indicative of a new vigour, vitality and curiosity, which will be explored in future issues.

As AYEC returns to being AJEC – the Anthropological Journal of European Cultures – in 2008, initially with two issues per year, we plan to introduce new elements to the format. The thematically focused approach that has characterised the journal since its inception will be retained, supplemented by book reviews, short research reports and debates. An expanded international advisory board

will work with the editorial team, based at the University of Ulster's Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages, to develop a strong presence for AJEC in the field of Europeanist anthropology, understood in a poly-cultural sense that accommodates different academic traditions.