

THEMATIC FOCUS: TOPICS IN EUROPEANIST RESEARCH¹

Introduction Mapping Europeanist Research

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There are two meanings attached to the concept 'Europeanist' when applied within the boundaries of our discipline. The term can be used to refer to the practice of anthropology *in* Europe (e.g. Grillo 1980; Macdonald 1993). This usage primarily indicates the region where fieldwork and research is carried out, as when we label other such fields of anthropological practice 'Africanist' or 'Americanist'. It is thus a mere indication of the regional focus of interest. A more circumscribed usage would take Europeanist anthropology as the anthropology *of* Europe (e.g. Goddard, Llobera and Shore 1994; Barrera-González 2005). The broader object of study being Europe itself, the term could not be properly applied to whatever piece of research and writing done on some part of Europe. Instead, it would entail studies with a substantial comparative dimension and/or a regional outlook.

In a still more restrictive sense, Europeanist research might be defined as the investigation of the processes of Europeanization in any of its multiple dimensions. Over the last twenty years or so there has been growing interest in the anthropological study of the institutions of Europe and the processes of its political constitution (Abélès 1992, 1996; Borneman and Fowler 1997; Bellier and Wilson 2000; Shore 2000). These are primarily the endeavours of applying anthropological theory and methodologies to the studies of European politics and efforts of bringing about a supranational polity. One main aim of a Europeanist anthropology in this sense would be to trace the characteristic features of the whole region, in order to grasp some ideas and imageries of Europe, broach the investigation of new emerging social and cultural realities (cf. Malmberg and Stråth 2000; Pagden 2002). However, a Europeanist approach to research where Europe is the primary object of study ought necessarily to have an interdisciplinary character, because it touches on issues of philosophy, history, political science and sociology, semiotics, narrative studies and the like.



If we are to take up the concept ‘Europeanist’ in the most circumscribed sense, we will have to face important theoretical and epistemological challenges. Is Europe an overarching idea, a concept that has a currency only in the domain of high culture, or is it rather a cluster of experiences shared by a set of diverse peoples, the Europeans, who nonetheless live in similar circumstances across the continent (e.g. due to homogenising policies, mobility and migration, transborder and regional co-operation, commonalities in culture and history)? Is this budding new field of research driven by some fashion prevalent among scholars, or is it pushed by the need to respond to the growing importance of specific processes and practices, given at the level of everyday life, in contemporary Europe? Does the advancement in the building of a new polity and economy (Europe, the EU) lead to the emergence of new social groups and novel social and cultural realities?

This is ultimately a matter open for empirical research and theoretical reflection. The authors contributing to this thematic issue respond to this intellectual challenge by investigating, *modo antropologico*, the following themes: the debates about European integration issuing at the local and national level in the Czech Republic; the emergence of new social and cultural practices related to the institutionalisation of transnational Euro-regions in Slovakia; the politics of identity among Lithuanian migrant communities in the U.S.A.; the state of migration studies in Bulgaria; the observable attitudes, prejudices and behaviours towards African migrants in Moscow; the memories and rationalisations of pronatalist policies, implemented during the Communist period, in present-day Romania; travel and the building of new identities among young educated Poles.

Most of the articles that compose this issue fall within the category of ‘anthropology *of* Europe’. They are contributions to Europeanist research in the moderately restricted sense of the word. Elements of the other two categories, anthropology *in* Europe at one end, and the anthropology of European institutions and processes at the other end, supplement the theoretically and epistemologically predominant middle way. The thematic issue is also characterised by the inadvertent and unplanned concentration of research topics, as well as authors, in Central and Eastern Europe, including Russia. This accidental effect can be viewed and explained in the context of post-communist transformations which brought about a strong leaning towards the idea of Europe and Europeanness for most of the countries of the region. The public and scholarly interest in Europe and European matters was thus

higher there. Arguably the strongest (and often contradictory) feelings and meanings of being European are currently being voiced and debated with the greatest intensity in the former peripheries of Europe. The argument pointed out above might also be viewed as a paradox, since the passionate engagement in debates for and against Europe and Europeanness could be interpreted as a reproduction of the peripheral status of Central and Eastern Europe (cf. Kuus 2004).

Some of the authors in this issue (e.g. Hana Horáková and Alexandra Bitušíková) explain why they do research ‘in’ and ‘on’ Europe, since – although the concept of an ‘anthropology at home’ is already almost thirty years old – anthropology is still popularly associated with the ‘exotic’ and the ‘distant’, and doing anthropology ‘at home’ requires some additional effort of academic legitimisation. The question is whether this is linked to the particular status of the discipline in Central and Eastern Europe, where it is still an emergent field that struggles to establish its legitimacy and build an academic niche for itself; or whether it rather signals that bringing anthropology to Europe (or any other ‘home’) will always be problematic.

The articles in the issue accentuate the importance of the historical perspective in anthropological research. The memory of trauma (as in Lorena Anton’s article) and memory of the past (as in Vytis Čiubrinskas’ text) are components of contemporary practices and imageries of Europe and Europeans. Thus Europeanist research has a particular task in unravelling historical sensitivities which are specific to the European scene. Moreover, the contributions to this issue demonstrate that some categories that are used in anthropological research (which also constitute a part of the social and political reality) have an ambiguous status and character. Magdalena Elchinova and Alexandra Bitušíková point to the limitations of categories such as ‘nation-state’, ‘community’ or ‘ethnicity’ when used as explanatory devices or broader analytical frameworks for research. They emphasise that continuous and unreflective reference to these categories can result in simplistic and static representations of social and cultural reality. At the same time some hierarchical and reifying concepts (e.g. East and West) still have currency as *emic* notions used for constructing the images of Europe. In Vytis Čiubrinskas’ article, for instance, national identity is viewed dialectically, as a category that can serve the empowerment of migrant and diaspora minorities. Two dilemmas mirroring each other arise from these ambiguities: how to bring the vocabulary of anthropological description closer to the language

of the people studied without resigning from what anthropology has already achieved in terms of the critique of these categories, on the one hand; and on the other hand, how to bring the language of the studied people closer to the discursive conventions of anthropological description, without the ‘colonisation’ of their life worlds.

Lastly, it has to be noted that articles collected in this issue are methodologically heterogeneous. They rely not only on participant observation as a source of empirical evidence but also on text and narrative analysis, archive materials, in-depth interviews and sociological surveys. The methodological heterogeneity demonstrated by the articles collected in this issue amounts implicitly to making a statement about the need to apply a diverse range of methodologies in our research pursuits and about the convenience of aiming to develop approaches more interdisciplinary in character.

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Notes

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