Obituary for Christian Giordano

27 October 1945 – 29 December 2018

At the end of last year, the *AJEC* team received the sad news that Christian Giordano had suddenly died during his Christmas holidays in Vilnius. Christian was one of the founders of *AJEC*, shaped the journal significantly during its early years as co-editor (1990–2001) and, for a time (1992–1998), publisher. He remained connected with it over the years, regularly acting as peer reviewer and informal advisor during Ullrich's tenure as editor. His final contribution to *AJEC* (Giordano 2018) was an essay for last year's special issue in memory of Ina-Maria Greverus, reflecting on their encounter through a shared interest in Sicily, their long personal friendship, and their often-theatrical academic relationship.

Born in Lugano, Switzerland to Italian parents who had fled there from Rijeka/Fiume towards the end of the Second World War, Christian initially studied law and economics at the University of Bern before moving to Heidelberg, where he took up sociology, ethnology, art history and romance studies. His doctoral thesis in Sociology (1973), on occupational confraternities in Sicily, 1750–1890, passed with *summa cum laude*, marked the beginning of his life-long love affair with that island. He moved back to Switzerland, taking up a research assistantship at Basel, but he was increasingly unhappy there, to the point that he considered giving up his academic career. In 1980, following an earlier meeting with Ina-Maria Greverus, he returned to Germany as an assistant professor at her Institut für Kulturanthropologie und Europäische Ethnologie in Frankfurt am Main, where he gained his Habilitation in the winter semester 1986/87 with a thesis on mentalities and rationalities in Mediterranean societies. He retained an attachment to that institute as Privatdozent after he was appointed the first director of the new Museum of Extra-European Cultures at Lugano.

During that period, Ullrich and Christian first met in Llangollen, a small town in Wales that, in the 1980s and 1990s, hosted the European Centre for Traditional and Regional Cultures. Its director in the late 1980s, Franz-Josef Stummann, was another of Ina-Maria Greverus's Habilitanten, and together, the three anthropologists were hatching the idea of an English-language journal that would provide an international platform for anthropological scholarship on Europe from non-Anglophone backgrounds (Greverus 2012). Franz-Josef and

Ullrich – then a freshly baked post-doc without definitive subject-disciplinary affiliation – were teaching ethnology and ethnographic methods at the newly established Institute of Irish Studies in Liverpool at the time, and Franz-Josef invited Ullrich to join their meeting. In the back of Franz-Josef's VW minibus on the way to Manchester airport, Christian revealed that he had – as they say in German-speaking countries – *einen Ruf angenommen* ('accepted an appointment') to a chair in social anthropology at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. He held that chair, associated with permanent directorship of the Institute of Social Anthropology, until 2016.

Christian's research interests ranged widely, including the political, economic and historical anthropology of southeast Europe, Mediterranean societies and, more recently, southeast Asia. From his long-term base in Switzerland, he undertook extensive fieldwork, including in Italy (especially Sicily), Spain (especially Andalusia), Portugal (Alentejo and Ribatejo), Turkey (Eastern Anatolia), Greece (Epiros) and Tunisia. In the late 1980s, he expanded his fieldwork into Poland and Paraguay and from 1989 to 2007 conducted long-term research in Bulgaria (Dobrudzha) and Romania (Banat) as well as shorter explorations in Croatia, Slovenia (Istria), Morocco, Mauritius and, again, Sicily. From 1996 until 2014, he was engaged in long-term fieldwork in Malaysia (Pulau Penang).

His long list of honorary and guest professorships included numerous universities in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe as well as overseas, especially in Latin America and Malaysia. He was awarded honorary doctorates by the State University of Tbilisi (Georgia) and the West University of Timișoara (Romania). From 2002, he was a permanent guest professor at the University of Bucharest's UNESCO Chair in Inter-cultural and Inter-religious Exchanges, which he had helped to establish in 1999. Here he taught courses in intercultural communication and intercultural management master programmes, and *AJEC*'s current social media editor, Dr Cristina Clopot, was one of his students.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, Ullrich met Christian occasionally at conferences, and he always took a friendly interest in how this undisciplined younger academic was getting on. Then they started seeing more of each other again, as their search lights, for different reasons, shifted towards eastern European locations. For a time, they were both involved in an ESF-funded network supporting anthropology in post-Communist countries. Christian was deeply concerned about sociocultural anthropology after the demise of Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and extremely supportive of the 'small'

anthropologies there, always expressing his strong methodological and discipline-political support and standing up for the place and role of anthropology vis-à-vis history, sociology or ethnology (*Volkskunde*-style) as the usually more dominant disciplines in these countries.

Setting an example of a scholar acting internationally (e.g., through IUEAS) against the marginalisation of Central/Eastern European anthropology, he established cooperation between Swiss anthropologists and their Bulgarian, Romanian, Polish and Baltic colleagues. Christian participated actively in the Baltic Anthropology Graduate School – a consortium of five universities in the Baltic States, and closely connected the University of Fribourg with Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas, Lithuania – by establishing a teaching exchange programme, similar to links he had been making with half a dozen universities in Central/Eastern Europe. An inspiring and devoted guest professor, Christian taught political anthropology regularly at universities in the region. Ullrich's own visiting professorship at Vytautas Magnus University coincided with that period, and so Ullrich, Vytis and Christian met more frequently when Christian was not spending time in Malaysia.

Christian was not only cofounder of *AJEC* but also chief editor of the Freiburg Studies in Social Anthropology book series and a member of numerous journal editorial boards, including *Ethnologia Balkanica*, *Focaal*, *Eastern European Countryside*, *Lithuanian Ethnology: Studies in Social Anthropology and Ethnology*, and *Sociologija – Mintis ir veiksmas*. He authored or edited some thirty books and published more than 260 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters. A prolific writer, he was also an empathic, spirited and supportive mentor to generations of students and early career researchers. A proverbial Renaissance Man with a firm academic grounding and a wide disciplinary reach, he was a committed and constructive champion of interdisciplinary research. Christian was also a very warm-hearted colleague with a unique sense of humour, anthropologically curious and open-minded, who considered nothing human as alien to him. He will be sorely missed.

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I (CC) discovered anthropology rather late in my academic career, but I had the honour and privilege to learn some introductory notions from Prof Christian Giordano during my master studies at the UNESCO Chair in Inter-cultural and Inter-religious Exchanges (Faculty of Philosophy, Bucharest, Romania), where he had been a guest lecturer for many years. For the particular course my colleagues and I followed in 2008, the Anthropology of Intercultural Relations, Prof Giordano shared this task with his colleague from Fribourg, Prof. François Ruegg, and they took turns to visit our campus and teach.

My colleagues and I remember with great fondness his classes. We enjoyed his engaging way of delivering teaching materials, prompting us to understand societies and groups from different perspectives. It was clear to us that the teaching materials were based on an extensive depth of knowledge. Later on, I would often turn to Prof Giordano's publications for his insightful analyses of the anthropology of Europe. Although our interactions were brief during the limited time of one semester, I have always kept a fond memory for Prof Giordano, who opened the door for me to an exciting and rewarding area of study and research.

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