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## Forum: Rethinking Euro-Anthropology : Part 1

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# Forum

## Rethinking Euro-Anthropology

This forum opens up a debate about the diversity that is European Anthropology and the directions in which it is travelling. To set the scene, we contacted SA/AS's Editorial Board and other prominent anthropologists, inviting them to write a short comment on the topic. We suggested they might wish to discuss 'any of the diverse anthropological debates, approaches or issues that have been generated in European universities, and that have made a contribution to your own research'. We also welcomed work/approaches that are not necessarily 'generated in European universities' but that have been, or are, handled differently or with different emphases in Europe as opposed to other parts of the anthropological world. For instance, this could include some of the thoughts about 'sociality' vs 'the cultural', or work on 'indigeneity', or on environment, post-colonialism and so on. We added a comment about being aware that 'there is nothing holding this diversity together as such; our aim is to try and gain a sense of the range of institutionally, conceptually, socially, politically, economically – perhaps even aesthetically or morally – distinctive ways anthropology has been thought, debated, and practised from one or other European vantage point'.

Appreciating that it's not easy to say much in such a short statement of 500 to 1000 words, the idea was nonetheless to generate some overall snapshot. The purview that has resulted is therefore far from exhaustive. After approaching around 35 people, the Forum below reflects the responses we got. We've divided them here into two: the first nine deal, more or less, with such issues as histories, traditions and the impacts of funding, and the second ten address more specific conceptual statements regarding particular research projects or approaches.

In casting our net wide, we tried to convey an ethos for beginning a debate, rather than closing or directing one. The idea was simply to invite colleagues to say what was on their mind, so as to start the ball rolling for a longer and more detailed discussion over the next four years. The results, printed here virtually as they were written, are a rich start to satisfying those aims. Some threads to the commentaries are briefly summarised below. Collectively, they raise many of the key issues affecting anthropology today, not only in Europe, but all over the world. Yet there was also something that stood out as an issue of distinctive relevance to the European region, and which to our minds may form a basis for developing the debate considerably further in future issues.

In discussing *historical, institutional, and national/state differences in anthropological practice* (Eriksen, Gregory, Papataxiarchis, Cervinkova, Kuper, Hviding), several

of the contributors made comments about what makes the European context distinctive, and what should be done about it. Speaking both from personal experience and through an overview of the conditions in which anthropology is practised, a surprisingly coherent message came through here: that location matters. Even where the broad traditions of anthropology are similar between locations, differences are generated by the institutional position of anthropology; by the particular trajectories the discipline took in any given country, or even university; and by the vagaries of historical events.

Noting this, Papataxiarchis calls for an ‘anthropological federalism’ that embraces these differences and generates both vertical and horizontal alliances across them. That contrasts with Kuper’s call for a continuation of the cosmopolitan ideals with which EASA began. Somewhat differently from either of these, Gregory suggests that emphasising the diversity of anthropologies practised in the European region provides an opportunity to turn the concept of ‘Eurocentrism’ upside down – to draw on a sparkling array of different national and even institutional traditions to imply that ‘Eurocentrism’ should stand for the opposite of singularity or homogeneity. Gregory suggests there might yet be hope to develop a ‘truly transnational Eurocentric anthropology’, echoing the view of some others, including Pina-Cabral, that Europe long ago stopped being European, in the earlier 20th-century meaning of the word.

Whether one agrees with any of these suggestions, or indeed with other suggestions, such as Corsín Jiménez’s call for recalibrating anthropology’s thinking as a ‘prototype’ form, what clearly comes through from the contributions overall is the sense that what the European region can offer to anthropology is its diversity – linguistic, institutional, historical, intellectual, political. Yet there is also a restlessness in the tone of many of the contributors – an impatience.

Summaries of other possible issues for further debate are listed below.

- *The political and economic conditions in which anthropology is being practised, and the challenges and opportunities these present* (Corsín Jiménez, Gregory, Miller, Papataxiarchis, Hviding). Here, the current financial crisis, which is hitting the southern part of Europe hardest, is clearly presenting enormous challenges, but also some new possibilities. As Papataxiarchis notes on his experience in Greece, while anthropology is thriving intellectually, it is severely threatened institutionally there at the moment. At the same time, Corsín Jiménez notes that the frosty environment in Spanish universities has pushed some academics out into the digital world, presenting work within Medialab/Prado, a leading ‘hacklab’. Both Miller and Gregory note the enormous effect the new European Research Council’s funding is having on the potential for making anthropology more visible.
- *Anthropology’s language regimes, which carve deep ravines between what is known by different anthropological communities* (Gregory, Kuper, Nic Craith). This issue is relevant everywhere, but several commentators pointed out that in the European region diversity of language has had a particularly fragmenting effect. While acknowledging the political hierarchy involved in this, Gregory suggests that the dominance of English does not necessarily prevent diversity of debate.
- *The shifting foci of anthropological attention, particularly as a result of technical change* (Miller, Maguire, Ingold, Wade). Technical and biological transformation leading to questions of the reclassification, or even recalibration, of

anthropology and its bits and parts. Here, there is an underlying question of the way that technologies seem to constantly slip the knot of being somewhere in particular: indeed, they appear to have the capacity to alter locations. Wade notes that debates about race, biology and genetics are circumscribed in different ways in Europe and the USA; the science may be the same, but what can be discussed is not.

- As might be expected, *changes in the places and peoples that anthropology studies* have demanded that anthropological practice and concepts shift their goal posts (Pina-Cabral, Wulff, Siniscalchi, Dawson, Favero), and have also led to renewed reminders that anthropologists should live up to the new moral obligations that these changes have brought about (Miller, Meyer, Hviding, Cervinkova). Thoughts about the way these shifts are, or should be, affecting anthropology's relations with other disciplines, and even redefining the discipline itself, are also present (Wade, Corsín Jiménez, Kuper, Meyer, Okely).

We look forward to publishing various responses to these thought pieces and provocations in our second issue as editors in November.

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## EVTHYMIOS PAPATAXIARCHIS

For a European union of anthropological localities

I am in favour of a European union of anthropological localities. I believe that it is time to conceive the anthropology that is practised in Europe in a new way, not just in respect to individuals but also, not to say primarily, in terms of the places where social anthropology is established. We should give more attention to 'anthropological localities', i.e. the venues – social, institutional, virtual and geographical – of anthropological production, instruction and conversation. We should foster these loci of anthropological synergy where our disciplinary identity is being built.

Our anthropological localities have a 'complex phenomenological quality'. They are products of an anthropological imagination, which is informed by varying epistemological traditions, interpretations of the ethnographic canon and political sensibilities, and traverses 'national schools' and ethnographic communities. This diverse anthropological imagination is often inscribed in social forms – programmes of study, projects, exchanges and public discussions. The small anthropological worlds, which many of us inhabit on the ground, provide the vital breathing space of our discipline. This is where we deal with the cognitive challenges related to our research and teaching as well as sense our professional vulnerability in difficult times.