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## The Anthropology of Eurasia in Eurasia

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### Abstract

This paper proposes reinterpretations of the concepts of cosmopolitanism and of Eurasia, both of which are commonly perceived negatively inside and outside anthropology. Cosmopolitanism is here understood as central to the character of anthropology as a comparative discipline, the antithesis of the ‘national ethnography’ (*Volkskunde*) tradition. It can be practised at various levels. On historical grounds, both short term and long term, it is argued that Eurasia is a highly appropriate level for comparative analysis. Eurasia is defined here as the entire landmass between the Atlantic, Pacific, Indian and Arctic Oceans. In addition to Asia and Europe, Africa north of the Sahara is included on historical grounds. While some parts of this “mega-continent” are well represented in the anthropological literature, many have been neglected. Recognition of the unity of the whole has been hindered by Eurocentric preoccupations with civilisational differences and by the dominant research methods of modern anthropology.

The second part of the paper relates these considerations to some of the practical challenges currently faced by those trying to establish a more cosmopolitan style of anthropology in countries where *Volkskunde* has been dominant hitherto. Specifically, it is suggested that this concept of Eurasia could provide a new platform for teaching and research in the former socialist countries. This might ease the task of grafting new anthropological programmes onto existing intellectual traditions, thereby facilitating a gradualist transition to cosmopolitanism and avoiding the dangers of imperialism and missionisation; but the level of Eurasia does not, of course, exhaust the possibilities for anthropological comparison.

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## Introduction

The very term anthropology continues to spawn almost endless confusion. In this paper I define it to include a broad spectrum of research traditions – not only cultural and social anthropology but also ethnology, ethnography and their variants in other languages; the biological and philosophical domains are excluded from consideration here, though they too have been and remain influential in shaping this semantic field.

While many of the best known anthropologists have been highly cosmopolitan intellectuals, our subject is also widely perceived to celebrate local rootedness. Even before the beginnings of the institutionalisation of anthropology in nineteenth century Europe one can detect tensions between those concerned to celebrate the ‘unity of mankind’ and those more concerned to explore differences. The arguments between ‘universalists’ and ‘relativists’, as the camps are commonly labelled nowadays, have been an integral part of the discipline’s history. Confusingly, the same term is sometimes deployed in different ways by the opposing sides. Thus universalists have used the concept of culture in the singular as a synonym for the achievements of civilisation, and many cognitive anthropologists today emphasise common interpretive schemas and skills of symbolic communication shared by the entire species. But relativists have pluralised the concept, emphasised the difficulties of cross-cultural translation, and even claimed that different cultures may be cognitively as well as ethically incommensurable (see Hann 2002a).

It is common to trace the latter tradition back to Johann Gottfried von Herder and romantic reactions in Germany to the universalism underpinning the French enlightenment. The Herderian impulse was enthusiastically adopted by nationalist movements in many parts of Eastern Europe. The practice of anthropology here came to be tied to *Volkskunde* rather than *Völkerkunde*, to investigations of the popular material and spiritual culture of one’s own nation rather than to comparative social science. The national ethnographers were the antithesis of such cosmopolitans as Franz Boas and Bronislaw Malinowski, continental Europeans who played key roles in the consolidation of anthropology in the English speaking world. Yet these founders also tended to a plural concept of culture, shaped by their training in central Europe. Moreover the new emphasis that both laid on fieldwork was decisive for the professionalisation of anthropology in the course of the twentieth century. Fine grained ethnographic accounts of small communities became the dominant currency in the discipline, and older comparative agendas were increasingly dismissed as scientific or positivist. From this perspective, the recent impact of postmodernism can be viewed as a continuation of trends launched by Malinowski, Boas and their students.

Scholars such as Marshall Sahlins and Clifford Geertz, two of the most influential anthropologists of recent decades, are of course cosmopolitan intellectuals who insist on the vitality and creativity of cultures everywhere. In this they resemble Herder and his eighteenth century contemporaries, for whom to be cosmopolitan meant to travel to other European countries and to learn their languages as a sign of aristocratic sophistication. Few of the more celebrated modern anthropologists in Western countries have devoted much attention to their own culture (David Schneider was an important exception). It has been a different story in other parts of the world. In Eastern Europe even the experience of socialism, with its ostensibly universalist and internationalist ideology, did not lead to a radical break with the habits and research practices of national traditions. In the Soviet Union, ethnologists were renamed ethnographers and obliged to provide support for Marxist-Leninist theories, i.e. to work within evolutionist models originally put forward by Engels on the basis of work by L. H. Morgan. But the *ethnos* theories of Yulian Bromley, the dominant anthropologist of the last Soviet generation, in effect endorsed a 'primordialist' perception of ethno-national identities. In short, in spite of increased contacts in later years of socialism (see Gellner 1980), the gulf between Soviet and eastern European anthropologists and their cosmopolitan counterparts in the West remained very deep. It continued to affect research methods as well as intellectual underpinnings: since most socialist scholars worked in their own countries, few saw any necessity to replace their traditional 'expedition' model with the Malinowskian pattern of long-term fieldwork usually favoured by Westerners.<sup>2</sup>

The end of socialist rule produced uncertainty in many branches of the academy. Some anthropologists had good anti-communist credentials and very few lost their positions for political reasons. But how new governments would treat anthropology as a discipline was by no means obvious. How would older scholars react to initiatives by younger colleagues to introduce new programmes derived mostly from the English-speaking world? How would they react to attempts by foreign researchers to carry out new styles of fieldwork in their own countries, some of them previously all but closed to foreigners? Since this is an important part of our research agenda, the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology (MPISA) has an obvious stake in these issues. This paper emerges from my own learning process in the course

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<sup>2</sup> This generalisation of course conceals a good deal of variation. Marxist dogmas and repudiation of nationalist traditions were most conspicuous in the German Democratic Republic. As a colonial power throughout Eurasia, Russia developed an anthropological tradition much broader than the Herderian pattern more typical of the smaller countries of Eastern Europe; some of these also produced notable scholars whose work ranged beyond the framework of national ethnography.

of numerous conversations with colleagues throughout the region over the last few years.<sup>3</sup> It is structured in two parts. Part I gives a concise account of the thinking behind my own Department at MPISA, particularly concerning the designation Eurasia. Part II is a discussion of some of the practical obstacles currently impeding the consolidation of anthropology in the region of our specialisation. I take the opportunity here to outline my own preferences and advice concerning what sort of anthropology we should be pursuing, and how to achieve these goals in terms of academic political alliances and the career paths of the new generation of anthropologists. Finally I repeat in the Conclusion that my proposal for more systematic comparative work at the level of Eurasia is not to be misunderstood as the replication at a higher level of *Volkskunde* or *europäische Ethnologie*; greater attention to Eurasia is merely one step, long overdue, in the direction of a more comprehensive cosmopolitanism.

### **Part I: Levels of Cosmopolitanism**

#### *Cosmopolitanism I: Regions*

I take anthropological cosmopolitanism to mean simply a commitment to the investigation of human diversity, untrammelled by one's own national affiliation. It is entirely compatible with Radcliffe-Brown's 'comparative sociology', though it need not necessarily aspire to this degree of natural scientific rigor. Cosmopolitanism does not imply that the researcher's own background is unimportant or that anthropology cannot be practised 'at home'. On the contrary, despite the forces of academic globalisation, I expect anthropology to remain a discipline in which most practitioners spend most of their lives in their home societies. They engage with the world, but they do not do so as the cliché 'rootless intellectuals' who figure in negative stereotypes of cosmopolitanism, in the former socialist countries and elsewhere. In addition to whatever other, overt comparisons that an anthropologist may attempt, there is nearly always a covert, implicit dimension of comparison with one's own society.

Pragmatically, it is not always easy or sensible to approach comparison globally. The minimal level of cosmopolitanism (the metaphor of levels is not ideal but I cannot find a better one) must be an interest in cultural traditions outside one's own country: one needs to be aware at least of the immediate regional context. Within one's own country, one needs to be similarly aware of traditions other than those of the dominant nation or group. For

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<sup>3</sup> I draw in this paper upon lectures, papers and discussions at numerous venues in 2003: International Association of South East European Anthropologists (Graz, February), University of Poznań (May), Congress of Ethnologists and Anthropologists of Russia (Omsk, June), University of Fribourg (Coppet, June), University of Cluj Napoca (September), Mediterranean Ethnological Summer Symposium (Piran, September) and the First Baltic States Anthropology Conference (Vilnius, October). I am grateful to colleagues on each of these occasions for comments and criticism; and also to Joachim Otto Habeck, Keith Hart, Kimberly Hart, Patrick Heady, and Mihály Sárkány for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

example, the social organisation of Gypsies was long neglected in many countries of eastern Europe because it was of little or no interest to most scholars working within the national ethnography paradigm. A new generation of cosmopolitan anthropologists is only now beginning to address this shortcoming.

Some countries experienced more or less violent forms of 'ethnic cleansing' in the course of the twentieth century, so that the composition of the population, in terms of linguistic, religious and other cultural features, often changed radically. The territories of Poland and Hungary, the two countries where I have most fieldwork experience, are much more Polish and Hungarian today than they were a century ago. But even 'presentist' projects, i.e. those concerned with aspects of social life following generations of 'homogenisation', may need to pay some attention to the earlier diversity. Work on regions with a multi-ethnic past, including studies exploring new constructions of the past in the postsocialist present, will almost certainly have to engage critically with national traditions of historiography and ethnography.

'Region' is (at least in modern parlance) a vaguer term than 'nation', 'country' or 'state'. The non-cosmopolitan ethnographers have typically concentrated their efforts on one or more specific regions *within* the territory of their nation, but that is not what I have in mind here. I am thinking more in terms of clusters of countries which share features such as ecological conditions, a history of colonisation, perhaps religion etc. For example, the three countries of the eastern Baltic which regained their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union might for some purposes be considered as a region, with many common features but also some distinguishing ones. The Estonian political scientist Rein Ruutsoo (2003) has shown how civil society developed in significantly different ways in the three states in the inter-war period. A cosmopolitan anthropologist might undertake a similar comparative analysis of how civil society (however defined) is developing in this region today. For other kinds of enquiry, however, it might be profitable to expand the notion of 'Baltic region' to include the Scandinavian countries, and also the larger colonial powers which have shaped the region's history: Germany, Poland and Russia. In other words, 'region' is to be defined pragmatically, to fit the requirements of the project at hand.

South-eastern Europe is often considered (from outside, but also to some extent from within) to form a single relatively coherent region – 'the Balkans'. Again, there are good historical reasons, notably the common experience of Ottoman imperialism, for conducting comparative analysis within such a framework. Yet (leaving aside the obvious exceptionalism of Greece, with its unique fast track to membership of the European Community), Albanian, Yugoslav, Bulgarian and Romanian experiences under socialism all differed radically from

each other. Depending on the particular problem at hand, comparisons in other directions might therefore be warranted. For example, it might be more profitable to compare postsocialist ethnic conflict in the western Balkans with specific regions of the Caucasus than with those eastern Balkan countries which have remained predominantly stable and peaceful. Cosmopolitan anthropology in this case would seem to warrant analysis beyond the level of the geographical region, but territorial proximity may still be a pertinent consideration for many kinds of enquiry.

There are also practical reasons for encouraging a perspective grounded in regional geography: it is generally easier for the scholars of neighbouring countries to visit each other regularly and to cooperate in teaching and research. One therefore welcomes the recent emergence of a regional grouping such as the International Association for South East European Anthropology, and the initiative taken in Vilnius, Lithuania, by the organisers of the *First Baltic Anthropology Conference* in September 2003.

*Cosmopolitanism II: Eurasia, not Europe*

At this point some readers might ask if we really need new organisational and research initiatives at the level of regions. After all, the end of socialism more or less coincided with the establishment of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA): is this not the most appropriate reference point for a cosmopolitan anthropologist whose home base is in Europe? Why should one think to compare Sarajevo with the Caucasus when so many other regions *within* Europe have experienced ethnic violence?

This is not the place for an assessment of EASA, of which I am an active member.<sup>4</sup> But I am not persuaded that we should restrict our supra-regional level of comparison to Europe. The economic and political dominance of the West, the aftermath of Soviet rule and the expansion of the European Union to include some of the former socialist countries have combined to ensure that a Europeanist orientation and perceptions of a common European identity have considerable cachet in Eastern Europe nowadays. The European Commission endeavours systematically to promote the ‘cultural’ dimension of this identity, e.g. through textbooks on the ‘European heritage’, discourses of ‘European citizenship’ and the formulation of common symbols etc. (Shore 2000). But I want to argue that the cosmopolitan anthropologist should be critical of the energies currently being invested in the invention of Europe. While it may be pragmatically justifiable to take Europe as a mega-region for some kinds of comparison, our cosmopolitanism should not rest at this level. If it does, there is a

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<sup>4</sup> The facts that EASA exists parallel to an older professional association, the *Société Internationale d’Ethnologie et de Folklore*, representing primarily the tradition of national ethnography, and that it has not succeeded in recruiting many active members in the eastern half of the continent, are in my view regrettable.

danger that European anthropologists will merely replicate the parochialism of the national ethnographers, particularising the imagined political community ‘Europe’ in much the same way that their predecessors contributed to the invention and dissemination of national identities.<sup>5</sup> Rejecting Europe, I argue instead, with reference to two contrasting time frames, that anthropologists should select the entire Eurasian landmass as a comparative framework with genuine historical unity. Eurasia is understood here as the sum of the continents usually distinguished as Europe and Asia, plus North Africa. This is the sense in which the term has been used over many years by Jack Goody, in contradistinction to the zone of his own first fieldwork, sub-Saharan Africa (e.g. 1976).<sup>6</sup>

The first time frame is the widespread shared experience of socialist rule in the recent past. Marxist-Leninist regimes and their Maoist variant in China survived long enough to leave indelible marks. They brought trauma and tragedy but also rapid modernisation programmes and ideals of ‘progress’ that were embraced by millions. Most of the projects in my group at MPISA are concerned with the contradictory legacies of the socialist generations. From Eastern Germany to Central Asia, from the Balkans to Chukotka and Kamchatka, we find that the socialist era remains the crucial temporal baseline, even for many of those too young to recall any adult experiences of living under socialist forms of government (see Hann 2002b, Hann *et al.* 2003).

The first temporality, then, for emphasising the unity of Eurasia is the high degree of homogeneity established across most of the landmass by socialist institutions in the twentieth century. But this is clearly incomplete and insufficient. It is preferable to adopt a long-term historical perspective. The second ground for emphasising Eurasia is the ultimate unity of its historical experience since the Neolithic, based upon the expansion of plough agriculture and increasingly complex, stratified polities. As Goody has argued, over the *longue durée* centres of material and intellectual creativity in the Far East were more than a match for centres in the Far West, at least up until the developments of the last few centuries. Of course East and West did not evolve in splendid isolation. There was borrowing (diffusion). But it is also important to recognise the development of similar structures, similar patterns of social organisation, in response to similar conditions. Even scholars of the calibre of Max Weber failed, due to their

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<sup>5</sup> This is evident even in Germany, where some university departments have adopted the name *europäische Ethnologie* as a way of shedding the political freight associated with the tradition of *Volkskunde*. In his recent stimulating introduction to the new discipline, while emphasising the diversity of approaches followed and the need to be aware of global contexts, Wolfgang Kaschuba defines the subject matter of *europäische Ethnologie* as ‘*Kultur in der Vielfalt ihrer Bedeutungen und Praktiken vor dem Horizont europäischer Geschichte und Gesellschaftlichkeit*’ (1999: 10).

<sup>6</sup> Following Goody, it should be obvious that we are not talking here of continents in a strict geographical sense but rather in terms of large territorial entities displaying commonalities in the following key dimensions: the means of production, the means of destruction and the means of communication.

Eurocentric bias, to appreciate the significance of common patterns of development (Goody 1996).

The historian Patricia Crone has articulated the kind of macro perspective that became unfashionable in twentieth century anthropology, but which needs to be reintroduced into anthropology programmes if we are to move beyond the level of meticulous case studies. At the end of her book outlining the ideal-typical features of pre-industrial societies, Crone asks how it came about that, from the late eighteenth century, the world was catapulted into new forms of social, political and economic organisation, for which there was no precedent in the agrarian civilisations which had gone before, in East and West alike. She sums up as follows:

There is nothing surprising about the fact that it was a Eurasian civilization which rose to world dominance. The Eurasian continent (including Africa to the north of the Sahara) had advantages over other parts of the earth from the moment food production started. It was the world's largest landmass and had a bigger human population than any other continent. It was also ecologically very diverse and better provided with plants and animals suitable for domestication. Above all, it had the large herbivores capable of providing transport and heavy labour (horse, cattle, camels) which were conspicuously missing not only from the rest of the world, in some cases because they had never been present there, in other cases because early human colonists had hunted them to extinction. Unlike the Americas and Africa, moreover, Eurasia is broader from east to west than from north to south, a seemingly trivial fact of enormous consequence in that domesticated plants and animals spread more easily to the east and west, where they remain within the same climatic zone, than to the north and south, where they have to cross climatic zones. Much the same was true of the humans who followed in their wake as traders or conquerors, spreading new technologies, ideas and diseases (and thus immunity to them). (...) plants, animals, people, know-how, and ideas all spread with relative ease from one end of Eurasia to the other, and the Greeks, Romans, Persians, Indians and Chinese were already aware of each other's existence by the first century AD, though they still knew little or nothing about sub-Saharan Africa or Siberia. The constant interaction in Eurasia generated new developments which kept driving the competition between different centres into a higher gear. (Crone 2003: 147-48)

For Crone, as for Goody, the question of how Europe rose to its dominant position is altogether less significant than the long prior history of agrarian civilisations in Eurasia as a whole. Those currently constructing European identity emphasise cultural contacts *within* the 'European heritage zone', forgetting that the dominant religion of this zone originates outside it, in the Hebraic culture of the Middle East. For millennia there has been more or less intensive interaction across this Eurasian landmass. In his *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (1940), Owen Lattimore showed that the distinctive forms of both the Chinese empires and the marauding nomadic empires of central Asia were shaped in their mutual long-term interaction. Crone may be right to suggest that some peripheral regions, notably in Siberia, were barely integrated into the macro-continental developments; but even here, historical

anthropological research has uncovered centuries of more or less tight links to states and metropolitan centres seeking to extract their tribute. Wherever one looks in Eurasia, the romantic anthropological goal of uncovering pristine socio-cultural forms through contemporary fieldwork in apparently remote places has to be abandoned as illusionary.

These, then, are my two time frames for suggesting a focus on Eurasia. One concerns the socialist history of the recent past, which is still so stamped on both individual and collective memories. The other concerns long-term affinities and interrelations, at least from the discovery of agriculture onwards. The latter is an especially unfamiliar perspective for modern anthropologists, accustomed as a result of their emphasis on Malinowskian fieldwork methods to work in the present in small communities and to neglect wider spatial and temporal contexts. But I think it is important for us, if we want anthropology to be noticed and taken seriously by other disciplines, and perhaps even by Brussels bureaucrats, to expand our horizons. After all Malinowski (1944) himself, in spite of all his emphasis on meticulous fieldwork in a small community, devoted himself in his last book to a macro-societal vision of how to organise free and democratic societies.

*Cosmopolitanism III: beyond Eurasia, pragmatically*

In this expanded vision of the discipline, Eurasia cannot of course be the limit of our cosmopolitan ambitions. Again it is worth noting the recent work of Goody. While many of his earlier contributions emphasised the gulf between Eurasia and sub-Saharan Africa, he has qualified this in recent publications. First, he has drawn attention (e.g. 1998) to universal cognitive capacities, identifying the same basic tensions in all human societies regardless of their means of production and communication (degree of literacy). Second, he has been impressed by certain rapid changes that have taken place in recent years almost everywhere in the world, above all in the domain of demographic transition. Previously, Goody confesses (2003: 52), he had not expected births to be widely restricted in Africa, a continent where land was generally abundant and virtually a 'free good' (*ibid*: 48); but, thanks primarily to the twin forces of migration and education, a transformation has occurred. Indeed, remarkable processes of convergence have taken place worldwide and the historical distinctiveness of Eurasia is thereby rendered less significant.

What does this imply for the future of anthropological comparisons? Again, as at the other levels, I think we have to proceed pragmatically. For many of our recent projects at MPISA, notably the set concerning rural 'Property Relations' it made sense to restrict the comparative framework to ex-socialist Eurasia, where the Soviet models of collective and state farms had been disseminated. Even for these projects, however, we found it useful to include a few

individual projects based elsewhere. The current work on ‘Religion and Civil Society’ is no different in this respect. The circumstances of socialist ideology and repression of religion are sufficiently uniform to make this a helpful baseline; but when we come to look at the detail, e.g. the impact of Pentecostalist churches on numerous postsocialist societies, it is obvious that it makes sense to widen the frame and be aware of anthropological studies of these and similar groupings all over the world. Indeed the combinations of cosmopolitanism and local rootedness found in the domain of religion exemplify the double nature of globalisation processes more generally.

## **Part II: Names, Institutions, Agendas and Careers**

### *What’s in a Name?*

I now turn to consider more practical issues concerning the consolidation of anthropology (as broadly defined at the opening of Part I) in the postsocialist countries. I shall try to show how the intellectual argument for addressing Eurasia as a unified entity might be consistent with the current challenges of institution building. The discussion is necessarily highly subjective.<sup>7</sup>

The question of names continues to breed confusion, due not only to international inconsistency but to increasing uncertainty in many places about what the core content of an anthropological education should contain. Anthropology remains the term with the highest international recognition, but the established terms in most East European countries correspond to the German *Volkskunde* or *Ethnologie* (these usually subsume more specialised branches such as folklore, material culture and museology, though these are in some times and places given varying degrees of autonomy). In recent years it has sometimes proved possible to rename Departments by simply adding the term anthropology (usually ‘cultural anthropology’) to the local term. Elsewhere this has been resisted. There seems to be no consensus as to the importance of the name on the letterhead. For some scholars, what matters is that the substantive research and teaching should conform to the norms of the English-speaking world, and the name is irrelevant. For others it is important, even symbolically crucial, to introduce the new term anthropology; but in practice few worry about defining it too closely and some colleagues may continue to work in an earlier paradigm. Some argue that the name is important, because it seems to have positive associations, but the concrete

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<sup>7</sup> For different viewpoints – from participants involved in the ‘struggles for sociocultural anthropology’ in ways that I am not – see Skalník 2002.

contents of ‘anthropology’ should be left deliberately ambiguous, in order to further the employment prospects of those who obtain qualifications in the subject.<sup>8</sup>

My position is as follows. Deliberate fuzziness in defining the subject is undesirable; a basic clarity concerning the discipline’s theoretical and practical *raison d’être* is important for students and practitioners alike. It is desirable to expose all students to ‘classical’ sources such as Boas and Malinowski, and to pay more attention to the history of the discipline than was usual in Britain in the 1970s when I entered anthropology. In my view, it is vital to be ‘up front’ in emphasising the commitment to a comparative social science, thereby distinguishing the new anthropology from earlier traditions of national ethnography. However, I see no need to insist on a total rupture with the latter. The *Volkskunde* stream is an integral part of the anthropologists’ intellectual heritage. Much excellent work has been done, including comparative studies beyond the national frame (e.g. pan-Slavic or pan-Germanic analyses of folklore, but also comparisons at a higher level between groups with no affinities of language and descent). It would be quite wrong to imply that the national ethnographers of the past all tended to nationalist politics. Many might nowadays welcome the opportunity to work more closely with colleagues trained in different schools. In some places there has already been a healthy rapprochement: innovative *European Ethnology* Departments in Sweden and Germany are prime examples. I have suggested above that this transformation has not been carried far enough. In institutional terms, a kind of apartheid seems to persist in the German universities I know. In any case, a name containing the term Europe can hardly speak to postsocialist ethnographers in the Asian realms of the old empire. Instead, recognition of a common heritage at the level of Eurasia, as outlined above, offers a broader platform and could be a catalyst everywhere for transcending the old national paradigms.

The solution of operating under a plurality of names, with anthropology being introduced alongside the older terms denoting national ethnography, seems to me at least for the short term to be a good one. Everyone stands to gain from experimental new alliances. The new anthropologists would bring their knowledge of world-wide developments in the theory and methods of the discipline as they know it, as well as expand the framework for comparative analysis. In addition to their unrivalled grasp of their specific ethnographic tradition, the national ethnographers would generally bring superior historical knowledge and expertise in the related fields of museum studies and archaeology. It is not hard to think of specific topics where collaboration between the two would be fruitful. For example, work on the transmission of particular folk-beliefs or ‘superstitions’ might be linked to modern cognitive

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<sup>8</sup> This was the argument of Roberts Kilis at the above-mentioned Vilnius conference, in a presentation entitled ‘Anthropology as a marketable subject’.

approaches to religion; the analysis of material culture artifacts can be creatively connected to investigations of consumption and identity on scales not previously addressed in the national ethnography tradition; the analysis of traditional folkloric motifs could be adapted to provide insight into the design and workings of the iconography of modern ethno-nationalist movements; and so on.

My impression is that an intellectual transition is already under way along these lines in a number of places. It is proceeding most smoothly where some scholars were already practising new styles of anthropology even before the end of socialism (e.g. Budapest, Poznań), so that a change of etiquette merely gives formal recognition to an already existing pluralism in teaching and research approaches. I have also come across examples throughout the region where a healthy 'syncretism' seems to be developing in postsocialist conditions. For example, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, a programme in cultural anthropology has been introduced at the new American University of Central Asia, subsuming previous programmes in Kyrgyz ethnography; established faculty members continue to teach their specialist local courses, but new staff, including foreigners, are helping to introduce wider perspectives. The University of Vilnius has pursued very successful cooperation with Scandinavian colleagues, and the new journal *Lithuanian Ethnology (Lietuvos Etnologija)* publishes a mixture of anthropological and ethnological articles in both Lithuanian and English. In Slovenia the organisers of the Mediterranean Ethnological Summer Schools have for more than a decade played an exemplary role in bringing all species of anthropologist together; and so on.

I do not want to pretend that all parties are always equally enthusiastic about such cooperation. Sometimes the dialogue takes the form of polite listening rather than active engagement with a will to learn from the other. Each of the examples I have quoted also has its tensions and a unified future for all anthropologists in these locations is by no means assured.

In other places it has not proved possible to work together at all. New groups of anthropologists have established themselves wherever they could find a niche, e.g. in Departments of Sociology, History, or Politics and Public Administration. From these niches, they wage a kind of guerrilla struggle against the national ethnographers. This seems to me regrettable, though I do of course understand the personal and political pressures that have led to conflicts. Even in those cases where the resistance of an 'old guard' of national ethnographers seems most formidable, I think the search for a separate niche should be

undertaken only as a last resort. A fragmented anthropology seems likely to remain inherently weak and vulnerable.<sup>9</sup>

To those who would argue that the natural home of a cosmopolitan anthropology lies with other social sciences, I would in principle say that I agree. But there may be dangers, at least in the short term. A new brand of anthropology within a Faculty of Social Science is likely to differ only through its methods – and perhaps not even in this respect, if conditions do not permit the sabbaticals necessary for extensive fieldwork – from the profile of more powerful neighbours. It may have difficulty in maintaining a distinctive anthropological agenda, especially if another faction of anthropologists persists elsewhere. I am therefore strongly in favour of grafting new shoots onto the existing stock, i.e. sustaining the broad anthropological tradition that includes national ethnography and its subdivisions, such as folklore. These variants of anthropology are more likely to be accommodated in a Faculty of History or Philosophy, of course for good historical reasons, but I see no danger in seeking to develop a unified anthropology Department under such umbrellas. In the longer term, such a ‘syncretist’ Department could be the catalyst for breaking down the barriers that have for too long separated social scientists from humanities scholars.

What are the most urgent research agendas for the ‘new’ anthropologists? They are legion and I hardly dare to suggest priorities. But wherever the anthropologists find themselves placed in terms of university structures, I hope that they address topics of ‘mass’ significance. In other words they should not confine themselves to marginal groups, to the ‘salvaging’ of cultural elements threatened with extinction, to the ‘exotica’ which remain prominent in public perceptions of the discipline. At the same time, from the point of view of ‘product differentiation’ from other social sciences it is of course unwise to abandon traditional concerns with ethnic minorities and with topics such as ritual, shamanism etc. The best reason for continuing to pay special attention to ‘marginalia’ (which are of course not only to be found in locations that are peripheral in a purely geographical sense) is simply that they tend to be overlooked by other social scientists. But our fieldwork methods can also yield important new results in those locations and among those social groups where other researchers are active. I therefore hesitate to specify priorities; but I do think we should sometimes try harder to show how even our studies of apparently remote, exotic phenomena

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<sup>9</sup> The establishment of a new Department for the new kind of anthropology is sometimes defended on the grounds that it will increase the resources available for anthropology as a whole. Indeed, the imperative not to lose Chairs seems to have hindered the merger of *Volkskunde* and *Völkerkunde* traditions in Germany. However, I do not think this argument can carry the same weight in Eastern Europe, where the prospects for establishing new Chairs in an impoverished academic environment are likely to remain poor.

can shed light on wider social fields – and even on some universal aspect of human communities.

*Anthropology at Home in Eurasia*

I have been arguing that an anthropological tradition focused primarily on one's own people, as most East European anthropologies have been hitherto, can be adapted or modified from within so as to become a more comparative, cosmopolitan discipline. What are the implications for young scholars entering the field? Those attracted to new styles of anthropology coming from the West may want to apply their new models to their home society, in order to highlight the novelty of their approaches as compared with the older national ethnographers. They might also take note of the fact that the ratio of Western anthropologists working in their home societies has increased substantially in recent years, undermining the old distinction between *Volkskunde* and *Völkerkunde*.

I nonetheless have no hesitation in urging young anthropologists to work elsewhere for their doctoral projects, the most crucial phase in their training. In spite of the fashion for 'multi-sited' fieldwork (fully justified for some kinds of project), there is still much to be said for 'classical' methods: at least one full year in a single 'community' that is small enough for one to get to know it extremely well, 'from the inside'. The passage to other relevant locations, to more historical depth and to more macro levels of comparison can all follow later. Above all, there are good reasons of principle for supposing that the exposure to a quite different society – working in a different language is usually a major element in this experience – can heighten one's anthropological awareness closer to 'home' in later projects. My hypothetical novice Eurasianist would have a vast range of societies from which to choose. Although I have been emphasising the historical unity of the landmass, this is entirely consistent with tremendous diversity of social forms down to the present day. Virtually the whole disciplinary range of anthropology could be taught on the basis of Eurasian materials, though you would never suppose this from the current textbooks.<sup>10</sup>

As indicated above, I do not imagine that we shall ever have a world of rootless intellectuals applying for jobs in anthropology wherever in the world they are advertised. I am confident that most teachers of anthropology in a city such as Vilnius will continue to have Lithuanian origins (though some may be recruited from neighbouring countries and even from further afield). They will furthermore continue to devise research projects at home, in Lithuania; but I

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<sup>10</sup> I owe this point to Patrick Heady, who has drawn attention to the 'maximal diversity' of Eurasia (personal communication). The point here is not to call for Eurasia-only textbooks, but simply to point to the current neglect of the largest landmass in most current textbooks for social and cultural anthropology.

maintain that these teachers of the future will do well to begin their careers with projects elsewhere. In particular, those old enough to have learned Russian at school will have an enormous comparative advantage when it comes to work in the former Soviet Union. I would also encourage them – and other East Europeans – to look eastwards for the simple consideration that the costs of financing fieldwork projects in most of the former socialist countries are still low compared to the cost of living in the European Union. The potential for realising cosmopolitan anthropology at the level of Eurasia is thus a very practical one. I am of course aware that the weight of recent history reduces the attractiveness of Russian for some Eastern Europeans (in fact for the most part Central Europeans), who prefer to look anywhere else in the world other than towards their eastern neighbours. But these prejudices need to be overcome if the European Union is not to become a fossilised fortress of ‘the West’, and anthropologists could play a key role in this task.

Sadly, Russian is rapidly losing ground as a *lingua franca* in Eurasian regions such as the Baltic, the Caucasus and Central Asia. It is being replaced by English, originally the language of a small offshore island, though now also the common language of a much larger population in the Indian subcontinent. Whether one likes it or not, this is already opening up many new possibilities for student academic mobility. The pattern adopted by numerous universities in Holland and the Scandinavian countries, which nowadays offer at least some courses in English, is likely to be emulated in other ‘small’ countries. Perhaps eventually this will become the motor of cosmopolitanism in the larger countries of the continent as well, including the largest of them all, China; and Eurasia’s original native speakers of English will be uniquely consigned to the provinciality of monolingualism.

## **Conclusion**

Social scientists have, with good reason, identified the contemporary era of accelerating global links and increased mobility of both people and capital as one of ‘deterritorialisation’. It may seem anachronistic in these conditions to suggest a focus on any territorial entity, even one as large as Eurasia as I have defined it in this paper. I nonetheless argue, not only with respect to institution building in the current academic context in Eastern Europe but also in the broader context of the history of anthropology, that to take a fresh look at Eurasia makes good sense at this point, though it cannot be the final goal.

With some simplification one can distinguish within Europe two basic tendencies in our discipline. Some countries have given them separate names and institutionalised them separately: in particular *Völkerkunde* and *Volkskunde* in Germany refer respectively to the

comparative study of human diversity everywhere and to the intensive study of one's own people. In Britain the latter has played no significant role in the intellectual history of anthropology, but the comparative generalising science of social anthropology was always in practice skewed towards non-literate societies in 'the south', above all in British colonies. The history of anthropology in France betrays a similar bias to the French colonies, and a disparaging view of 'folklore' studies in Europe. In many Eastern European countries, by contrast, it was some version of the *Volkskunde* paradigm which dominated. This national ethnography often had tight links to nation-building projects. In the German speaking countries *Volkskunde* has been partially displaced in recent years, following the political disaster of the Second World War, by a discipline called *europäische Ethnologie*. This is by no means tied to the cultivation of European identities in the same way that the *Volkskundler* were tied to the identities of specific territories and nations, but it cannot suffice as the definition of a global comparative discipline. My plaidoyer for an anthropology of Eurasia should not be read in this way. I have simply argued that attention to Eurasia is warranted in at least two historical frames, one short term (the aftermath of socialism) and one long term (the evolutionary process that gets under way with the discovery of agriculture). Moreover, emphasising a common Eurasian heritage may be a pragmatic device to facilitate the intellectual unification of our diverse traditions, e.g. in Eastern Europe, where the bifurcations remain precarious. In other words, a comparative anthropology of Eurasia as the cornerstone of research and teaching could play a valuable role in the institutional consolidation of the discipline across the landmass.

Having made this plea, I conclude by declaring that I too look forward to the day when all the new Departments of Anthropology in Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Baltic also have their own area specialists for Latin America, Australia, Africa etc. (I cannot quite envisage the day when the territorial or 'area studies' perspective will entirely lose its pertinence in our subject.) Meanwhile the fact is that many if not most societies of Eurasia have been neglected in modern Western anthropology, with its long history of exoticising. One can only hope that the excellent opportunities for anthropological research which now present themselves (almost everywhere) in postsocialist Eurasia will allow the full social and cultural diversity of the landmass to be studied in the most appropriate regional and supra-regional contexts by all interested scholars, and ultimately to be brought into a single encompassing cosmopolitan framework of comparison.

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