

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Susan Parman, ed. *Europe in the Anthropological Imagination*. Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1998. xi + 274 pp. \$17.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-13-337460-5.

Reviewed by Kelli Ann Costa (Department of Anthropology, Franklin Pierce College)
Published on H-SAE (March, 1999)



From Center to Margins: An Intellectual History of the Anthropology of Europe

I found these essays to be an interesting intellectual history of anthropology practiced by American scholars in Europe. Unlike other recent thematic compendiums on Europe—such as Goddard, Llobera and Shore[2] and Boissevain,[1]—Susan Parman presents a broad survey of field research by scholars with extensive experience in Europe. These authors agree that Europe has been seen within the greater anthropological community as too central, familiar and urban for the exotic practice of ethnographic research. Hence, many of these essays critique the perception of Europe as a less viable and impractical venue for anthropological study. And many of them discuss the marginalization of anthropological practice in Europe demonstrated by investigations of remote rural locales, Eastern European exotica, peripheral communities within peripheral states. As Parman notes in her Introduction, this compendium has a two-fold intention: to examine the anthropology of Europe and to “address issues in the history of anthropology” (p. xii). But the book is not organized as a systematic chronology of the anthropology of Europe; rather, it is tied together by theoretical issues central to our discipline.

For example, Susan Carol Rogers addresses the core/periphery debate in the first chapter, “Strangers in a Crowded Field: American Anthropology in France.” Despite the abundance of scholarship on France in other disciplines, Rogers points out that American anthropologists have provided few insights regarding France’s centrality within Europe. Anthropology’s position as a field that studies the “exotic” is at loggerheads with the familiar relationship between Europe and America. Rogers

sees American anthropology as “clustering disproportionately in many of the corners of Europe that have remained comparatively neglected by (other scholars)” (p. 18). France, quintessentially powerful, political, urban and influential, in no way resembles the “corners” or margins of the European Other. The relative lack of anthropological research in the “core” nations of Europe leaves these areas little known and understudied. Analytical perspectives essential to our profession—holism, cross-cultural and comparative methods, intersubjectivity—are left at the back doors of Europe when it comes to American anthropologists. The French, on the other hand, have been actively studying themselves (Rogers cites Le Wita 1988; Zonabend 1989; Abeles 1989; Segalen 1990; Althabe et al. 1992; Bellier 1993; and Gaboriau 1993 and others). French researchers, Rogers suggests, “remain perplexed by the small numbers, junior status, unfamiliar research questions, apparent naivete, and guarded enthusiasm for France that (American anthropologists) have to offer them” (p. 29). She concludes by proposing that a Europeanist anthropology must include the familiar as well as the exotic, Versailles as well as Vasilika.

In the second chapter, “Europe Through the Back Door: Doing Anthropology in Greece,” Jill Dubisch supplements Rogers’ consideration of the ‘core’ by questioning the “ambiguous” locus of Greece within Europe. Located at the interface between Occident and Orient Greece challenges, as an anthropological subject, the propensity to consider it as the progenitor of all things Western. Beyond Athens and the familiarity bred from philosophy, literature, archaeology and the National Ge-

ographic, Greece is foreign and often indecipherable. When she began her Greek research Dubisch “did not consider (herself) to be working in Europe” (p. 35), but in “part of the Eastern world” (p. 35). Greece’s marginality as something other than a historic subject has been passed on to those pursuing anthropological work there. Many anthropologists have seen their work pigeon-holed into a pan-Mediterranean context (pp. 36-38), or under the rubric of “peasant studies” a la Ernestine Friedl (pp. 36-37). Like French culture, Greek culture has been seen as a single entity—whether studied in urban, rural, frontier, or island locales. Dubisch echoes other scholars (e.g., [3]) when she argues that there is a wide range of “Greekness” (multiple Greek identities) which is often lost in discussions of nationhood and nationalism. She also notes that Europeanist anthropologists must contend with the critical and wary eye, not only of their subjects, but of native anthropologists. European colleagues provide American Europeanists with a large body of highly reflexive work. This contrasts with “exotic” areas of the world, where “we” are the authority on “them.” In Europe “we” are the perennial student. On a final note, Dubisch joins other contributors to this volume by asserting that “Europe” is a porous and ever-evolving region, lending itself to energetic inquiry and demanding rigor and time as an anthropological research site, equal to that applied elsewhere.

In Chapter Three, Susanna M. Hoffmann discusses her landmark ethnographic film *Kypseli: Women and Men Apart—A Divided Reality*. Here the core/periphery discussion of the foregoing chapters yields to Hoffmann’s more personal attempts at cultural understanding and the filmatic materialization of her field research. She conveys a structuralist orientation and determined efforts to produce a film which illustrates theory. Her quest to find an “isolated or rural site with a long western tradition” (p. 49) ended on Thera, in the village she calls “Kypseli.” Here she found concise kinship rules based on gender where “[a]ll women were believed dangerous, all defiling” (p. 53). Her analysis moves beyond standard honor and shame representations of Greece, into the realm of “male purity and female danger” (p. 53) common in studies of more exotic or “primitive” societies. The success and popularity of “Kypseli” in both anthropology and women’s studies courses is undeniable; it has surely spawned many succeeding ethnological and ethnographic films. The question is: “Does this represent the looking glass through which we view ourselves?” I suggest it does not. Kypseli culture is presented as an exotic Other, the gender lines are razor sharp, bizarre and

unusual, the village is “backward.” “They” are essentially different from “us.” The anthropological imagination is fulfilled. Hoffmann’s work in this remote village dovetails with traditional notions of anthropological research, discussed in foregoing chapters, where the primitive or non-Western are emphasized. Although Hoffmann acknowledges (p. 56) that structuralism and symbolic interpretation are valid beyond the margins of society, Kypseli remains a peripheral study locus in “the margins of Europe” (Herzfeld 1987).

“Europe on Film” by Peter S. Allen is the fourth contribution and presents films on European cultures as marginalized media. Allen reiterates Parman, Dubisch and Rogers’ observations that like ethnography, “the filmography of Europe often focuses on the more “exotic” (and ironically, already marginalized within Europe) peoples of the area” (p. 62). He also notes that a number of ethnographic-type films which were not made by anthropologists (e.g., *Man of Aran*, *Farrebique*) often exaggerate and distort facts in order to make a point. Allen’s survey of available and widely distributed ethnographic films reveals that films about Europe are few and far between. This may be due to our assumed familiarity with the subject—Europeans simply aren’t exotic or “other” enough to be interesting in the classroom. Allen does however express hope for the future of European film. The wide availability and relative low cost of video have recently aided production of many highly acclaimed films such as “Village of Spain,” “Shepherds of Berneray,” and “The House That Giacomo Built” (a book/film combination by Donald Pitkin). In recent years an increasing number of folklore and archaeology films have been released. Despite this bright outlook and the “serious attention” and “wider acceptance” (p. 67) of European filmography, Allen states “the market for documentary films in the United States is driven largely by the television syndrome and if a production is not “broadcast quality,” then it has little chance of being shown” (p. 68).

In Chapter Five, David I. Kertzer discusses Italian ethnography, his experiences in the field, and the categorization of Italy as “Mediterranean” (ie., exotic). He points out the difficulties of being an urban anthropologist in a discipline that continues to cling to the notion that “real” anthropology takes place where “the air should smell of cow dung, not car exhaust” (p. 71). He recounts the history of anthropological research in Italy which proceeds along much the same route as Greek ethnographies of honor and shame, family, kinship, and political discussions. Kertzer’s account of recent research sites demonstrates a continued propensity

of Anglo-anthropologists to search out the most exotic and unfamiliar even in Europe. This may be due to a number of reasons already discussed, but Kertzer adds another kernel of insight to this dilemma at the end of his chapter: "... we still pine for the simplicity of a manageable field setting, one we can get a handle on, one where people know who we are, where the social boundary is clear, the scale human, and the cow dung wafts through the air" (p. 78).

Caroline B. Brettell's chapter discusses studies of transnationalism among Portuguese emigrants in Paris. Brettell, like Kertzer, is an urban anthropologist, and her interests in Portuguese women in Paris reflect a commitment to relate the study of gender and women to decision-making and power. Throughout this chapter Brettell grounds her position as a Europeanist by arguing that "Europe is a vital place," "on the cutting edge" (p. 82), despite the fact that "work done in Europe was not generally recognized as legitimate anthropology" (p. 82). Moving from classic peasant studies to explorations of social stratification, gender, and urban settings, anthropological research in Portugal has often related to the larger questions of our discipline. Examining Portugal as a microcosm of Europe, Brettell concludes that the validity of these studies (in an arguably marginal part of Europe) serves to legitimate the endeavors of past, present and future ethnographers who wish to explore Europe as an accepted area of study.

William A. Douglas continues Brettell's theme of transnationalism in a general statement on European migration. He reminds us that migration has effected Europe for centuries. The global movement of Europeans has been promoted by both colonialism and the creation of "Euro-settler societies" (p. 95) such as the U.S., Australia, Canada and South Africa where masses of lower class people emigrated. Furthermore, Europe has experienced massive internal migration as a consequence of industrialization and urbanization. Noting this tri-fold pattern of demographic movement, Douglas asserts "it is inconceivable that twentieth century anthropologists would have encountered any European little communities unaffected by the consequences of the continents' migratory legacy in its many guises" (p. 96). Indeed some anthropologists have acknowledged this phenomenon. The traditional anthropological site of the "little community" is challenged by the notion of a pan-European in-traregional Diaspora. In so far as European anthropology has substituted the peasant for the primitive, it reflects the desire to isolate the subject of study—whereas the reality of the "little community" is its connections to the

larger picture and the processes by which its inhabitants negotiate those connections.

Thomas M. Wilson discusses the evolution of Irish ethnography in Chapter Eight, "Themes in the Anthropology of Ireland." Beginning with a thorough explanation of Arensberg and Kimball's community-based model which became "the template for rural ethnographic research" (p. 107), Wilson traces the development of Irish research. Until recently, Wilson explains, most of these ethnographies have been "extensions" of the original project in Clare. *The Irish Countryman* (Arensberg 1937) became a representation for Ireland as a whole; this persistent generalization did not come under any serious critique until the 1970s. A series of political events—not the least of which was "The Troubles" in Northern Ireland—impacted the theoretical and methodological directions of Irish ethnography. Anthropologists (Wilson included) began to examine issues of "social class, nationalism, and sectarianism" (p. 109) which had been glossed over by the romantic descendants of *The Irish Countryman*. The maturing of Irish ethnography epitomizes the "depth and breadth of anthropological research" (p. 112) both in Ireland and in the greater European community. In response to debates regarding the influence of the European Union, Wilson suggests "anthropologists may be in the best position among all social scientists to provide the information necessary for the understanding of wider European social formations, not the least of which is the European Union, in the everyday lives of Europeans" (p. 117).

Wilson's depiction of evolving Irish ethnography is followed by Linda A. Bennett's "retrospective" on anthropology in (former) Yugoslavia. She sees Yugoslavian anthropology as a series of trends distinguished by periods: 1950s through the 1970s; the 1980s; and the 1990s. These trends are based on: "(1) the relationship between anthropologists from the United States and former Yugoslavia in carrying out anthropological studies; (2) the relative emphasis on applied issues; (3) specific topics of research; and (4) responses by anthropologists to the traumatic developments and terrible events since 1991 due to the war" (p. 118). The current decade is perhaps best described as a time of ethnic confrontation. War atrocities and the stress of reporting or taking any effective action has been, according to Bennett, "extremely disturbing" to anthropologists working there. She points to a variety of publications on the recent situation in former Yugoslavia, which go beyond descriptions of the war and its effect on people and the landscape. "Anthropologists have analyzed the 'situation' of the research,

asking questions regarding our 'right' to impose "Euro-American concepts such as 'human rights' and 'individualism' in situations such as the war" (p. 129). Democratization, displacement, refugees, and trauma have been discussed in various publications. And international conferences have been "devoted to the topic of the war, violence, and recovery" (p. 131). Bennett notes that collaborative efforts with colleagues in former Yugoslavia continue.

Chapter Ten, "Utter Otherness: Western Anthropology and East European Political Economy" by David A. Kideckel, contrasts Western and East European anthropologists working in Eastern Europe. The "utter otherness" of the title refers to the "marginal and highly charged political economic circumstances" (p. 134) of East Europe that influenced (and to a degree continue to influence) Western anthropologists working there. Kideckel points out that research in the east has shifted, but that it is still seen as exotic, marginal, and essentially "outside" the West. Despite its shared frontier with the West and its designation as "Europe," Kideckel suggests that we (the West) must see the East as "an utter other, more different precisely because of its proximity" (p. 136). After the collapse of socialism in the East, the glories of transformation, new day politics, and expanding opportunities for the East have clouded Western research there. Funding has been funneled toward research related to democratization and privatization, with anthropologists being seen as uniquely qualified to study these cultural transformations. This post-Cold War research has nearly done away with previous explorations of mutual understanding and collaboration. Research on a national scale concentrating on issues of economics and politics has made the East more familiar in many ways, but familiar in the way we are familiar with Australian Aborigines or the Ainu; while the East has lost many of the exotic hard edges of its past, it remains peripheral to Europe and thus its exoticism and oddness are preserved in our work.

Thomas M. Wilson's second chapter derives from his thought provoking examination of the European Union, which he contends, should be seen from "below" as from "above." He explains that Europe on both the small-scale and large-scale must be examined as a system of relationships "with people and institutions of the region, nation and state" (p. 149). Wilson sees the European Union as a necessary venue of understanding. Concepts of nationalism, supranationalism, transnationalism, frontiers, boundaries, and identity are invoked as avenues of intellectual discourse on the underpinnings of European

cultural, political and economic relationships within and outside the state. Wilson is persistent in his efforts to establish an anthropology (or anthropologies) where "Europe" in and of itself is seen as driven by a multitude of political strategies—including the EU—which often are in competition or league with one another, driven by elites, and forced upon the people. He points out policies instituted by the EU which de-nationalize many of the products, traditions, and institutions "that define 'home' to many Europeans" (p. 155) and whose loss may jeopardize Europe's uniqueness and social fabric. He states "[t]he ways in which culture and power are meaningful in Europeans' lives, and the ways they are able to withstand or effect cultural change in the midst of EU building, should be the concern of anthropologists now and in the future" (p. 156).

In Chapter Twelve, Mark T. Shutes discusses George P. Murdock's various contributions to the anthropology of Europe. This is an extremely personal chapter with little discussion of fieldwork. Instead Shutes dedicates his chapter to Murdock's impact on the discipline, his patterns of cross-cultural study, and his "painstaking" statistical analyses. Much of this chapter is a synopsis of Murdock's changing theoretical schemes, and a great deal of it borders on hero worship. While it is difficult to deny Murdock's myriad contributions to the discipline of anthropology, I found this chapter particularly disappointing because of its altruistic tone, and out of place in a volume such as this.

Susan Parman ends the book with a long chapter entitled "The Meaning of 'Europe' in the *American Anthropologist* (Part I)." She utilizes an "inductive reading" of AA, and presents three major patterns of discourse on Europe which appear in the journal (she makes clear there are many more): (1) using difference (contrast) as a way of establishing the Occident; (2) establishing the connection between Americans, Europeans and whiteness; and (3) using discourse on Europe to establish the "disciplinary boundaries of anthropology" (p. 171). According to Parman, this AA material manifests contrastive themes bound to the concepts of Occident and Orient. These themes beget notions of traditionalism and cultural autarky, modernity, place, and political, religious and linguistic affiliations (p. 173-74). She reiterates Kideckel and Bennett's view of the "East" as being seen as essentially different from the "West." "Western Europe was historical, stable, modernized, innovative, and Christian in contrast with the ahistorical, unstable, primitive, conservative, and ambiguously bounded Eastern Europe" (p. 179). From the earliest writings in AA, through

the present day, these ethnocentric notions of “us” and “them” remain shadowy reminders of our imperfect humanistic science. The chapter is an interesting intellectual history of European publications in AA until the 1970s, and helps to clarify the evolving nature of Europe in our collective anthropological imaginations. It illustrates Europe’s shifting place intellectually in this collective and generalized anthropological mind and presents Orientalism and Occidentalism as subjective categories, often used at whim.

Europe in the Anthropological Imagination is a readable, interesting and often thought-provoking volume. While I feel there are a number of shortcomings, the book is of value to potential Europeanists, and to those who might use it in a course generally addressing European anthropology. My major concern was the lack of material on Central Europe, the United Kingdom and Scandinavia. Ethnographies on Germany and the UK have been especially well-documented and have indeed examined these areas as NOT marginal, but as vital members of both the EU and world community. Large scale multi-national businesses which both decentralize Europe’s commerce and touch its margins are not addressed, nor are businesses unique to Europe. Most notably, I would have appreciated a chapter that examined tourism in Europe—arguably one of Europe’s most treasured cultural exchanges. Despite these shortcomings, I feel the book to be a valuable contribution to the rising interest in the anthropology of Europe. In many ways the contributors not only put a “face” on their subjects; they are also able to humanize themselves as fallible, self-conscious, and lively participants in anthropology. The tension and stress of working in an area of the world that is still considered unworthy by many in our field is palpable in the writing. As I read the book, my own fieldwork in the

Tyrol was re-experienced as I compared and contrasted it to my colleagues’ endeavors. Theoretically the book is lacking, but this is not principally a book on theory. Rather Parman has assembled a sweet melange of experiential anthropology that vividly illustrates the personal and professional landscapes of the authors.

Notes:

[1]. Boissevain, Jeremy (editor)(1996) *Coping With Tourists: European Reactions to Mass Tourism* Providence, R.I.: Berghahn.

[2]. Goddard, Victoria, Josep R. Llobera, and Cris Shore (editors)(1994) *The Anthropology of Europe: Identities and Boundaries in Conflict* Oxford: Berg.

[3]. Herzfeld, Michael (1987) *Anthropology Through the Looking-Glass: Critical Ethnography at the Margins of Europe* Cambridge University Press.

[4]. Shore, Cris (1995) “Usurpers or pioneers? European Commission bureaucrats and the question of ‘European Consciousness’ ” pp. 217-236 In Cohen, Anthony P. and Nigel Rapport (editors) *Questions of Consciousness* London: Routledge.

Copyright (c) 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and the list. For other permission, please contact H-Net@h-net.msu.edu.

A message from H-SAE, affiliated with H-Net and the Society for the Anthropology of Europe. Have a look at our web site at: <http://h-net.msu.edu/~{ }sae/> Editor: Tony Galt (galt@gbms01.uwgb.edu)

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-sae>

Citation: Kelli Ann Costa. Review of Parman, Susan, ed., *Europe in the Anthropological Imagination*. H-SAE, H-Net Reviews. March, 1999.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=2861>

Copyright © 1999 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.