

2004

Outside Academe

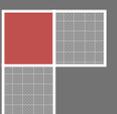
Workshop Report

EASA Newsletter, 11: 37-38

Miguel Vale de Almeida

MIGUELVALEDEALMEIDA.NET

2004



EASA
European Anthropological Summit
Lisbon, 27-29 May 2004

“Outside Academe” – REPORT

Participants: Ulf Hannerz (chair), Miguel Vale de Almeida (Discussant), Jean-Yves Durand, Luis Vasconcelos, Maria Cardeira da Silva, Lale Yalcin-Heckman, João Vasconcelos, Cristiana Bastos, Hillary Callan, Iris-Jean Klein, Eduardo Archetti, Marilyn Strathern.

The issues discussed at the “Outside Academe” workshop overlapped to an extent with those discussed at the “Public Position of Anthropology” workshop. Participants tended to understand ‘outside’ as ‘what anthropologists do when they leave the university buildings’. However, the discussion did start with a consideration of work outside the academe by people with an anthropological training. The main issue here was how to distinguish between knowledge claims by those inside and those outside the academe – i.e., the participants acknowledged the difficulty in defining a list of skills that an anthropologists should have for the job market, as well as the difficulty in defining how we can decide who can be recognised as an anthropologist (here the Norwegian experience of holding recurrent training workshops for anthropologists outside the academe during the professional meetings was explored). But most participants shared a concern about the very possibility of people trained in anthropology finding jobs outside academe: practical fieldwork was seen as an added value, especially when compared with what sociologists have to offer. This is especially true for certain niches, such as, for instance, prison work and prison studies, where fieldwork in a prison provides the anthropologist with much wanted inside knowledge.

The participants, however, were very cautious about such optimism, since there is a sense that ‘there is just too much social science out there’, in the sense that everyone seems to know what ‘the social’ is and claims to be prepared to work on/about ‘it’. For instance, even ethnography has become understood by many outside anthropology (who claim to use the method) as ‘just talking to people’ – whereas in fact, the added value of ethnography ‘anthropology style’ is the focus on both contextualization and connectedness.

Also, in many countries expertise tends to replace disciplinary specialization. Knowledge seems to be increasingly legitimated as expertise, and there is more funding available for those who contribute to the understanding of ‘a problem’ than to the development of ‘a discipline’. Here too ethnography as critical social knowledge is not our clients’ expectation about it.

In this sense, one of the main difficulties felt by anthropologists working ‘in the real world’ is the very reflexive nature of social knowledge: it is difficult to convey meanings that are dense in nature, and it is difficult to find the right media to convey them. Here the discussion shifted to more public areas of practice, such as media commentary, the role of the public intellectual in some European traditions, and the felt

need to separate social problems and therapeutics from the above-mentioned dense meanings that we can/should convey.

Finally the participants addressed the '5th tradition, referred to by Pina-Cabral in the Summit's inaugural address: what about *European* concerns, beyond the specific issue of the study of EU institutions, but rather the study of culture(s) and society(ies) in Europe and European culture/society? The issue of the public effect of undergraduate teaching was addressed here, as well as the teaching of anthropology before the university level, seen as needed in order to counter nationalistic and ethnocentric biases. The context for this assertion is the fact that we are not living in a US-like environment, but rather in 'an imagined community on the making' – Europe, and so far we do not have much to offer on this matter.

The world is IN anthropology, and the academe is not a separate world or thing. So the main question we should ask ourselves could be: do people and institutions really want us to convey our dense meanings? Probably our task is to convince them that the answer is yes, and for that to happen we have to produce the above mentioned knowledge, expertise, commentary and educational materials.

Miguel Vale de Almeida